

Including the Debate on Migration-Development in the Post-2015 Millennium Development Goals: An Editorial Introduction

by NINNA NYBERG SØRENSEN (Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS)

In September 2000, world leaders came together at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting a series of time-bound targets – with a deadline of 2015 – that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight MDGs to be achieved by 2015 did not include goals and targets related to migration basically, some might argue, because the hype around the migration-development nexus was not yet established in the international policy agenda-setting fora. Since 2003, when the Global Development Finance Annual Report took formal notice of remittances to developing countries, increasing attention to the migration-development link ensued: First in migrant-receiving states such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, and later in the international fora, such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Since then, studies, policy analyses, international forums and recommendations on migration have aimed to work for policy development in practical ways, including efforts to include migration concerns in the post-2015 development agenda.

Interestingly, national development processes existed in some developing countries well before the international community took on the task to “establish the link”. These processes attempted to strengthen the involvement of migrant populations living abroad. In 1994 Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc noted that, in the mid-1980s, the political leadership

of post-colonial states such as Grenada, St. Vincent, Haiti and the Philippines began to engage their migrant-populations living abroad in new de-territorialized processes of nation-state building. They did this by constructing the image of migrants as loyal citizens, encouraging them to maintain multiple ties to their homelands, and expecting assistance in developing local agriculture and industries, either directly or through encouraging their relatives at home (Basch, Glick Schiller and Scanton Blanc 1994). Even when initially deprived citizenship rights in their countries of origin – as was the case for many Central Americans fleeing political persecutions during the 1980s – some migrants found that their home country governments began to fight for their residency rights in the United States in order to secure the continuous flow of remittances. In the case of El Salvador, migrant participation in cross-border community, family and political networks led to formal recognition of political rights as Salvadoran citizens (Mahler 1995; Popkin 2003). In other migrant-sending countries, governments began to take an active role in encouraging and formalizing cross-border action by granting dual citizenship rights and introducing policies to facilitate migrant participation in national development efforts (Smith 1998; Guarnizo 1998; Baker-Cristales 2008).

Linking migration to development is not a new topic for the international community but has, in the words of Hein de Haas, swung back and forth like a pendulum since the post-World War II period: from modernist development optimism to brain-drain pessimism, towards neo-optimistic brain-gain and remittance euphoria, ever

since the dawn of the new millennium (de Haas 2012). Whether viewed positively or negatively, perceived migration pressures challenge social cohesion and, combined with burdened humanitarian and development aid budgets, these tensions may partly explain the post-2000 heightened interest in attempts to formulate migration-development policies (Vammen and Mossin Brønden 2012). To reiterate a few numerical facts: In 2013, one out of every seven people in the world was a migrant, either internally or internationally, voluntarily or involuntarily. It is estimated that 232 million people currently live outside their country of birth, of which 60 percent are to be found in more developed countries and 40 percent in developing countries. Of these, some are persons with legal status in the countries of settlement. Others are in irregular situations and try by various means to regularize their status. Refugees account for a relatively small proportion of global migrants; they are estimated at 15.7 million, comprising about seven percent of all international migrants. Nearly nine out of every ten refugees in the world are to be found in developing regions (OECD-UNDESA 2013).

Remittances have played an important role in establishing migrants as important development agents. Viewed from a purely financial point of view, remittances to developing countries indeed constitute a considerable source of external resource flows. It is estimated that these remittances exceeded \$72 billion U.S. dollars in 2000, reaching \$336 billion in 2008 (declining slightly with the global financial crisis but getting back on track with \$404 billion in 2013). These figures are expected to rise to \$516 billion by 2016. Remittances not only represent a large proportion of financial flows but also are substantially more than global official development assistance, capital market flows and foreign direct investment in many countries (World Bank 2014).

Remittances' potential for development – and their resistance, or even their capacity to be counter-cyclical to economic recession – surely explains why they stand at the centre of the optimistic discussions at international institutions like

the World Bank, the regional development banks, United Nations agencies such as the Development Programme (UNDP) and the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the inter-governmental International Organization of Migration (IOM) (Faist 2008). The financing model underpinning the original MDGs focused largely on domestic resource mobilization and official development assistance (ODA), whereas the relative importance of ODA vis-à-vis remittances has declined (Greenhill and Prizzon 2012), which further illustrates this global situation.

