



## **Migration and social policy in sub-Saharan Africa**

**Aderanti Adepaju**

**February 2008**

prepared for the UNRISD – IOM – IFS project on  
Social Policy and Migration in Developing Countries

**DRAFT WORKING DOCUMENT**

**Do not cite without the author's approval**



The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency engaging in multidisciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

Research programmes include: Civil Society and Social Movements; Democracy, Governance and Well-Being; Gender and Development; Identities, Conflict and Cohesion; Markets, Business and Regulation; and Social Policy and Development.

A list of the Institute's free and priced publications can be obtained by contacting the Reference Centre.

UNRISD, Palais des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: (41 22) 9173020  
Fax: (41 22) 9170650  
E-mail: [info@unrisd.org](mailto:info@unrisd.org)  
Web: <http://www.unrisd.org>

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).

This is not a formal UNRISD publication. The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed studies rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the UNRISD Web site (<http://www.unrisd.org>) does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them. No publication or distribution of these papers is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

## **Abstract**

Internal, intra-regional and international migration in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) takes place within diverse socio-ethnic, political and economic contexts. Emigration pressure is fuelled by unstable politics, ethno-religious, conflicts, poverty and rapidly growing populations. Distinctive forms of migration characterise the different sub-regions, but unlike in other world regions, these migrations are largely intra-regional. These complex configurations are changing dynamically and are reflected in increasing female migration, diversification of migration destinations, transformation of labour flows into commercial migration, and emigration of skilled health and other professionals from the region. The formation of sub-regional economic unions to some extent simulated the kind of homogeneous societies which once existed in the sub-regions. In all cases, economic unions are often dominated by the economies of a single country to which movements of persons have been directed. Many countries are concurrently experiencing challenges and opportunities with respect to the emigration of skilled professionals, the diaspora's links with country-of-origin, and migrants' remittances from within and outside the region. At present most countries lack synchronised migration policies and programmes, as well as appropriate data bases to inform such policies.

In spite of its rich and diversified resources, SSA is the world's poorest major region, and most of the component countries are ranked low in terms of human development indicators. Illiteracy remains high and health conditions continue to deteriorate. There are as yet no encouraging signs of improvements in social conditions as many countries have failed to create jobs, despite pursuing stringent structural adjustment policies. In reality, the already poor social conditions of individuals and families are rendered poorer by stabilization and adjustment measures, and families have borne the brunt of government reductions in spending in the social sectors. Access to education, health and other social services has been curtailed, thus reducing the overall welfare of the population – particularly the poorer ones.

Africa's social policy framework is weaved around the key areas of employment, education and health, and the performance of social policies is therefore measured by the level of human and social development, which is in turn determined by the income, education and life expectancy of the population. In the area of health, migrants' vulnerable conditions and restricted access to health services make them especially susceptible to health risks. Immigrants usually experience greater difficulties than other groups in accessing social services and hence in exercising their rights, as a result of cultural problems and discriminatory policies and practices in host countries. Migrants and refugees who are not considered citizens with full rights may be denied access; they are often scapegoats, face xenophobic reactions by the local population and may be expelled when economic and political conditions deteriorate. The situation of women can be precarious, and that of migrant women more traumatic, being excluded from access to credit and land. Women suffer discrimination at various levels - from birth, at home, in the school, at the workplace and in the society - and their access to employment is severely restricted: they experience discrimination in securing employment and equal pay with men for the same qualification and job profile.

These myriad of problems - the worsening of the health condition of the population, poverty, unemployment and socio-economic insecurity and inequalities that aggravated and widened the rural/urban disparity, a deficit of decent work, poor quality of social services, lack of popular participation and endemic corruption – are further complicated by unreliable data to track trends

in social indicators. Yet more and more people will be living in cities and would require basic amenities in housing, clean water, and health care. These and traditional cultural attitudes towards women's participation in wage employment and politics must therefore be resolved in order to enhance social policy formulation and implementation in the region. Above all, the interrelations between migration and social policy must be explicitly appreciated and social policies appropriately incorporated into national development and migration policy framework. These are challenges that officials have to grapple with to advance the region's sustainable development.

## **Introduction**

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a region, historically, of intensive migration prompted by demographic, economic, ecological, political and related factors; these have acted in combination to produce the variety of migration configurations: labour migrants, nomads, clandestine migrants, migration of skilled professionals, refugees and internally displaced persons. The component sub-regions are characterised by distinctive forms of international migration: labour emigration from western and central Africa; refugee flows within eastern Africa; labour migration from southern African countries to the Republic of South Africa (RSA); and clandestine migration in western and eastern Africa. In all cases, clandestine movements across long, porous frontiers by ethnic groups and pastoral peoples, and undocumented migrations, are perhaps the most common configuration.

What sets SSA apart from other regions, however, is that migration is essentially intra-continental. However, deteriorating socio-economic, political, and ecological conditions across the region have produced changes in the direction, pattern, composition, and dynamics of migration. The focus of this paper is on these intra-regional migrations, its root causes, and its implications for social policy and social service provisioning in the region.

