

Assessing progress in the implementation process of migration related SDGs
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My Name is Salome Mbugua. I am a native of Kenya and a first generation migrant living in Ireland. I first arrived in Ireland in 1994 as a student where I studied for one year. I later moved there permanently in 1998 as the spouse of an Irish citizen. Prior to first arriving in Ireland I worked as a social worker in Nairobi, Kenya for four years. Before settling permanently in Ireland I worked as a gender specialist in Uganda for two years. Today I will share with you my experience as a migrant woman activist who has lived in Ireland for the last 20 years. I will also share with you my experience of working with so many migrants from over 50 nationalities that I have worked with over the years.

My own isolation as a migrant woman led me to mobilise a group of African women in Ireland in 2001 to found AkiDWA (the African and migrant women's network in Ireland). Through shared discussions of racism, economic inequality, the plight of women in direct provision as well as experiences of gender based violence we opened doors to involving migrant women in discussions and the development of policies in Ireland. This all occurred at a time when there was a large growth in the number of migrants in Ireland. Today migrants represent 1 in every 8 of the Irish population, or just over 12%.

Through the AkiDWA network I have worked with Irish government departments and agencies in developing policies and laws in areas such as health, Gender based violence, women peace and security and employment. While most migrants in Ireland have now settled there permanently, the majority do not to feel included or part of the society. Limited access to the normal civil and human rights remain a challenge for all. This includes resources, healthcare and culturally appropriate support services. Employment in particular employment remains a huge challenge for a large number of migrants with many being denied legal access to work and others experiencing institutional racism in the labour market.

Today I also speak to you and share my experience as the vice chair of the European Network of Migrant women. This network was founded in 2010 and launched in 2012 with its head office in Brussels. We are a network of migrant women in Europe with members who reside in 21 European countries. Challenges facing migrant women in Europe are compounded by many factors which include the impact of immigration journey, their immigration status, and support structures in the country of destination and the commitment or lack of commitment to migrant rights in the country of destination.

Immigration Journey: Based on my work with women who have been trafficked, they narrate of how they have been controlled by their traffickers, women escaping war and violence get attacked on their journey, some raped, other women have spoken to me about their experience of ill health during their immigration journey and lack of access to medical facilities while most of them still remember the long walk of many days with no food and water.

Immigration status: Immigration status, many women whom I work with have different immigration status, refugee, asylum seekers, student, migrant workers, immigration status of each person determine their life and their access to rights. Women seeking asylum in Ireland are not allowed to work and have to depend on a weekly allowance of €19.10, most of the women seeking asylum whom I have worked with have stayed for long period(over five years) before they are granted residency, their live in communal shared residence which has also impacted on their health and wellbeing.

Support structures: Many migrant depend on social networks for survival, my network- AkiDwA has provided services including information and moral support of which most of the migrant find helpful and useful.

Migrant's rights: I have worked with undocumented women whose work visa expired and could not find employment due to recession, these women have no access to health or social protection, they have no right to education and housing. Family reunification remains a big challenge to migrants of all status.

In 2015 I undertook research with migrant refugees coming from armed conflict or war torn countries. The focus groups for this research included women from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, Nigeria and Somalia to name just a few. My research, *HEALING THE WOUNDS OF WAR, Narratives of women from armed conflict* was published and launched in May 2016.

This research found that the majority of the women are living on the margin of the society. They are struggling with their past experience of trauma – especially women who experienced rape, loss of families and properties and they have lost their self-esteem and self-worth. They are faced with challenges while trying to access health services due to language barriers. There is a lack of both accessible information and cultural competence among frontline services and healthcare professionals. The women reported that they feel isolated and have been consistently victims of racism and discrimination. Some have poor literacy levels and there is high risk of poverty.