In this special issue, Philip Martin argues that migration has contributed significantly to the achievement of the MDGs in areas such as poverty reduction, increasing education and improving child and maternal health. With reference to the global policy interest in the field, Martin also finds that international interest in migration has been decisive in promoting global partnerships for migration. Based on previous analysis of the “unsettled relationship” between migration and development (Papademetriou and Martin 1991), Philip Martin argues that three major migration-related processes of recruitment, remittances and return can contribute to development in migrant-sending areas. As significant international cooperation already has been put into reducing the transfer costs of sending remittances, the primary aim of the article is to argue that governments can cooperate to reduce the costs of migration by reducing the recruitment costs paid by the migrants themselves. Moving workers across borders may be a \$10 billion global business, which means that substantial sums could be redirected towards development if costs were reduced. A positive side effect of better migrant worker protection may follow from cost-reduction efforts.

From the mid-2000s onwards, international efforts to link migration to development through remittances have increasingly realized the private and family-based nature of individual remittances. These efforts have thus begun to focus on collective remittances transferred by hometown

associations or diaspora groups. Unlike family remittances, collective remittances tend to be targeted towards community-development projects in infrastructure or other communal areas, such as health care and educational provisions. Despite the fact that collective remittances represent a smaller share of the overall remittance flow, they are perceived to have a larger impact on local development, with potentially large multiplier effects on the local economy.

Three case studies focusing on migrants' collective participation in development are brought together in this special issue. The first article by Joan Lacomba and Alexis Cloquell discusses the various claims made by national and international institutions with regard to the role of migrant associations in home-country development. Based on a comprehensive, comparative study of the associations of eight migrant nationalities in Spain – including Algerian, Moroccan, Malian, Senegalese, Colombian, Ecuadorian, Bulgarian and Rumanian associations – the authors note the heterogeneity of migrant associations as well as the fact that not all migrant associations take on a transnational behaviour. Whether they do or not is narrowly related to the migrant groups' incorporation in the country of reception, the level of ethnic solidarity within the national group, the external assistance each group has been able to mobilize from Spanish NGOs and other alliances established with Spanish civil society and development agencies, the vitality of civil society in their country of origin, and the availability of material and human resources within the associations. The study concludes that migrant engagement cannot be a substitute for state or private investments in home-country development. To understand why some migrants engage in associational practices of a transnational character, researchers and policy makers need to be clear on the units of analysis we select. In the country of origin context, attention should be paid to issues such as political situation, social conflictivity, economic stability, and cultural identity. In the country of destination, migrants' labour market incorpora-

tion and economic and social integration plays a major role.

Lothar Smith, Fabio Baggio and Ton Van Naerssen expand the analysis of transnational migration-development initiatives beyond bilateral country of origin / country of reception arrangements. Their article is based on engagement with the multi-stakeholder TRANSCODE programme, aimed at providing a platform for cross-fertilisation of experiences and ideas between migrant organisations of various national and geographic origins as well as other actors such as NGOs in migrant-sending countries, local and national governments, policy makers, practitioners, representatives of the business community, and academics. So far, the programme has built bridges between participants from the Philippines, the Netherlands, Ghana, Italy and Burundi. It has also fostered lessons learned in terms of identification of best practices as well as enhanced engagement and cooperation between transnational community organisations and other actors. The programme also has met, however, a number of persistent obstacles, such as a weak representation of the private sector and the creation of hierarchy as well as competition among actors for funding and along generational lines. A main obstacle is located in the policies and practices of funding development agencies that still seem to think along the lines of nation-states and partner-countries in consideration of the merits of projects and shortlisting.

European development agencies have also pursued migration-development initiatives under the heading of diaspora-cooperation. These initiatives are often directed towards areas that formal development actors find difficult to access due to conflict and other security problems. Based on a larger study of diaspora contributions to development and reconstruction in fragile situations, Nauja Kleist sets out to analyse the understandings of diaspora that underlie development agencies' engagement with diaspora groups. The analysis outlines three dimensions of how diaspora groups are perceived and approached in European develop-

ment cooperation: First, as collective development agents serving as bridgeheads or brokers between the established development industry and local actors; second, as security threats or long-distance nationalists whose distance make them unaccountable or prone to affiliation with the wrong local actors (the fundamentalists, the terrorists); and, finally, as any other civil society actor in development cooperation that just needs to be mainstreamed. Concrete activities funded either by the European Commission or national European donor agencies are found to cluster around three types of support, namely mainstreaming, particular diaspora schemes and network support. Capacity building and matching fund schemes are the two common ways of support. No matter the type and practicalities related to support, the diaspora project landscape is extremely volatile. Donor countries furthermore display a lack of policy coherence between their migration and development policies by not linking projects concerned with development in countries of origin to integration efforts in countries of reception. When selecting projects for funding, donors tend to merge quality with value assessments and select only those diaspora projects that are in line with their own priorities. Selection of partners is thus a very political process.

