
**INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION
MANAGING MIGRATION IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

SESSION III: CROSS BORDER DISPLACEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines a selection of the various initiatives by the Government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with its partners including the International Organisation for Migration, to manage migration when it was faced with an overwhelming surge of outward migration at the turn of the century.

2. BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country, sharing borders with four other countries, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi. It has a population of just over 12 million people with a youth population of over 45%.

The Zimbabwe context has been characterized by a sharp decline in social and economic indicators, since the turn of the Millennium. The declines were largely precipitated by a stalemate that was eventually unlocked through the signing and implementation of the Global Political Agreement on 15 September 2008, which among other measures ushered in a new Inclusive Government from February 2009. Other measures of an economic nature complimented those in the political domain, including the introduction of a multi-currency financial system to stem the hitherto prevailing hyper-inflationary situation. In August 2008, Zimbabwe's inflation rate exceeded 11 million%.

One of the most profound results of the socio-economic difficulties that the country went through was an upsurge in the migratory tendencies of Zimbabwe to levels never before witnessed in the country since Independence in 1980. In the face of dwindling economic opportunities largely characterized by high formal unemployment and underemployment, most Zimbabweans migrated into neighbouring countries as a coping mechanism.

Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate in Africa and a highly educated and well trained workforce that enjoys relatively good employment prospects within the region at all levels of employment, from the shop floor right to top management, including directorship. It is also in this regard that a significant number of Zimbabweans migrated abroad to other countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

The prime regional destinations were mostly South Africa and Botswana, where Zimbabweans were quick to secure employment especially for the skilled trades or occupations in teaching or health work. General labourers were also a significant component of those who resorted to migration for employment purposes.

What emerges from the Zimbabwe case is that migration is indeed inextricably linked to the political, social and economic situation of a country. A sustained deterioration in these variables will inevitably lead to potential crises in the domain of migration. This

was our experience before the stabilization of the country situation following the implementation of the Global Political Agreement from September 2008.

The foregoing gives a global view of how migration is generally understood as well as the spectrum through which management processes are arranged in Zimbabwe.

3. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK IN ZIMBABWE

The need for Zimbabwe to manage migration as a composite whole is one that has outrun the setting up of a fully responsive migration management framework in Zimbabwe. Although various policies and legislation in the area of migration exist, the proper functioning of these is hampered by policy and legislative inadequacy, lack of coherence and limited institutional capacity for implementation and enforcement.

In part, these challenges exist because, traditionally, migration issues were domiciled in various administrations as crosscutting matters that did not merit stand-alone attention. Two draft policy instruments are currently being worked on, that is, the Migration Management and Development Policy and the Labour Migration Policy.

The inadequacy of the existing legal framework has meant that the country is without a viable basis to effectively address such issues as smuggling and trafficking of persons. On the other hand, inadequate policy and support frameworks have meant that the country cannot harness the full developmental potential of remittances, as informal transmission channels continue to be most preferred. In spite of the linkage of migration to various other subjects as development, security and health, Zimbabwe is also yet to develop the relevant apparatus for the measurement of migratory patterns and impacts as a way of enabling better informed decision making.

4. REFUGEE SITUATION

Zimbabwe is geographically at the centre of the Southern African region and as such it is the most lucrative link for East and Central African migrants largely destined to South Africa, which is a relatively more prosperous country in Africa. The advent of irregular movements also has not spared Zimbabwe which continues to receive high numbers of refugee and asylum seekers who at times abuse the asylum system. In some cases, the manner in which this category of migrants operates is highly irregular with most of them using false pretences and criminal machinations to secure eventual passage to unknown destinations.

a) Refugee population

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention and is committed to fulfil its obligations under this Convention. With respect to the refugee population, as of March

2012 the country had a total of just over 6 500 refugees and asylum seekers. About 5 000 of these are those from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Those from Burundi, Rwanda and the Horn of Africa number 525, 661 and 368, respectively.

