Circular Migration: Triple-Win Solution for Ghana and Italy

Labour migration management has proven to be an essential tool through which excess labour supply in a particular sector of a country could be matched in areas where there are shortages in other countries, so there is a triple-win situation for the governments of the two countries involved and the migrant worker, as well. In this context IOM, through support from the European Commission (EC) and Italian government, implemented a pilot circular migration program between Ghana and Italy as part of the AENEAS 2006 Labour Migration Project for West Africa (LAMIWA), entitled “Facilitating a Coherent Migration Management Approach in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Libya by Promoting Legal Migration and Preventing Further Irregular Migration.” 20 Ghanaian candidates were selected in collaboration with the Labour Department of Ghana to travel to Trento, Italy where they could enhance their farming skills in the harvest of grapes and apples for three months.

The Ghanaian migrant workers participated in a pre-departure seminar that included sessions in practical language skills training, cultural adaptation, healthcare, and money management. The Minister of Employment and Social Welfare of Ghana, Hon. E. T. Mensah, met the team and extended the government’s full support, encouraging them to work diligently and be good ambassadors of Ghana.

The 20-man team of migrant workers left Accra for Trento on 28 July 2011 and were welcomed by the Ghanaian Ambassador to Italy, Her Excellency Anita Stokes-Hayford. Their new Italian agricultural employer, Coldiretti, met them in Trento where they received accommodation, work permits, and valuable experience in commercial agricultural production. Coldiretti were very satisfied with the Ghanaian workers’ performance, commending them for completing all assigned tasks ahead of schedule, and expressed an interest in recruiting the migrant workers again next year.

The migrant workers returned to Ghana three months later in October and shared the good news of their experience, learning new farming techniques and saving enough income to improve and expand their own farming businesses and thereby increase profits. A comprehensive reintegration programme in the form of agricultural training and supply of equipment is also provided under the project with the expectation that the beneficiaries will move from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming. Migrant workers are also encouraged to share their acquired skills with other farmers in their communities.
IOM Responds to Crisis in Côte d’Ivoire

As a consequence of the contested results of the November 2010 Presidential elections, a humanitarian crisis erupted in Côte d’Ivoire (CDI). The UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire reported wide-spread violence and human rights abuses, as increasing numbers of Ivorian refugees began arriving in Liberia, Guinea and Ghana and the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within CDI increased notably.

In response to the significant numbers of IDPs (over 69,000 registered by IOM and UNHCR) and refugees, asylum seekers, returning nationals, and Third Country Nationals (TCNs) who fled to neighbouring countries (approx. 346,000), IOM, in coordination with key partners, provided extensive humanitarian assistance with donor support from AusAID (Australia), CERF (UN), ECHO (European Commission Humanitarian Office), SIDA (Sweden), PRM (United States), and UNHCR.

In Ghana alone, IOM and its partner agencies have thus far delivered a total of 39,657 assistance services, including transportation, temporary accommodation, meals, arrival assistance, obtaining emergency travel documents, fitness for travel health screenings, medical treatments and emergency medical referrals to 12,418 Ivorian Refugees and Asylum Seekers living in host communities and camps supported by UNHCR, 893 Ghanaian Returnees, and 264 TCNs who fled Côte d’Ivoire.

Nearly one year later, the influx of Ivorian Refugees and Asylum Seekers into Ghana has expectedly decreased, yet, as of November 2011, there still remain 15,791 refugees residing in Ghana with 7,342 registered in camps. Currently, incoming Ivorian migrants cite family reunification, resulting from financial difficulties, in Côte d’Ivoire as the predominant reason for entering Ghana and registering with IOM, suggesting development of “income-generating” activities within CDI are now the priority at this stage of the crisis.

Resettlement & Rapture in Raleigh: a Family Reunion

Resettlement is one of any key services offered by IOM. As mandated by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), IOM provides transportation arrangements for refugees admitted to resettle in the U.S. through the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Hotounou Messan is one such refugee who benefited from this resettlement program, receiving medical and transportation assistance from IOM Ghana.