### **The context and dynamics of international migration in sub-Saharan Africa.**

Spiralling population growth, which places tremendous strains on the development process, lies at the root of much international migration in the region. It not only creates the condition for migration through its linkages with labour force growth and unemployment but has combined with unstable politics, persistent economic decline, poverty, and environmental deterioration to shape trends and patterns of international migration. The contractionary fiscal and monetary policies have resulted in retrenchment of workers in the public service, the major employment sector while the limited capacity of the labour market to absorb productively the annual cohorts of job seekers turns them into potential emigrants.

The region's populations are strikingly young, thus making it extremely difficult for governments to create jobs fast enough to meet the needs of such a burgeoning youth population - the millions of additional people who join the labour force each year, adding to the large pool of unemployed and underemployed workers. Deepening unemployment in urban areas reflects the incapacity of the urban sector to act as a sponge for the rapidly growing workforce. Over the past decade, the region has experienced steady economic deterioration exacerbated by the imposition of stern adjustment measures, yielding a situation of daunting proportions.

Temporary, cross-border migration has been facilitated by regional variations in the seasonality of agricultural production. Small, unproductive landholdings have also compelled farmers in rural areas to seek waged labour or non-farm activities in the towns, and across borders.

Broader international trends also affect the region — globalization, regional integration and the entry of multinational corporations in search of cheap labour. Other forms of international migration have also increased—namely the circulation of low-wage labour, the permanent exit of skilled workers, and the clandestine migration of undocumented workers at all skill levels. Refugee flows are also largely confined to the region,

Today, SSA encompasses countries of immigration and emigration as well as those that combine both; some serve as transit routes for migrants. Countries that were once migrant-receiving have metamorphosed into migrant-sending countries. Since the late 1980s, traditional labour-importing countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Zambia) and attractive destinations for migrants (Nigeria, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and Zimbabwe) have experienced endemic

political and economic crises, which also spur out-migration of their nationals. It is precisely for this reason that countries are no longer classifiable as sending and receiving countries. Yet, the main traditional countries of immigration are Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in West Africa, Kenya in East Africa, Gabon in Central Africa and South Africa in Southern Africa. Nigeria, the region's demographic giant, assumed both situations between 1975 and 1990, fuelling a large-scale emigration of workers, both skilled and unskilled, to the Gulf and the Maghreb states. Côte d'Ivoire today is a country divided, again spurring the emigration of both non-nationals and indigenes. Zimbabwe's economy is all but collapsed turning millions into emigrants (Adepoju, 2005b).

### **Economic restructuring and deteriorating social conditions**

In a vicious cycle, poor education, poor health, and malnutrition forestalled economic growth to perpetuate poverty in the region. Decades of economic crisis have translated into today's deteriorating health and education structures. In spite of its rich and diversified resources, SSA is the world's poorest major region, and most of the component countries are ranked low in terms of human development indicators. Illiteracy remains high and health conditions continue to deteriorate. Owing to the failure of development planning to improve living conditions, the 1980s came to be known as the lost decade and the 1990s fared even worse, with absolute declines in many leading indicators. There are as yet no encouraging signs of improvements in social conditions as many countries have failed to create jobs. Instead, between 1994 and 2004, for instance, the number of workers living on less than a dollar a day increased by 28 million (ILO, 2007).

Adhering to the World Bank/IMF dictates, governments have been forced to reduce the size of the public sector, in many countries the leading source of jobs, and the private sector has generally followed suit to drive up rates of unemployment for both family heads and young people. The costs of structural adjustment have reduced access to education, health, food, and social services by removing subsidies, thus reducing the overall welfare of families, particularly the poor (Adepoju 1996). Cost-recovery strategies - a burden that is heaviest for the poor, the region's majority - call for families to pay the full cost of health and education at a time when family heads are increasingly jobless. Parents, unable to pay school fees, grudgingly withdraw their children from school. The cumulative result is that the average African today is probably less well educated, less well fed, less well employed, and less well paid than in the immediate aftermath of independence (Adepoju, 2005a). The dismal economic forecasts for the foreseeable future combine to stimulate emigration of especially young persons.

In reality, the already poor social conditions of individuals and families are rendered poorer by stabilization and adjustment measures, and families have borne the brunt of government reductions in spending in the social sectors. Access to education, health and other social services has been curtailed, thus reducing the overall welfare of the population – particularly the poorer ones. In the course of implementing SAPs, annual attendances dropped dramatically in most hospitals in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia and a host of other countries as a result of, in part, the cost recovery programmes. Poor patients, unable to pay stipulated fees in hospitals have resorted to other, less efficient forms of traditional health care. As subsidies were withdrawn from staple food (maize in Zambia and Zimbabwe, rice in Liberia and wheat in Senegal) and social services (health, education and public transportation in particular), workers are hard pressed to meet daily family obligations. It is now a common sight in some capital cities for hundreds of workers trekking on foot, morning and evening, to their offices, or to discover people, children included, making do with only one meal a day.

