More development - more migration? The "migration hump" and its significance for development policy co-operation with sub-Saharan Africa

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The "Migration Hump" and Its Significance for Development Policy Co-operation with Sub-Saharan Africa

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German and European efforts to reduce irregular migration, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, place a great emphasis on development co-operation. The aim is for this to eliminate as many causes of such migration as possible. This raises questions concerning the interrelation of development and migration. In the academic debate, it is well established that socio-economic development promotes migration rather than reducing it. But this causal relationship is not as clear-cut as the corresponding "migration hump" model suggests. It is evident that migration decisions are also influenced by further factors. It is therefore problematic when policy makers use this apparent evidence to assume stopping development aid will stop migration. The context of migration and development needs to be analysed with an eye towards managing multiple drivers of migration. Donor countries should also utilize development policy approaches that lead to co-operation with African partner states.

Many view development co-operation as a key to reducing irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa. However, critics note that increased socio-economic development is likely to lead to more, rather than less, migration. Historical and cross-country comparison studies have shown that emigration initially increases when economic growth and rising in-come levels enable countries to emerge from the status of a low-income country. Only when the status of upper middle-income country has been achieved can a decrease in inter-national migration be anticipated. Known as a "migration hump", this correlation between development and migration also applies for sub-Saharan Africa. However, it cannot be explained solely by rising incomes and increased education. It is also driven by other factors, including demographic transition, changes in economic structures, emulation effects in migration processes, rising inequality, credit restrictions and the lowering of migration barriers.

The implication that positive socio-economic development in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa would inexorably lead to an increase in irregular migration to Europe is therefore an oversimplification. Irregular migration in particular is not driven by economic motives alone. Instead this is an example of so-called "mixed migration", in

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which the drivers of voluntary and forced migration blend together. Factors such as corruption, weak rule of law, human rights infringements and fragile statehood are key drivers here.

What is the "migration hump"?

The term "migration hump" was coined in the 1990s. It is based on the observation that growing per capita income in developing countries is typically accompanied by higher rates of emigration. The explanation is that increasing per capita income is often related to improved levels of education and training, but that those benefiting from this find only limited opportunities for appropriate employment in their local labour markets. Rising demands and expectations subsequently make migration a more attractive proposition. In addition, a higher income level makes migration easier, as a degree of capital is required. This interrelation is strengthened by the fact that emigration supports the development of the country of origin. Remittances of migrants, which the World Bank now estimates to be three times the size of all public development aid, not only promote investment and consumption in the countries of origin, but also spending on education and health. Development and migration therefore support one another mutually. Emigration rates only fall again after a specific level of socio-economic development has been reached. The graphic illustration of the migration rate dependent on the socio-economic development of a country takes the form of an upside-down U, resulting in the term 'migration hump'.

The emigration rate only subsequently declines when the countries concerned enter the area of "upper middle-income countries", as defined by the World Bank classification. These are currently countries whose per capita gross national product stood at between 3,956 and 12,235 US dollars in 2016.

It can take a very long time for a country to grow economically into an upper-middle or upper income bracket. In countries with very low incomes, such as Niger or Chad, this may take well over one hundred years, so these countries should expect to see emigration rates increase for decades until incomes rise significantly.

Only a question of income?

However, the correlation between income level and likelihood of migration investigated in this model is too one-sided and undifferentiated. Studies of the US Center for Global Development (CGD) in particular have shown that the picture is more complex and that migration decisions are influenced by additional factors.

- **Demographic transition.** In developing countries with strong economic growth, high birth rates and a fall in child mortality often results in significant growth in population. The result is a surplus of young people, which may be accompanied by growing youth unemployment. This may increase the likelihood of emigration, as younger people are more likely than older people to emigrate.
- **Structural transition.** Economic transformation also changes the relative significance of individual economic sectors, particularly the agricultural sector, as well as ways of living and working. The pressure to adapt may result in internal migration or emigration.
- **Inequality.** Economic growth and rising incomes are often accompanied by inequality and relative deprivation, i.e. the experience of falling behind socially and economically in comparison to others and with regard to one's own expectations. This may raise the likelihood of emigration.
- **Emulation effects.** The larger the size of a diaspora, the group of immigrants originating from a specific country of origin, the easier it is for potential migrants to find out about the employment and housing situation in the destination country. This can facilitate further migration.
- **Credit restrictions.** Access to credit or financial markets in general remains diffi-

cult in many developing countries, even where incomes are increasing. In growth phases in particular, migration may therefore be a practical strategy for receiving investment capital.