Following the recruitment-remittances-return logic adopted by various international institutions involved in the migration-development field leads to the assumption that migrants will contribute to development when they return to their country of origin. When returning to post-conflict countries, this contribution is seen to have a peace-building effect. The contribution by Marieke van Houte and Tine Davids addresses the question under which conditions this might be the case. Their analysis focuses on experiences with “Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration” programmes that, at this point, have taken up a substantial part of European migration-development policies and budgets. Within this policy domain, the return migration of refugees, failed asylum seekers and undocu-

mented migrants is considered both as a movement *back to normal* that restores pre-conflict natural and social order and a movement *forward to change* in which returnees contribute to development and peacebuilding. There are several problems involved in this assumption: First, that few assisted returns are, in fact, voluntary. Second, many assumptions pertaining to returnees – that they bring skills, capital, new ideas and access to transnational networks – do not apply to migrants currently returned to countries such as Afghanistan. And third, only those returnees with access to continued mobility (those having obtained citizenship elsewhere) have the necessary room to maneuver and engage in peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict states suspicious to “foreign influence”. There is, in other words, a mismatch between the assumptions on which migration-development policies are based and the fact that most resources are put into assisting involuntary returnees.

Conceptual confusion and a mismatch between enactments in policy and migrant realities inform several debates. The article by Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Ida Marie Vammen sets out to discern the understandings of the family in two (often intermingled) debates concerned with the effects of migration on development: Firstly, the largely state and policy driven discourse on the potential benefits of migration on economic development and, secondly, the largely academic transnational family literature focusing on issues of care and the micro-politics of gender and generation. The authors discern two standard accounts in policy discourses around migrants and their families. The first posits that remittances potentially benefit migrants and their families by lifting individuals and families out of poverty, often leading to increased female participation in employment and, by implication, empowerment of women and changed family relations. At the other end of the spectrum, disconnections are emphasized: Family separation leads to family disruption; has emotional, psychological and social costs; distorts care regimes; and causes a plethora of

social problems ranging from school dropouts and teenage pregnancies, to societal decay and the breakdown of social norms. These accounts rarely specify the family situations that circumscribe migrant families prior to, during and after migration. The academic literature around transnational motherhood, fatherhood, childhood and global care chains suggests a more complicated picture of gains and losses. The authors argue that in understanding whether families fall apart after migration or succeed in transnationalizing their existence, researchers might find a better explanation in global macro-politics than in family micro-dynamics.

The last article in the issue by Thomas Faist takes the issue of the relationship between academic knowledge and policy dynamics a step further by debating the public role of social scientists in the migration-development nexus. Faist advances the proposition that policy and academia indeed have been coupled in migration-development debates, not least through a high degree of commissioned research around issues such as return-to-develop, brain drain, co-development, diaspora entrepreneurs, etcetera, which are all related to particular macro-political changes. He then distinguishes between two types of knowledge: instrumental knowledge oriented toward the means to achieve a goal, and reflexive knowledge geared toward (normatively desirable) ends. Should migration-development research aim at producing expert knowledge to political organizations? Should we take sides and advocate for social justice, equality, or migrants' human rights? Or should we rather pursue the role of the public intellectual who seeks to change the perspective of the debate by supporting the better argument? Since academic knowledge may serve legitimizing, substantiating and symbolic functions for policy and decision-making, these are important questions. They imply that social scientists active in the migration-development field should consider which role we wish to occupy in the post 2015 MDG migration-development debate: as advisors to politicians or as agenda setters in the public debate?

If the latter choice is made, an important task of migration-development academic research is to see through ideological statements made in migration policy. New research should highlight interdependent functions in the construction of the policy field, beginning with pointing out that much policy talk about migration-development is, in reality, serving migration control functions.