Pervasive poverty is therefore at the root of many problems confronting families today and is generally concentrated among people with low education, unstable employment or unemployment, low income, poor housing condition and large families. The incidence, depth and severity of poverty have tasked to the limit the ability of families to serve as safety net (Adepoju, 2005a). As poverty deepens and becomes more widespread, women are constantly under pressure, seriously compromising their ability to perform their traditional family welfare, health care and nurturing roles. A large proportion of poor women are increasingly being pushed into the labour force on very disadvantageous terms, due to the lowering of household incomes as real wages fall. Belt-tightening fiscal policies to boost the deteriorating economic conditions forced women to share the preserved role of the provider with men, or assume that responsibility entirely. Over time, this situation is almost becoming the norm rather than a reversal of traditionally assigned roles.

External debt is another major constraint to social and economic development efforts in the region with highest debt burden of any world region and average per capita spending for debt service higher than that on education and health. With nearly two-thirds of its export earnings devoted to debt service, the region's capacity to mobilize resources for socioeconomic development and employment generation is severely constrained. Concurrently, the economies have also been disrupted by prolonged civil war, political violence, economic mismanagement and widespread corruption. The resulting loss of state capacity that scares away investors and stifles development forced many to leave in search of a safer haven (Adekanye, 1998).

State collapse in several countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and devastation by war of basic elements of infrastructure (schools, hospitals, homes) scattered family members far and wide, causing an entire generation to grow up without basic necessities. In these countries, children grow up recognising the sound of guns than the alphabets of textbooks.

The stagnant rural economy also underlies much of the region's high rate of emigration. Unable to satisfy their needs and aspirations within the local opportunity structure, migrants quite literally move in search of something better. Migration, whether rural-urban, intra-regional or inter-continental, always responds to the pull of opportunity and the push of abject poverty. Work opportunities, inadequate in both urban and rural areas, are fairly superior in terms of educational facilities which might benefit the migrants' children, who constitute the bulk of potential emigrants. This in part explains why migration persists in the region in the face of worsening urban unemployment.

#### **Deteriorating socio-economic conditions: emigration as family survival strategy**

SSA is a region worst affected by poverty. Wars, civil and political destabilisation severely erode the developmental progress of the post-independence decades. In spite of the crises, the family remains the primary socialising agent of the society; apart from its basic functions of biological reproduction and intergenerational solidarity, families are the main mechanism for social control and focus of most activities that permeate all aspects of African life, including migration.

Families in SSA have used selective migration and differential investment in education for its various members commonly as a strategy to ensure the survival of its members or to pursue economic mobility to supplement dwindling household resources. In doing so, households generally select and invest in a family member who is viewed to have the greatest potential for generating migrant earnings and sending remittances. Propelled by the economic crisis, migration has become central as a coping mechanism to secure family survival. Decisions about who should migrate, where, and for how long are sanctioned, if not completely controlled, by the family so as

to promote inter-generational flows of resources (Adepoju, 2005a). For many families, remittances are a lifeline and the dominant source of income to pay for rent, home construction, medical expenses, school fees, business investment, and a variety of other activities. In some resource-poor African countries, the importance of remittances, especially those in hard foreign currencies, are given considerable attention by governments, which work actively to encourage labour migration.

In the context of structural adjustment, African families, acting as the safe haven of last resort, have had to provide social security for, and sustain its retrenched members. Official social safety nets to ameliorate some of the negative impact of the restructuring programmes are little more than a palliative, essentially of a short-term nature and do not cover more than a small fraction of these workers affected. Dual-residence strategies enable families to function as an extended structure in the face of migration-induced separation. The expectation is that migrants will maintain close touch with family members left behind through visitations and especially remittances. Another family survival strategy involves selective migration for education. A family adopting this strategy sponsors one or more members as migrants to gain education in the city, invest in the person's education expecting to reap rewards when he/she obtains a job in the formal sector of the urban economy (Oucho, 1990). The city-based family member typically feels compelled to remit regularly a substantial proportion of his or her earned income to support family members left behind at home.

#### **Widening destination for South-South migration**

Ratha and Shaw (2007) estimated that, globally, South-South migration accounts for 47 per cent of all migration from the South, a figure that is close to other estimates of about 50 per cent by the United Nations Population Division and the World Bank. If irregular migration is included, these estimates would be much higher. The estimate of 69 per cent of South-South migration for SSA is the highest of all major world regions. Such migration is also mostly intra-regional and the share of migration to other developing regions – Latin America and Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia) is negligible. Indeed, less than 1.5 percent of sub-Saharan Africans living outside their country live in countries of European Union (OECD, 2007). The proportion becomes even more insignificant if we include in the denominator the millions of refugees who have relocated to nations bordering zones of crisis and conflict.

*Intra-regional migration within SSA has become more varied and spontaneous.* Many who migrate no longer adhere to classic geographic patterns, but explore a much wider set of destinations than those where traditional seasonal work can be found. This diversification is evident in rising levels of both temporary and long-term circulation especially among Sahelian international migrants (Findley, 1997). Indeed, a large proportion of Sahelian migrants can be

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/reportId=5\\_21189](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/reportId=5_21189)

