



Migration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Workshop discussion paper

Despite the evident linkages between migration and development, migration does not feature prominently in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by 191 states under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) in September 2000. Subsequent reports and related strategic documents, while acknowledging linkages, still lack a specific focus on migration.¹

Until relatively recently, the subject of ‘migration and development’ was approached from the viewpoint of tackling the root causes of migration, and was concerned largely with promoting sustainable development in areas of high migration pressures in order to discourage emigration. The discussion revolved around the negative impact of migration on development such as the emigration of qualified professionals from developing countries, the subsequent loss of skills (‘brain drain’), and the negative effect this had on the local health and education systems. Today this approach is increasingly complemented by the rising recognition of the positive effects migration has on development. Individual migrants and diasporas can contribute to the development of the country of origin through remittances, capital investment, as well as business and social networks, and skills and knowledge transfers.

The significance attributed to the positive impact of migration on development is being increasingly reflected in government policy agendas and development policy frameworks, as well as on the agendas of other actors in the field of international development cooperation. However, migration has not yet consistently been integrated into national development agendas or in national and international assistance strategies. Research efforts are ongoing and a coherent guiding framework to address the complex relationship between migration and development has not yet been established.

There is no simple ‘cause and effect’ relationship between migration and development. Migration can have, either directly or indirectly, both a positive and negative influence on the achievement of the MDGs. In analyzing the linkages, it is important to keep in mind that migration patterns change considerably from country to country, as well as between regions, and must be distinguished in terms of direction, duration, motivation and type. Not only are there differences in the level of poverty among migrants and therefore in their reasons for moving, but the duration of the move may also differ, thereby creating different types of links and levels of identification with the host country, the country of origin, or both.

This paper examines the impact of migration on efforts to achieve targets set by the MDGs, particularly in sectors relating to poverty eradication, gender, health, sustainable environmental development and global partnerships.

¹ This discussion paper was finalized before the publication of the UN Millennium Project Report *Investing in Development – A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, which draws out some of the linkages. Available at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/html/millenniumplan.shtm>.



Poverty eradication

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Migration can be both a cause and effect of poverty.² Poverty can constitute a push factor for migration for those with some access to resources, but can also reduce the ability to emigrate for the very poor given the high transfer costs.³

At the same time, migration can play a positive role in poverty reduction and can be linked to a decline in the number of people living in poverty.⁴ However if not properly managed, migration may also result in ‘brain drain’ which, in some countries, may have an adverse effect on the country’s economic development. Turning ‘brain drain’ into ‘brain gain’ is a strategy being developed by more and more developing countries.

Increasing attention is being paid to the role of remittances in reducing poverty through the provision of an additional family income, financing of community projects and local development efforts, and as sources of foreign direct investment. Remittances also have a positive effect on macro-economic growth when they are used to finance health and education.⁵ Some research indicates that beyond their positive effect on consumption and their potential long-term development effects, remittances are relatively unaffected by crises and violent conflict and they appear to be more equally spread among developing countries than other capital flows.⁶

Remittances should, however, be considered as a complement, not a substitute for financing for development. Remittances are private funds, and are not a substitute for official development assistance. It is therefore important to maximize the benefits of remittances in terms of their contribution to poverty reduction within a broader approach, such as supporting the development of a facilitating environment, good governance and stable economic structures in the countries to which these funds are transferred.⁷

² Skeldon 2002

³ Waddington and Sabates -Wheeler 2003

⁴ Adams and Page 2003

⁵ World Bank 2004, p. 185

⁶ Ratha 2003, p.164

⁷ O’Neil, Kevin, “Summary Report: Discussion on Migration and Development: Using Remittances and Circular Migration as Drivers for Development”, Migration Policy Institute 2003. Accessible at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=133>.



Diasporas contribute to poverty reduction in their countries of origin through other types of investment, including the provision of skills and knowledge. Diaspora business networks and associations, temporary return programmes and labour migration programmes can all play a role in the development process in countries of origin. An increasing number of developing and transition countries seek to adopt policies, legislation and structures to promote the foreign employment of part of their workforce and generate remittances, while providing safeguards to protect their migrants.

Gender

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

The principal links between gender equality and migration include the contribution migration can make to, firstly, the empowerment of women and, secondly, to help promoting gender equality by making use of newly acquired coping skills as potential resources for change and development. Empowered female role models encourage subsequent generations in areas key to development such as health and education. Finally, according to recent studies, female migrants tend to remit a larger share of their income, which in turn can contribute to poverty reduction.⁸

But migration also often challenges gender equality. Women are more vulnerable when traveling and more likely to become victims of human trafficking and exploitation. Upon arrival in a country of destination, and given their situations of relative dependency, female migrants may face greater difficulty with regards to integration than men. Double discrimination on the labour market, as well as disadvantaged access to employment, social security and health programmes, may result from being both female and foreign.

Given that gender equality is often identified as essential for achieving all the MDGs, addressing this topic would not only benefit individual migrants, but also enhance the developmental effects of migration.⁹ The potential of migration processes to achieve gender equality needs to be explored more systematically.

Health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

⁸ IOM 2003, p. 7

⁹ UNDP 2003, p. 50.



Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Migration is closely linked to attaining goal 6 in a number of ways. Firstly, migrants are particularly vulnerable to health risks during their journey and upon arrival in the country of destination and tend to be more prone to contracting disease than residents in the countries of destination and origin.¹⁰ Questions of legal status, as well as language problems and cultural differences, can be barriers to access to health care systems and social security. Failure to address the health needs of migrants during the various phases of migration can furthermore obstruct successful integration and can hamper effective reconstruction in post-conflict or emergency situations.¹¹

Furthermore, in light of the vulnerability of migrants to health risks, the contribution of migration to the spread of infectious diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS, is a recognized problem, which is being widely addressed.¹²

Finally, the brain drain resulting from emigration of health workers from developing countries can have a serious impact on some national health care systems, which, in turn, can affect the public health situation and impede the delivery of health services as well as the standard of education in this field.

Countering the brain drain of health workers by mobilizing diaspora resources for temporary return is one important means for re-building the health infrastructure and the availability of human resources for the healthcare sector in developing countries. In addition, corresponding policies in countries of destination, such as for example responsible recruitment practices, as well as bilateral agreements on health worker migration are important for attaining the MDGs related to health.

Environmental Sustainability

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 11: By 2020, have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

The inter-linkages between environmental sustainability and migration are most visible in situations involving large numbers of uprooted people, such as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), which can pose massive ecological challenges in a given region. In this context it is

¹⁰ IOM 2002c, p. 1

¹¹ IOM 2003, pp. 95, 96

¹² United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS “Global Crisis – Global Action”*, June 2001. Accessible at <http://www.un.org/ga/aids/coverage/FinalDeclarationHIVAIDS.html>.



important to take a coordinated approach to humanitarian activities, such as the building of refugee camps, by applying, for example, the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”, which offer a framework for activities of agencies engaged in providing protection assistance to IDPs.¹³

Target 11 aims at the reduction of city slum dwellers. About 40 per cent of urban population growth can be attributed to internal and international migration.¹⁴ Urban areas in developing countries will absorb most of the population growth forecast for the coming years. These urban areas are fed, in part, by migrants as the majority of migrant flows take place between developing countries.¹⁵

Rural-to-urban and international migration remain two vital strategies for individuals to improve their livelihoods. But in order to achieve target 11, the connection between rural-to-urban migration, international migration and urban poverty has to be understood and migration needs to be managed for the benefit of cities, societies and individual migrants.

Global Partnerships

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

In relation to target 12, the opening up of trading and financial systems may influence remittances transfer (the reduction of transfer costs and the establishment of effective legal channels for the transfer of such private financial flows therefore need to be considered in this context), and could facilitate investment by diasporas.

Moreover, the substantial liberalization in goods, capital and some services has outdistanced any liberalization of the movement of persons to provide services pursuant to Mode 4 of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which for many developing countries is seen as an important contribution to the economies of their countries and the employment opportunities of their nationals.

Target 18 notes the significance of close cooperation with the private sector to make available the benefits of new technologies. For diasporas this means using virtual channels, such as internet-based portals for knowledge sharing, serving their functions of transferring knowledge and technology, as

¹³ Presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998 by Francis Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons. Available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/d2e008c61b70263ec125661e0036f36e?Opendocument>.

¹⁴ Brennan 1999, p. 10

¹⁵ IOM 2003, p. 6



well as facilitating business connections.¹⁶ Some diasporas have played a pivotal role in promoting the presence and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in their countries of origin, thereby helping to bridge the ‘digital divide’. Finally, diasporas contribute to private sector development in their home countries by establishing businesses, through investment, the provision of training or knowledge transfer to their countries of origin, as well as serving as intermediaries to facilitate business links. However, the potential for development through global diaspora networks and transnational initiatives is only beginning to be exploited.

Partnerships are essential for harnessing migration for development. Partnerships and cooperation exist at multiple levels – from local or grassroots level cooperation to international and inter-organizational cooperation. Partnerships can consist of partners from the public and private sectors, including individual migrants or diasporas, and exist within a variety of sectors.

Regional and international consultative processes are important in this regard, as they contribute to introducing development as an element of international migration management and could further the debate on how migration can contribute to development. By bringing together governments over questions of migration and development these processes can feed into and add to the creation and enhancement of international strategies and global partnerships for development.

Conclusion

The inter-linkages between migration and the MDGs are complex. The impact of migration can be direct and indirect, as well as positive and negative. Consequently, most of the linkages have the potential to challenge and support the achievement of the MDGs at the same time.

In those areas where migration can be identified as a challenge to achieving the MDGs, effective migration management strategies need to be developed in order to address the negative effect of migration on the MDGs. Governments, development agencies and international organizations are encouraged to formulate coherent strategies to enhance the positive impact of migration on the achievement of the MDGs. Above all, the complex relationship between migration and the MDGs must be explored further. Migration, as is increasingly recognized, cannot be excluded from development agendas, but must be incorporated in development policies and programmes. Although it is difficult in itself to obtain reliable data and statistics on migration, increased and focused research on the topic will be crucial in the process of achieving the MDGs. Thorough assessment, the development of comprehensive and coherent strategies and responsible implementation will be able to advance this process.

¹⁶ House of Commons International Development Committee 2004, p. 65



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