

### THE MEDITERRANEAN MIGRANT CRISIS: ROOT CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

*From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation*



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#### SYNOPSIS

Recently, tens of thousands of Africans have lost their lives to migration, trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. Six of the ten most contributing countries to migrants into the European Union (EU) in 2014 were from Africa, with at least 96,623 migrants. Globally, more than 500,000 people reached the EU by end of September 2015, with many originating from Africa. Overall, the Mediterranean Sea Migrant Crisis claimed the lives of 5,820 people between 2014 and 2015. From 2000 to 2014, at least 22,000 migrants died fleeing their countries for various destinations for better livelihoods across the globe. The far-reaching negative implication of this crisis for Africa has moved the Africa Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP/MfDR) to organize an online discussion among its members with the objective of generating knowledge that will stimulate positive actions to tackle the problem. The following are key messages from the discussion: The migrants in the current crisis are mostly refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia, fleeing wars fought in these countries. Other refugee-originating countries, where wars are fought in some regions are Nigeria, relating to Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east; and Pakistan, relating to the war in the north-west. Key root causes of outmigration are : 1) poverty and unemployment; 2) repressive, persecuting and unaccountable political regimes, 3) perpetrating human rights abuses; and 4) lack of political will to overcome migration problems. The implications to Africa include short-term effects like community instability; disruption of local enterprises; sudden loss of critical skills; possible outflows of capital; and poor international image. Long-term effects include possible permanent brain drain; further entrenching of repressive or ailing regimes; lack of confidence and or undermining of national will to address internal challenges; reduced prospects for attracting foreign investments and even tourism. The discussion noted some efforts by African institutions to stem the illegal migration such as the March 2015 Kigali's Roundtable on intra-regional migration and labor mobility within Africa. It was concluded that, the recent Mediterranean Sea migration is caused by many dimensions and it has negative implications to Africa's growth. It hence recommended an increased political will among African leaders and organisations for fighting illiteracy and reducing poverty and unemployment especially for youth. The AfCoP members calls upon African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and partners to forge cooperation and networks with existing actors; initiate joint ventures; encourage debate on the concept of the African Citizen and Sustainable Development; and heighten the results advocacy in the areas of effective leadership, accountability and partnership. Private sector participation is critical to the creation of jobs and wealth especially for youth, and must be encouraged. Organizations like ACBF should increase support and capacity building to African states and actors in developing specific programs to strengthen youth capacities in having access to decent jobs and also developing self-employment.

## Introduction

The Mediterranean Sea is turning into a curse to the world in light of the ongoing migrant crisis in which thousands of lives have been lost trying to cross into Western Europe to seek asylum and better economic opportunities. This is becoming especially worrying for Africa whose citizens constitute a large proportion of migrants losing lives in this venture. The dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought enormous hopes for a turnaround in the lives and welfare of least developed nations embroiled in endemic poverty. Hopes that were reflected in a plethora of global development initiatives aimed at this direction. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were in force since 2000, also flanked by a range of developing financing and aid effectiveness packs committing rich and poor countries to ending global poverty by 2015. Yet, over 22,000 migrants died between 2000 and 2014 trying to flee poverty- and conflict-ridden developing nations for peace and prosperity in developed nations, especially Western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea has been a major source of deaths of migrants in the recent years. That route has claimed the lives of a total of 2,748 migrants in 2015 so far, while accounting for up to 3,072 deaths or disappearance of the same asylum seekers in 2014, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).<sup>2</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, “a boat carrying migrants from Libya to Italy sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa,” sailing from Misrata, Libya, with a good proportion of the migrants originating from Ghana, Eritrea, and Somalia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_migrant\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis) (visited 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_migrant\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis) (visited 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Pianigiani, Gaia (3 October 2013). Scores of Migrants Dead After Boat Sinks Off Sicil. *The New York Times (Siracusa)*. Retrieved 3 October 2013: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013\\_Lampedusa\\_migrant\\_shipwreck#cite\\_ref-gp13\\_2-0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2013_Lampedusa_migrant_shipwreck#cite_ref-gp13_2-0) (visited 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

In 2014 alone, the European Union received 220,194 illegal migrants, streaming through the Central, Eastern and Western Mediterranean, constituting an increase of 266 percent compared to 2013. Coupled with those treading through Western Balkan routes,<sup>4</sup> the number reaching the European Union was brought up to 283,532 in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Six of the ten most contributing countries to the flood of migrants into EU through land and seas in 2014 were from Africa: Eritrea (34,586); Somalia (7,676); Mali (10,575); the Gambia (8,730); Nigeria (8,715); and unspecified sub-Saharan nationals (26,341); bringing Africa’s sub-total to **96,623 (34.1%)** in 2014.