- **Migration obstacles.** The formal and informal immigration barriers in richer states, such as visa and immigration regulations or the recognition of educational qualifications, are usually higher for people from the poorest countries compared to people from those from middle or high-income countries. When countries advance economically the immigration obstacles become lower and migration increases.

Complex migration factors

It is apparent that individual factors cannot explain the migration hump on their own. They need to be regarded as being interrelated, as the decisions for migration are highly complex. These decisions are often influenced by other actors such as families or networks, as well as the respective economic, political, demographic and cultural framework conditions. The desire to leave the country of origin is not in itself sufficient to actually undertake the migration. The legal and practical opportunities for reaching the destination country are equally important. This is why the migration hump is different from country to country. The effect of individual factors on emigration decisions is often very idiosyncratic.

It is therefore also too simplistic to state, as is often the case, that more growth and higher incomes, for example in countries south of the Sahara, would encourage more people to head for Europe through irregular channels. Proponents of this assumption fail to recognise the complexity of the motives for irregular migration from Africa to Europe.

In fact, the migration is often a mixed affair, in which migration and flight motives are combined. For example, prior to the fall of the Gaddafi regime people came to Libya as regular working migrants, but subsequently lost their jobs due to the civil war. Many of them view the hazardous journey to Europe as the last escape route from their predicament. Conversely, other migrants from sub-Saharan Africa left their homelands not only in search of higher incomes, but also due to deteriorating living conditions that accompany weak state institutions, corruption, and weak rule of law. There is no doubting that repressive regimes, human rights breaches and state fragility weigh heavily on the decision to leave one's home countrie.

However, development policy can exert an influence here, as it aims to influence political, social, ecological or economic conditions. With instruments such as the promotion of democracy and good governance it can help to ease repression and enhance rule of law. It could therefore succeed in reducing the level of enforced and "mixed" migration. Following this logic, reducing development co-operation in order to prevent irregular migration could only succeed in achieving the opposite.

Conclusion: Migration shaping instead of migration prevention

Development policy co-operation cannot and should not prevent migration. The migration hump shows that migration and development do not mutually exclude one another, but strengthen one another. Therefore, it cannot be the objective of development co-operation to reduce migration as a whole. Instead, it should strive to prevent forced, unsafe and irregular migration as far as possible, and to promote voluntary, safe and legal forms of migration.

In the New York Declaration of 2016 the member states of the United Nations declared that regulated migration was a key driver for development. In addition, in goal 10.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) they committed themselves to "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies". These resolutions will also be included in the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), due to be passed in 2018.

To control migration meaningfully, paying particular attention to the African states, the following approaches are recommended:

- **Migration programmes influenced by development policy.** In the medium to long term, EU member states will need to offer more programmes for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa if they wish to sustainably reduce unregulated migration. The focus here should be on low-skilled employment. Demand in many member states is high, but has so far often been met through the irregular employment of natives and migrants. There is considerable room for improvement here. A joint programme of the EU, which would cover at least part of the European requirement for seasonal workers, could encourage transit and origin countries to co-operate more in tackling the problem.

The opportunities for qualified migrants have also not yet been exhausted. If European employers show sufficient interest in such skilled workers, programmes could be supported by funding from development co-operation. With the aid of language assistance, qualification and the involvement of diaspora organisations an attempt should be made to open up opportunities for migrants in the labour markets of the EU.

- **Support for intraregional migration.** A large portion of the migratory movement of Africans takes place within the African continent. Here too, safe and regulated migration can support development outcomes. However, this requires protection of the rights of migrants, the facilitation of migration processes and the intensification of interaction between migrants and their countries of origin. The efforts of African regional organisations to stimulate and guide intraregional migration are worthy of support. In addition, intra-African programmes should also be given development policy support, for example the Joint Labour Migration Program for Africa, which was established by bodies including the African Union and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Moreover, the development co-operation of the partner countries should be assisted in the establishment of migration policy capacities.

- **Prevention of brain drain.** The emigration of urgently-needed specialists constitutes a development risk for many countries of origin. In essential economic branches such as the health sector, development co-operation can improve working conditions with targeted investment, thereby counteracting emigration. New approaches are also called for here. These include transnational training partnerships, which simultaneously train skilled workers for demand in the countries of origin and the industrialised states.

- **Promotion of good governance, democracy and rule of law.** Development co-operation can help to create stable political conditions, particularly by promoting democracy and good governance. In this way it can help prevent states from triggering migration through breaches of human rights, weak rule of law or violence. This commitment remains one of the central tasks of development co-operation. It can thereby make a decisive contribution to replacing irregular migration with regulated, development-promoting migration.

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