Of the registered refugees, 3 600 are camp based and under a care and maintenance support programme, while 1 000 are urban based refugees who are able to survive on their own.

b) Abuse of asylum seeker protection system

Of serious concern to Zimbabwe is the pattern of those who abuse the country's asylum seeker protection regime, particularly from the Horn of Africa region. In the six months up to March 2012 the country received up to 3 800 asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa yet only 31 settled at the Tongogara Refugee Camp, with the rest having disappeared. Indeed such a scenario poses security risks to the country and means are being looked into in order to find a lasting solution to this challenge.

In order to better manage the case of refugees more efficiently the Government of Zimbabwe and IOM have established a temporary reception centre for those seeking asylum at the Zimbabwe-Mozambique Border post called Nyamapanda. This is the major entry point for asylum seekers coming from East and Central Africa.

5. BORDER MANAGEMENT: THE PROCESSES AND CHALLENGES

By the year 2005 the applications for travel documents, when contrasted with Government's limited capacity to issue the same, created a crisis situation for most Zimbabweans. The majority of the migrants heading into South Africa and Botswana could not secure the needed travel documents and thus illegally entered into these countries through undesignated entry points, and usually with the assistance of smuggling rings.

The plight of the migrant Zimbabweans was further complicated by the fact that they had little information, if any, of the migration process, including the nature of employment prospects in the countries of destination. The natural result was an unprecedented increase in the number of Zimbabweans being deported. Although figures varied widely, at the height of deportations hundreds of Zimbabweans were being returned from South Africa on a daily basis. In most cases the returnees would be arrested and detained without the benefit of due process.

The end result is that many migrants would eventually be deported without having collected their belongings or received their salaries. Thus as soon as they were deported, the same deportees would immediately cross back into South Africa, again as

illegal migrants. In some cases, it would be cheaper for one to finance their irregular return than it is to seek bus fare back to where they originally came from.

Those who could not immediately cross back would practically be trapped in the border town, inevitably fuelling criminal activity including a resort to prostitution. To most deportees, the prospect of having to go back to their initial places of origin was not worth contemplating as the country situation was deteriorating. Among the deportees were always significant numbers of the sick, frail elderly persons, unaccompanied minors as well as expecting mothers in need of medical attention. In most cases these would have been deported without any cash on them. A humanitarian crisis thus loomed within the border town of Beitbridge, which provides passage into South Africa.

A joint Ministerial tour of the South African farms where most Zimbabweans worked conducted in 2006 revealed that the working and living conditions of many Zimbabweans were deplorable. It emerged that most Zimbabweans did not possess the required documentation and that they were occasionally abused by the employers who would hand them over to the authorities when salaries were due to be paid. At the same time these worker could not access medical services or police protection in times of need for fear of deportation.

6. TOWARDS THE MANAGEMENT OF RETURN MIGRATION AT THE BEITBRIDGE AND PLUMTREE BORDER POSTS

a) Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre

It is against the above background that the Government of Zimbabwe and the International Organisation for Migration, with the support of several donors, established a Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre in 2006. The Centre assists the vulnerable deportees with transportation, food, basic health services and awareness-raising on HIV and AIDS. The information kit also includes awareness issues on irregular migration, trafficking and smuggling as well as human rights issues. A child care centre was also established to take care of the special needs of deported minors, some of whom were aged below five years. Through the Centre, training of public authorities involved in the migration management process is also an integral element.

At inception in May 2006, the operations of the Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre thus represented a unique, pioneering and successful initiative to broaden the Government of Zimbabwe's social protection system to include vulnerable returnees from South Africa.

Up until April 2008 when the Governments of Zimbabwe and South Africa entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on Home Affairs issues including, inter-alia, a moratorium on deportations from South Africa, the total number of assisted returnees at

the Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre numbered above 300 000. The moratorium for the cessation of deportations was meant to allow for the undisturbed regularization of the status of many Zimbabweans in South Africa.