The full set of articles included in the issue expands the basis on which to make migration issues an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda succeeding the Millennium Development Goals. The original MDGs briefly mentioned the respect for and protection of migrants' human rights but largely ignored broader migration-development issues, both those concerned with making migration work for development and those understanding migration as an integral part of global development processes. Numerous policy inputs from stakeholders around initiatives such as the Global Commission for Migration and the Global Forum on Migration and Development have sought to promote a more coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues".¹ A UN High Level Dialogue on International Development has debated the multidimensional aspects of international development in order to identify appropriate ways to maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impacts.² Yearly meetings of the Global Forum on Migration and Development have sought to establish "a new global process designed to enhance the positive impact of migration on development (and vice versa) by adopting a more consistent policy approach, identifying new instruments and best practices, exchanging know-how and experience about innovative tactics and methods and, finally, establishing cooperative links between the various actors involved". After the first constitutive meeting in Brussels, discussions have included protection and empowering of migrants for development (Manila 2008), integration of

¹ See www.gcim.org

² See www.un.org/esa/population/migration/hld/index.html

migration policies into development strategies (Athens 2009), migration-development partnerships (Mexico 2010), issues of coherence, capacity and cooperation (Switzerland 2011), migration and human development aspects (Mauritius 2012), and establishing partnerships on international migration (Sweden 2013). The results of several years of intense debate have led to achievements on the remittance front, first and foremost lower transfer fees and easier access to sending and receiving remittances. On the policy alignment front, however, there has been less convergence (Glick Schiller 2012). While there has been increasing policy attention to promoting return of irregular migrants and failed asylum seekers, there have been fewer attempts to actively include migration concerns in development policy.

The current Outcome Document from the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals confirms this picture by having only the following to say about migration: Goal 10: reduce inequality within and among countries ... by facilitate[ing] orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation and well-managed migration policies.³ A key message emerging across the issue is that any formulation of migration-development goals and effective implementing of policies in the area must consider the adverse effects of tighter migration control. If prevented from mobility, how would some of the world's most disadvantaged people be able to contribute to development where public policy and official aid programmes have failed?

References

- BAKER-CRISTALES, B. 2008. "Magical pursuits: legitimacy and representation in a transnational political field". *American Anthropologist* 110(3): 349-359.
- BASCH, L., N. GLICK SCHILLER and C. Scanton Blanc. 1994. *Nations Unbound: Transnational*

Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterioralized Nation-States. Langhorne: Gordon and Breach.

- DE HAAS, H. 2012. "The Migration and Development Pendulum: A Critical View on Research and Policy". *International Migration* 50 (3): 8-25.
- FAIST, T. 2008. "Migrants as transnational development agents: an inquiry into the newest round of the migration-development nexus". *Population, Space and Place* 14 (1):21-42.
- GLICK SCHILLER, N. 2012. "Unravelling the Migration and Development Web: Research and Policy Implications". *International Migration* 50 (3): 92-9.
- GREENHILL, R. and A. PRIZZON. 2012. "Who foots the bill after 2015? What new trends in development finance mean for the post-MDGs". London, Overseas Development Institute, Working Paper 360.
- GUARNIZO, L. E. 1998. "The rise of transnational social formations: Mexican and Dominican state responses to transnational migration". *Political Power and Social Theory* 12: 45-94.
- MAHLER, S. J. 1995. *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- OECD-UNDESA 2013. "World Migration in Figures". <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/World-Migration-in-Figures.pdf> (accessed October 16, 2014)
- PAPADEMETRIOU, D. and P. MARTIN, eds. 1991. *The Unsettled Relationship: Labor Migration and Economic Development*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- POPKIN, E. 2003. "Transnational migration and development in postwar peripheral states: an examination of Guatemalan and Salvadoran state linkages with their migrant populations in Los Angeles". *Current Sociology* 51(3-4): 347-374.
- SMITH, R. C. 1998. "Transnational Localities: Community technology and the politics of membership within the context of Mexico and U.S. Migration". In: M.P. Smith and L.E. Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- VAMMEN I.M. and B. MOSSIN BRØNDEN 2012. "Donor-Country Responses to the Migration-Development Buzz: From Ambiguous Concepts to Ambitious Policies?" *International Migration* 50(3): 26-4.
- WORLD BANK 2014. "Migration and Development Brief 22". April 11, 2014. Washington, D.C.

³ See <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

Note on the Author

NINNA NYBERG SØRENSEN is a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). She has worked on migration-development issues for most of her career and published widely on transnational migration, conflict and gender, for example *Work and Migration* (London 2002), *The Migration-Development Nexus* (Geneva 2003), *Living Across Worlds* (Geneva 2007), and *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration* (London 2013). Her recent work explores undocumented migration of Central Americans, the insecurities migrants encounter and the consequences of massive deportation on local communities and sending states.