Against this background, AfCoP decided to launch an online discussion on the aforementioned topic as a means of sharing knowledge and documenting perspectives as to how the continent could effectively and sustainably address African migrant crisis. The discussion specifically focused on answering the following questions:

1. What are the main root causes of this crisis? Why are African young people so desperate to leave their countries and the surge in these migrants in recent times?
2. Africa has historically been experiencing wars, conflicts, abuses, unemployment, and poverty. How could this have informed the present migrant crisis?
3. Could explanations of this crisis be related to local/indigenous African beliefs?
4. What are the short and long term socio-economic implications of this crisis for the African continent?
5. To what extent have African governments and regional bodies responded to such crises? Are there any specific examples of strategies African countries are putting in place to prevent the citizenry, especially the youth, from getting into this crisis?
6. What should be the role/strategies for state and non-state bodies to address the challenge?

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<sup>4</sup> The Balkan States are: Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo; Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia.

<sup>5</sup> See

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_migrant\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis) (visited 5th October 2015).

7. What are the capacity imperatives required to address this challenge sustainably on the continent?

### The Migrants in the Current Crisis and their Motivation

The migrants in the current crisis in Europe are documented to be mostly refugees from Syria; Afghanistan; Iraq; Eritrea; Sudan; and Somalia, fleeing wars fought in these countries. Other refugee-originating countries, where wars are fought in some regions are Nigeria, relating to Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east; and Pakistan, relating to the war in the north-west.

There are generally two types of migrants: refugee vs. economic migrants.: According to the 1951 Refugee Convention Article 1, amended in the 1967 Protocol, a **refugee** is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. Such persons are called "asylum seekers" until considered with the status of "refugee" by the Contracting State(s). **Economic migrants** are said to be those fleeing poverty and unemployment, many of whom hope "for a better lifestyle and job offers, without valid claims to refugee status." African countries reported in the current crisis falling under this are the Gambia and Nigeria, in West Africa; in addition to Kosovo and Albania, in Western Balkans; and Bangladesh and Pakistan, in South Asia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_migrant\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis) (visited 5th October 2015).

### Causes of African Outmigration

Major broad issues stood out of the online discussion as root causes of outmigration: 1)poverty and unemployment; 2) repressive, persecuting and unaccountable political regimes, 3)perpetrating human rights abuses; and 4) lack of political will to overcome migration problems.

In *Bangura (2015, p.14)*, entrenched poverty as a push factor for migration is emphasized: That, about 50 percent of the sub-Saharan African (SSA) population is still poor at a daily expenditure benchmark of US\$1.25, which will amount to 70



Migrants near the Hungarian–Serbian border, 24 August 2015: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_migrant\\_crisis#cite\\_ref-auto1\\_46-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis#cite_ref-auto1_46-1). (Visited 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

percent if a benchmark of US\$2 per day were used; and 36 out of the 50 poorest countries in the world are located in this region.<sup>7</sup> The rural areas hold most of the impoverished: ironically, despite global, regional and national development policies witnessed in the 21st century, SSA's rural poverty had grown from 268 to 306 million people during 2000-2010.

Youth unemployment in the region was estimated in 2013 by the *Peace Child International* at 22.8 percent, ranging from 2.2 percent in Madagascar to 42 percent in Tanzania.<sup>8</sup> This could be worst in wartimes and postwar periods. In post-conflict

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<sup>7</sup> Bangura (2015, p.14).

<sup>8</sup> See also Peace Child International Report (2013) on "Youth Unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa": <http://peacechild.org/youth-unemployment-in-sub-saharan-africa/> (visited 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Sierra Leone, youth unemployment was estimated at 70 percent in 2009.<sup>9</sup>

Another online discussants, dubbed the loss of Africans overseas the “crisis of losing some generation somewhere”. This was re-echoed by many discussants, that societies and states that fail to provide youngsters with appreciable range of socioeconomic options would certainly lose vital generations to other states through migration.

Commenting on *local and indigenous African beliefs*, it was argued that, these beliefs did not come out as triggering or accommodating factors of migration. If anything, it should be a cushion of the tendencies of migration given the high value Africans attach to their traditions. If anything, it could have only been “impressionistic” or loose. He recognizes the “immensely diverse cultures, traditions and belief systems, among other differentiations,” as treasures found in Africa, which no African would just easily let go.

### Socioeconomic consequences of migration

The leading discussants on this argued that, African leaders are in the habit of sending their children abroad for schooling and this is believed to be inimical to sustainable development of the continent. Besides constituting lost generations overtime, it would imply less moral and operational investment in African educational institutions. Those who attempt to come back to succeed their parents in leadership would only do so with alien governance style, most of which may not be compatible with African realities. The same is true for healthcare, with the increased propensity of leaders to fly abroad for medical treatment. It would imply less commitment to investing in domestic healthcare system. These widely celebrated habits of leaders cherishing foreign values and facilities at the expense of investing in their constitutionally trusted responsibilities has left many Africans, especially the youth losing hopes in their countries. The resultant effect is for everyone else, like the leaders, to explore routes to Europe or

elsewhere abroad, even if it meant dying across the Mediterranean. Most of the discussants agreed to the following as short and long term effects of migration on the continent.