The impact and the experience of the immigration journey and the situation in refugee camps continue to haunt many even after many years of settling in their countries of destination. As one of the woman indicated, *“We have come from far with many issues; some of us have been raped and are still suffering from it. After leaving our country, we were settled in a refugee camp in Tanzania following many days of walking through the bush; many families did not make it to the camp including some of our relatives. Some families gave in their young daughters for money to help them move. It was sad and emotional, seeing girls being sold to become wives. Also in the refugee camp there were lots of violence against us, outbreak of disease and a lot of rape for women leading to crisis and unwanted pregnancy. We stayed in the refugee camp for 13 years before getting here to Ireland. Even though we feel safe and secure here, our memories and past experience continue to haunt us.”*

In most circumstances migrants' ability to cope and fit into the country of destination depends on the situation they find themselves in. Based on my discussions with the women it is very clear that their lives are full of emotional battles and an inability to fit in, adapt and settle in the new environment. As another

participant highlighted, *“Living here now we are still struggling with trauma and experience of our past. Even though we have been granted houses and social welfare money our lives remain the same, we are not able to move beyond the impact of the war, we can hardly communicate in English, we do not engage with the rest of the community or go out, we feel they do not understand the harsh and difficult life we have gone through. We feel ignored and nobody that we can approach for help; the government brought us here but after two years all those who were supporting us disappeared; we are people who have been so much affected physically and mentally in a new land, we cannot find work to help us move out of house or keep ourselves busy, it’s so hard living in the house the whole year and with no meaningful resources. We have left war there but have found another one here”*.

Being part of the local community and getting involved in community activities can help. However many women expressed a feeling of isolation; some due to language barriers, others due to an inability to participate in community activities and an inability to engage.

Most of the women continue to struggle and this has impacted on their psychological, health and well being. Loss and separation from other family members left behind in countries of origin is a major challenge. One of the women had this to say *“I have been having headache and its even getting worse; I cannot forget what I saw. My husband and brother were killed in my presence. I still hear the noise of the bullets; I am not able to sleep at night. The doctor has prescribed me medicine many times but these medicines are not working. Members of the family left behind are also struggling, the war and conflict is still there, my people continue to suffer, I can never be at peace, every day we receive news, all bad news, sometimes they want us to send them money, to help with food, but we don’t have that money. I am very sad even though I am here I am not happy, my heart is not here, I am sad, sick and completely lost, my health is not good”*

Lack of cultural competence by front line services and health care professionals, as well as a lack of proper support, isolation, racism, discrimination and access to information remains huge challenges.

For migrant to move forward and for them to become productive members of the society culturally competence services are important and should be established while dealing with vulnerable migrants. Community peer led support programme are important and such support should include mentoring, language training and cultural orientation of migrants. These are important and contribute to their integration. Psychological support services and supports to overcome trauma must be established and provided to migrants. In particular, those who have been trafficked or are coming from war torn countries must be specifically targeted.

Access to employment and the promotion of entrepreneurship is vital. Many migrants want to work. This helps them with a feeling of fulfillment and self worth. It also helps them to integrate and meet their needs and those of their families, including their extended families.

“The social welfare allowances we receive is not enough, it would have been better if we had jobs; we need to be facilitated to access work. We would like to become independent. We have skills and talents, yet we

can't do anything. Our lives have been wasted and our children's lives are going to be the same. We are here forgotten, neglected completely, isolated; we will continue to grow old and become useless in a land that we feel we do not belong"

In conclusion, as we continue to implement SDGs let's not forget those migrants who continue to suffer and struggle in refugee camps in neighboring countries also women and men who are vulnerable to trafficking and those on move. We must also ensure that migrants are facilitated to live free from poverty as well end inequalities and injustice. From my experience and my own contribution towards the implementation of SDGs the Diaspora are playing a vital role. Leveraging families, communities and network developments in host countries and in countries of origin is vital as well as globalising the development agenda. It is therefore important to mobilize, engage, support and empower migrants to enable them settle and contribute positively to their own development and that of their families.