The moratorium was lifted on 7 October 2011 when over 250 000 Zimbabweans had been issued with work permits by the South African government. Since October 2011 the deportations from South Africa have since resumed and the Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre is once again fully operational and taking care of the vulnerable migrants and stemming an otherwise serious humanitarian challenge in the border town. As of March 2012, the Centre has assisted over 15 000 returnees.

b) The Plumtree Reception and Support Centre

Given the enormous successes realized at the Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre in 2008 a similar arrangement was established at the Zimbabwe-Botswana border town of Plumtree where similar humanitarian challenges were being experienced albeit at a lower scale than those at Beitbridge. Not less than 30 000 Zimbabweans were returned from Botswana in 2006 and the figures increased in the subsequent years. Since its inception in May 2008, the Plumtree Centre has assisted a total of 144 000 return migrants and enabled the same to make informed and better choices in their future decisions to migrate. In 2012 alone, the Centre has so far assisted over 4000 returnees.

The focus on managing return migration at our respective Border towns with South Africa and Botswana soon proved inadequate due to its reactionary nature. The approach sought to deal with deportees instead of addressing some of the root causes of the deportations themselves. In particular it was realized that the major reason for deportations from South Africa was the lack of proper travel documents, coupled with a lack of work permits for those in employment. A need thus emerged for the extension of protection services to the generality of migrant workers, incorporating a viable governance framework for managing cross-border migration.

7. BILATERAL COOPERATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

The cooperation with South African authorities was mainly achieved in the context of the strong bilateral ties that were expressed in the form of sectoral agreements on Home Affairs, Labour and Employment as well as Social Services. It is through the agreement on home affairs that the moratorium on deportations was agreed and implemented. The agreement on labour and employment included cross-border migration issues that were addressed by a Cross Border Labour Migration Forum (CBLMF) which organises regular meetings in the respective border towns. The CBLMF also included the participation of IOM and ILO from time to time.

Notwithstanding the mutual understanding at government-to-government level, some local South Africans felt that Zimbabweans, amongst other nationalities, were unduly taking away key economic opportunities from them. This view led to a period of sustained xenophobic attacks on foreigners in that country particularly between 2009 and 2010, culminating in the return of thousands of Zimbabweans including through an Assisted Voluntary Return scheme mainly funded by IOM.

8. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BEITBRIDGE LABOUR MIGRATION CENTRE

The Government of Zimbabwe, with the support of IOM, has also proceeded to establish a Labour Placement Centre within the Beitbridge Reception and Support Centre. The Labour Centre seeks to regularize the status of Zimbabwean migrants working in farms in South Africa's Limpopo Province. This represents the management of the demand-driven, safe and legal labour migration by Zimbabweans to the South African economy.

The Centre also seeks to enhance compliance by South African farmers with their legislation on the employment of foreign labour. As at March 2011, the Centre had registered over 700 job seekers wishing to find employment in farms in South Africa's Limpopo Province. The Centre has also managed to recover about R 45 000 in unpaid wages on behalf of returned migrant workers.

The Labour Migration Project is also receiving financial and technical support from the International Labour Organisation. The pilot phase is for now confined to the commercial farms in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Depending on the success of this phase, the process can be extended to other Provinces and sectors of the South African economy.

The Centre has been welcomed by prospective job seekers as it offers a practical mechanism for the movement of would-be farm workers who face significant challenges in obtaining documentation for regular migration. The challenges include relatively high costs of obtaining passports, and at one stage these included a huge backlog at the responsible authorities due to economic challenges. The Centre also mainstreamed the important aspect of information dissemination targeting key issues of safe migration and other related matters such as HIV and AIDS.

The project has a modern information technology infrastructure, with internet-based connectivity between Beitbridge and other participating centres in key migrant sending communities. The Centre has the support of the Government of South Africa as well as the South African farmers. Some of the farmers actually pledged financial support for the implementation of the project.