Mr. Messan and his family fled civil unrest in Togo to seek refuge in neighbouring Benin in September 2005. After living 3 years in a refugee camp, Mr. Messan’s USRAP application was ultimately approved in 2008, so he and his wife journeyed to their new home in Greensboro, North-Carolina, leaving 6 children behind in Benin.
After working the Messan family reunification case for 3 painstaking years, IOM Ghana received request from the U.S. Embassy in Benin to prepare and transport Mr. Messan’s children to join their parents in Greensboro.

In November 2011, Mr. Messan and his wife were reunited with their children at last — it was an exhilarating and tearful moment of pure joy. The Messan family reunion even made the news in Raleigh, North Carolina (visit WRAL online for the full story and video at www.wral.com/news/local/story/10330148/).

**IOM Ghana Launches HIV/AIDS Research Project**

Migration is a recognized social determinant of migrant’s health. “Migration Health” refers to the physical, mental and social well-being of migrants, mobile populations, their families, and communities affected by migration. Mobility itself is not a risk factor, but rather the person’s risky behaviour. The links between migration, population mobility and HIV are still not widely understood. IOM is increasingly focusing on “Spaces of Vulnerability” where migrant and mobile populations interact with local communities in environments conducive to multiple concurrent partnerships or higher-risk sexual behaviours.

To contribute to evidence-based programming for Most At-Risk Populations (MARP) in Ghana, IOM is currently conducting a research project, entitled “HIV Vulnerability Assessment among Female Sex Workers along the Tema–Paga Transport Corridor.” IOM has established this UNAIDS-funded project with an international NGO, Management Strategies for Africa (MSA), and a local NGO, West Africa Program to Combat AIDS and STI (WAPCAS).

**Ghana Links with Diaspora to Promote Development**

In August 2011, IOM Ghana commenced implementation of a 12-month, diaspora engagement project, titled “Linking the Ghanaian Diaspora to the Development of Ghana,” to support the Ghanaian Government in mobilising its diaspora toward the sustainable, socio-economic development of Ghana. Funded by IOM’s 1035 Facility for member states, implementing partners on this project include the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, the Ministry of the Interior of Ghana, and the Ghana Immigration Service.

Expected results include: A) engaging Ghanaian diaspora associations in the five nations with the largest Ghanaian emigrant populations, namely the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy; B) promoting dialogue between the diaspora, Government of Ghana, civil society, and the private sector by convening two videoconferences and one diaspora colloquium; C) establishing a national Diaspora Support Unit; and D) creation of a diaspora website and databank.
I specialize in public health and have been working in this field for over ten years. My work is mainly focused on looking at migrant health and chronic disease in Africa, and what can we do to improve the health of these populations.

CURRENT KNOWLEDGE
What we know is that the migrant population in Western Europe tends to have poorer health than the general population. When migrants initially move, they are healthy but as time goes on, their health gets worse. This is due to several factors. Migration is stressful and is composed of several challenges. Stresses can come from many sources — discrimination at work, problems with neighbours, poor working conditions and family issues. People change their eating habits when they migrate, as well as their patterns of physical activity, and those too have an impact on people’s health. And when people are sick, they often don’t know where to go for help. All of these factors play an important role.

POSITIVE PROGRESS
I return to Ghana every year with the help of IOM’s Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) Ghana Health project to teach and collaborate with other health workers and experts. Chronic diseases – diabetes, hypertension and also cardiovascular diseases – are on the rise in Africa, particularly in low- and middle-income areas. Many African countries are in transition and that means people’s behaviour and eating patterns and everything are changing. It is very important that we educate people about their health and their rights. I do this by going out into the community, both here and in Ghana, with my colleagues and speaking to people directly. We also give interviews and provide information via African radio.

One of the best things about science is that your results will be read and used. Our work is necessary and needed, and has even had a direct impact on public policy. People in Ghana appreciate what I do, and they like that I come and help. That in return also encourages me to carry on. I think that the most important thing is that I can make a difference in other people’s lives; that is absolutely crucial. The rest can wait.

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What is most important about my work is trying making a difference, making sure that people who don’t have a voice can be heard. The piece that you write for a scientific journal can go a very long way to making that happen. No one will listen if you just say, “I want to do this, I want to do that.” But if you are able to communicate scientifically, you can certainly make that difference.

The IOM Mission
IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As the leading international organization for migration, IOM acts with partners in the international community to:

- Assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management;
- Advance understanding of migration issues;
- Encourage social and economic development.