- short-term:—will lead to community instability and moral panic; disruption of local enterprises; sudden loss of critical skills; possible outflows of capital; poor international image; even genuine emigrants and others travelling for valid reasons may become suspects.
- Long-term:—possible permanent/irreversible brain drain; further entrenching of repressive or ailing regimes; lack of confidence/undermining of national will to address internal challenges; reduced prospects for attracting foreign investments and even tourism.

### What the African leadership and organisations have done to stem illegal migration?

The main source of information presented here comes from the general literature on African development, while most discussants, held the view that an effective response to the migrant crisis involving African populations out of the continent should be to improve the socio economic and political situation in each of the African countries, and to foster free movement of Africans for better employment opportunities within than outside the region.

As noted in the general literature, African leadership is not short in supply of the requisite frameworks and institutional arrangement towards improved livelihoods. For example, all African countries endorsed the United Nation Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs) at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century aiming at reducing poverty and improving the social and environmental conditions of the continent. About 33 of them had benefited from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative framed around the development and implementation of the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP) to ensure focused assistance from the international community on increasing employment and reducing poverty. Africa increased

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<sup>9</sup> See a Government of Sierra Leone’s Second Generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Document (2009, p.98).

its economic integration and cooperation at regional and sub-regional level, with the Africa Union playing a pivotal role in providing overall socioeconomic and political direction.

Various migration related initiatives have been undertaken, aimed at simplifying and ensuring free movement of people and labor across the continent. One of the latest initiatives is the Roundtable on intra-regional migration and labor mobility within Africa, kicked off in Kigali, March 2015 on the theme “Enhancing capacities of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member States to facilitate Intra-Regional Migration and Labor Mobility for Regional Integration and Economic Cooperation”.<sup>10</sup> The African Union has within its architecture a Directorate for Trade and Industry responsible for coordinating the implementation of trade and private sector initiatives in the region, and has particularly been calling for the ratification, by Member States, the 1991 Abuja Treaty of an African Economic Community with free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. Other initiatives on Migration and Labor Mobility include the Migration Policy Framework for Africa; Minimum Integration Program; Action Plan for Boosting intra African Trade; and Continental Free Trade Area; all aimed at revitalizing Labor mobility. Experiences of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), with an ECOWAS passport used by all citizens within the sub-region, and the East African Community “testify that free movement of persons and goods has positive effects on economic development” (see African Union Roundtable on Intra-Regional Migration and Labor Mobility within Africa, Rwanda, 2015).<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the situation continues to worsen; Africans are among migrants dying across the Mediterranean Sea and mistreated ashore their planned

destinations. A key challenge to the regional leadership is the organized crime of human trafficking bent on making money at all cost—but it should be noted that these crime bodies thrive in societies with bad governance and extreme poverty.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The recent Mediterranean Sea migration crisis is caused by many dimensions, but principally causes are the weak political governance and bureaucratic systems leading to poor service delivery, and hence entrenched poverty, civil strife, wars, and forced migration. To sustainably address these issues, the following are recommendations:

*Political will among African leaders and organisations:*—many instruments are in place for reducing unemployment and poverty reduction and migration out of Africa. What is needed is the will to put them into action.

*Fighting illiteracy:*—the phenomenally high rate of illiteracy in many Africa countries is a leading driver of underdevelopment of the continent; thus prioritizing literacy in the national and regional plans is critical to achieving sustainable development in the region.

*Private sector and enterprise development:*—Private sector participation is critical to the creation of jobs and wealth especially for youth, and must be encouraged. Organizations like The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) should increase support and capacity building to African states and actors in developing specific programs to strengthen youth capacities in having access to decent jobs and also developing self-employment.

*Regional Citizenship:*—the level of xenophobia experienced within Africa over the last couple of years does not help the aspiration of combating outmigration from Africa and preventing dangerous migrant crossings into Europe. The concept of regional and African Citizenship must be propagated at regional, national and local level with accompanied conceptualizations of the socioeconomic benefit this will have for the entire continent. The appropriate capacities and skills

<sup>10</sup> See <http://sa.au.int/en/content/roundtable-intra-regional-migration-and-labour-mobility-within-africa-serena-hotel-kigali-rw> (visited 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

<sup>11</sup> <http://sa.au.int/en/content/roundtable-intra-regional-migration-and-labour-mobility-within-africa-serena-hotel-kigali-rw> (visited 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015).



should be enforced at the regional levels to operationalize this concept.

*Strengthen local communities, civil society and the media:*—Local communities must be empowered and supported. As one discussant noted, “communities have a moral force, embodying strong traditions and values, instrumental in keeping the social fabric together, to better withstand the strains of conflict and extreme events.” Civil society organizations and the media have always had a key role to play in enforcing public accountability for results; thus, their role should be strengthened.

*The African Community of Practice on Managing for Development results and Partners:*-- They need to forge cooperation and networks with existing actors; initiate joint ventures; encourage debate on the concept of the African Citizen and Sustainable Development; and heighten the results advocacy in the areas of effective leadership and accountability and partnership.

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