



Summary: It is important to understand how today's migrations are shaping the architecture of Africa and South America, creating intensive South-South and South-North movement, but a weak flow between the two continents. Political, socio-economic, and environmental differences between Africa and South America could lead to imbalanced migratory processes between the two continents. Migration policy is not a purely rational enterprise; it is usually designed to please public opinion, and remains highly related to security. A conceptualization of governance must include the capacity to establish common visions for migration not only between states but also among civil society, the private sector, and the migrants themselves.

African and South American Migration: The Current State and Future Perspectives

by *Aicha Belarbi*

Introduction

Cross-border migrations in the South Atlantic Basin existed long before the current phase of globalization. Nonetheless, it is important to understand how today's migrations are shaping the architecture of Africa and South America, creating intensive South-South and South-North movement, but a weak flow between the two continents.

A recent study conducted by Susan Martin and Philip Martin, "Migration in the South Atlantic Basin: Patterns, Governance, and Development," emphasizes the density and complexity of migration in the South Atlantic Basin; it tackles a set of variables that may contribute to an explanation of the similarities and differences in migration patterns between both regions.

Despite the similarities demonstrated by the study, it is also clear that the political, socioeconomic, and environmental differences between Africa and South America could lead to imbalanced migratory processes between the two continents. After all, poverty, environmental degradation, and violent conflict are among the main causes of voluntary and involuntary migration.

African and South American Migration and Development

Among 54 African nations, 34 are among the world's least developed countries, while there are none in South America.¹ The majority of countries in South America belong to a high or middle human development index.² Divergences continue if we compare population sizes, and GDP gaps,³ but the greatest divide between the two continents are active conflicts and wars, which affect many African countries, but are limited to Colombia in South America. Violent conflicts in Africa result in greater movement of refugees and asylum seekers. Therefore, we can expect that internal and South-North migration will be more important in Africa than in South America.

International migration was predominantly a male phenomenon during the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the United States.⁴ Waves of women

1 *Least Developed Countries Report* (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2012).

2 *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 2011).

3 Philip Martin and Susan Martin, *Migration in the South Atlantic Basin: Patterns, Governance, and Development* (German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2014).

4 Christine Catarino and Mirjana Morokvasic, "Femmes, migrations et mobilités," *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 21:1 (2005): 7-27; *State of the World Population 2006 – A Passage to Hope: Women and International Migration* (United Nations Population Fund, 2006).

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and children followed male migrants through family reunification policies in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.⁵ But by the 1990s, women were migrating in far higher numbers than before, both as family members and independently, voluntarily and involuntarily.⁶ Widespread poverty, land degradation, male unemployment, and the desire to build careers all contributed to a steady increase of female migrants, reaching parity today with male migrants. As with male migration, female migration can directly or indirectly alleviate poverty by raising the overall productivity, education, and health of families.

As mentioned by different researchers, lack of sufficient statistical data hampers migration policies and programs. Many countries still have inefficient documentation systems, especially regarding internal flows of migrants. Artificial borders that separate groups and tribes are often porous and lead to free circulation, especially in Africa; this leads to an increase in the numbers of irregular migrants and unauthorized workers during seasons of peak agricultural work. In addition, the control and selectivity exerted by European and American states today do not prevent traffickers and smugglers from choosing or reinventing new corridors.

Migratory processes in South America and Africa are changing. Some theorists argue that free trade is the best means of accelerating southern countries' economic and social development because it generates infrastructure investment and creates new and better job opportunities, which should thereby reduce migration. However, agreements on migration are often not part of free trade agreements. The larger question is whether trade liberalization is an effective means for reducing unwanted migration South-North.

The massive outflow of highly qualified migrants from South American and African countries to North America and to Europe is one of the most pressing challenges posed by South-North migration today. It highlights the complexities of migration as it relates to poverty alleviation and development. Undeniably, skilled women and men choose migration to improve their own lives and that of their families, as well as to enhance their professional

5 Lacoste Dujardin and Virolle Marie, «Femmes et hommes au Maghreb et en immigration, la frontière des genres en question,» *Etudes Sociologiques et Anthropologiques* (1998): 234; Mohamed Charef, *Les migrations au féminin* (Editions: Sud-Contact, Agadir, 2002).

6 Anette Goldberg-Salinas, «Femmes et migrations, considérations sur l'état de la question en France,» *Revue Juridique, Politique et Économique du Maroc* N° spécial (2000): 43-60.