Once the modalities for the operation of the Labour Migration Centre are fully tested, the same model is set to be replicated at the Plumtree border post with Botswana where the

other Reception and Support Centre is operational. Furthermore, an attempt will also be made to extend the coverage of the labour centres to other occupations beyond the agricultural sector.

It is important to mention that the Centre has for now failed to achieve its full potential due to coordination problems on the part of government, coupled with donor fatigue as the roll out of the recruitment process was delayed. The support of the other Ministries and Departments in components such as passport issuance was often delayed resulting in various deadlines being missed, up to the point when resources earmarked for the Centre were forfeited.

9. EXTENSION OF LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO RETURNEES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Apart from the attention that has been given to the border towns through the establishment of the reception and support centres, as well as the labour centre, important interventions were also made within the migrant sending communities themselves. A key intervention was made through a Livestock Revolving Programme through which returnees were identified and co-opted into project teams to breed goats on a commercial basis. The programme was operated in the Masvingo Province which had the highest numbers of returnees from South Africa. A total of 265 returnees were assisted between the period 2007 and 2010.

Beyond the Livestock Revolving Programme, Government is now collaborating with IOM in the context of a more development oriented intervention called the Community Based Planning programme. The major objectives of this programme are to support local development as prioritized by the communities in high migrant sending areas. As of now, communities have identified construction of schools, clinics, water and sanitation and income generating projects and resource mobilization is being undertaken to extend the desired support.

These interventions represent some of Zimbabwe's most notable approaches to the management of migration especially for the vulnerable groups, at a time that outward migration became the most viable coping means in a context of reduced economic opportunities in the country.

10. LESSONS LEARNT

It is necessary to recap on a few of the important points raised in the brief outline of Zimbabwe's migration management experience. The key success factors for Zimbabwe's interventions can be itemised as follows:

- a) The major challenge that must be overcome in migration management relates to the aspect of coordination among the various ministries that have something to do with migration. It often appears that there is competition among departments as to who should lead particular initiatives. In the end such discord often frustrates the development partners and various donors up to the point that the implementation of various initiatives becomes almost impossible. The Beitbridge Labour Migration Centre talked about above provides a very good example.
- b) The greater measure of the success realized in managing the high volumes of outward migration, especially into South Africa and Botswana, required strong inter-state cooperation, including through sectoral agreements on labour and social services. It is through such cooperation that the Reception and Support Centres as mentioned above are enabled to operate successfully.
- c) The 2008 South African moratorium on deportations through the sector agreement on home affairs by our two countries represents a major achievement and an indication of how inter-state cooperation can influence the lives of many vulnerable migrants perhaps more positively than any other measure.
- d) The last point relates to the challenge of sustainability. It so happens that when the social and economic status of a country declines, this is also the period when government is called upon to invest more in migration management initiatives. The gap that results is that of incapacity on the part of government hence increased reliance on donor support. However, this presents a further challenge in that notwithstanding the success of various programmes and interventions sustainability issues always arise when communities as well as governments cannot easily gain the capacity to inherit when donor support comes to an end.

In the final analysis, the same vulnerabilities that exposed individuals and communities to irregular patterns of migration return to haunt the very same populations to resort to previous precarious coping means. Accordingly, it is of paramount importance that all government and community support initiatives have in them an inbuilt mechanism for continuity.

11. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

This paper has discussed the critical interventions that have been put in place by the Government of Zimbabwe with the support of various development partners, including in particular IOM. These interventions have been dynamic in nature having begun as purely humanitarian initiatives until they developed into development oriented programmes targeting not only the migrants but their communities as well.

The importance of internal cohesion cannot be overemphasized. Migration issues by their nature are cross-cutting and close cooperation is required across the whole spectrum of Government ministries and departments as well as among a wide range of potential donors.

In view of the intricate challenges posed by migration management issues it is vital that all concerned stakeholders come up with a working method that fosters harmony and clarifies the roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder. Such a working method must be a fundamental point of reference in the migration policies and programmes.