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careers; at the same time, their home countries are facing a critical shortage of qualified workers in some crucial jobs (doctors, nurses, teachers, and informatics). On the other hand, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa note that migrant outflows are not compensated by the inflows they are receiving, which are usually comprised of low- or middle-skilled migrants. Migrants' home towns and diaspora associations are increasingly worried about brain drain consequences, while receiving and sending states are searching for solutions that will safeguard freedom of movement as well as produce greater benefits for the development of their countries. Empirically, only part of the picture can be drawn solely from data on South-North migration of the highly skilled. Data on other directions of migration such as South-South, North-South, and East-West are not systematically covered by international statistical institutes.

The Importance of Local Political Circumstances

Many recent reports and recommendations from various international and national organizations and forums⁷ have noted the link between migration and development, arguing that migration could be a significant factor in the development of sending countries through remittances

7 See, for example, *Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action*, Global Commission of International Migration (2005); *Summary of the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development*, United Nations, October 13, 2006; *Rapport sur Migration et développement*, Banque Africaine de Développement (2009); *L'argent des migrants au service du co-développement*, Conseil Economique et Social Français, May 16, 2008.

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and return of expertise. But the impact of local politics on development should not be neglected.

The lack of real democratization in many African countries, continuing corruption, nepotism, and human rights violations tend to hamper all areas of human development and to impede the productivity of foreign aid. The more than \$500 billion sent to Africa in the form of direct aid⁸ in the last few years has unfortunately failed to produce many positive impacts, and the region as a whole still struggles with severe debt issues and poverty.

Given this common political situation, it is difficult for certain migrants to confidently make significant investments in their country of origin, except through some development projects they initiate with local and diaspora NGOs operating with transparency, control, and accountability. Remittances are usually spent to improve family life through education, health, housing, social welfare, and so on, and migrants tend to invest in land, small commerce, house construction, dowry, etc. Thus, the impact of remittances is often not significant enough to be seen at the macroeconomic level.

In addition, a great number of migrants struggle just to survive in developed countries. Generally not well educated or highly qualified, particularly among first- and second-generation migrants, their investment capacity is low. For the third generation, typically more skilled and entrepreneurial, they tend to invest in projects outside their country of origin. With the economic crisis, unemployed and indebted migrants in Europe and in the United States have become more vulnerable; they tend to have fewer opportunities to acquire skills, and fewer are able to send remittances. The recession of 2007-09 stopped much of the African and Latino migrations to Europe, particularly to Spain, and even led to return movements. These facts complicate prevailing assumptions in migration and development.

Conclusion

Migration policy is an expression of a country's national interest; it draws on realistic but also symbolic meanings that involve concepts and myths about a nation's history, culture, and religion. Thus, migration policy is not a purely rational enterprise; it can be emotional, subjective, and open to many interpretations and interests. It is usually

⁸ Guilherme Neto, "The Top 15 Poorest Countries in Africa in 2013," *Finance News*, June 26, 2013.

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designed to please public opinion, and remains highly related to security.

Migration is a source of conflict more than of cooperation. In periods of economic crisis and social insecurity, blame for disruptions is often placed primarily on immigrants. Recent examples include South African riots,⁹ Brazilian movements against foreign workers, and Spanish protests against Latin Americans,¹⁰ Moroccans, (El Jido 2000), and sub-Saharan Africans.¹¹

All migrant workers, regardless of legal status, are entitled to the same human rights protections as any other citizen. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990) is the most comprehensive instrument protecting their rights. The convention came into force in 2003, setting out minimum standards that all the governments of states parties are obliged to uphold. Unlike most human rights instruments, however, this one has not been ratified by most developed countries.

When considering migration, we need to look to the future with a different lens. A conceptualization of governance must include the capacity to establish common visions for migration not only between states but also among civil society, the private sector, and the migrants themselves. In addition, it requires mobilizing the political will and lead-

⁹ Christopher Munnion, "South Africa: 30,000 Migrants Flee Violence," *The Telegraph*, May 22, 2008; Munnion, "South Africa Riots: Violence Against Immigrants Spreads to Cape Town," *The Telegraph*, May 23, 2008.

¹⁰ «L'immigration Étrangère en Espagne,» *Migrance 21* :2 (Generiques, 2012).

¹¹ Sandrine Morel, «Contre les migrants, le retour des barbelés tranchants à Melilla,» *Le Monde*, November 28, 2013.

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ership to build a normative framework as well as to apply the international conventions related to the protection of migrants' rights, whether they are legal or irregular. Integrating migrants into the host society is another problem that ought to be taken into consideration by governments and international institutions. The main focus today should be to stimulate deeper public discourse, facilitate the development of relevant benchmarks, and encourage decision makers to tackle migration with the appropriate urgency.

About the Author

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