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Interregional mechanisms for protection of african migrants in the Gulf Region: What prospects for Africa?

Paul Odhiambo*

ABSTRACT

Migration is a common phenomenon in Africa as citizens migrate within the continent for several reasons including education, family, employment, trade, and investment. Significant numbers of African migrants travel to the Middle East in search of economic opportunities. With the intensification of globalisation and the advancement of technology, human mobility across international borders is expected to rise in the coming decades. Despite challenges of international migration, migrants play a significant role in destination countries as they boost working-age population; contribute to revenue generation through taxes; contribute to human capital development; and enrich

technological progress. Countries of origin increasingly appreciate their Diaspora communities due to remittances and migrants' skills. The growing number of African migrants calls for a strategic partnership between Africa and the Middle East through a multilateral forum that will enhance policy consultation and coordination for the benefit for both sides. The paper analyses intra-African migration, migration patterns from Africa to the Middle East and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, drivers of migrations, migrants' positive contributions and challenges; national and Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) responses in protecting the migrants.

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Key recommendations including the strengthening of free movement policies is critical Africa in ensuring that rights of African migrants are protected within Africa; working towards improving migration data to inform policy; enhancing interregional cooperation between Africa's RECs to enhancing the potential of intra-African migration; and fast-tracking the establishment of an effective multilateral forum for Africa and the Middle East for enhancing policy consultation and coordination to guarantee their common interests.

Key Words: interregionalism; intra-African migration; multilateral forum; policy consultation and coordination.

MECANISMOS INTRARREGIONALES PARA LA PROTECCIÓN DE MIGRANTES AFRICANOS EN LA REGIÓN DEL GOLFO: ¿QUÉ PERSPECTIVAS PARA ÁFRICA?

RESUMEN

La migración es un fenómeno común en África. Los ciudadanos migran en el continente por un sinnúmero de razones que incluyen educación, reunificación familiar, empleo, comercio e inversión. Un número significativo de africanos viajan al Medio Oriente en búsqueda de mejores oportunidades económicas. Con la intensificación de la globalización y los avances tecnológicos, se espera que la movilidad humana a través de fronteras internacionales se incremente en las próximas décadas. Aun con los retos que enfrenta la migración internacional, los migrantes juegan un papel fundamental en los países de destino ya que

incrementan la población en edad de trabajar, contribuyen con el desarrollo de capital humano y enriquecen los procesos tecnológicos. Los países de origen han centrado su interés en sus comunidades en la diáspora no solo por el incremento de las remesas, sino también por los conocimientos de los migrantes. El creciente número de migrantes africanos exige una alianza estratégica entre África y Medio Oriente a través un foro multilateral que facilite las consultas y la coordinación de políticas para el beneficio de ambas partes. Este artículo analiza la migración intraafricana, los patrones de migración de África hacia Medio Oriente y los países del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo (CCG), las motivaciones de la migración, las contribuciones positivas y los retos de los migrantes, las respuestas nacionales y de las Comunidades Económicas Regionales (REC) frente a la protección de los migrantes. Las recomendaciones fundamentales incluyen el fortalecimiento de políticas de libre movilidad que son críticas para que África pueda proteger los derechos de los migrantes dentro del continente, el trabajo hacia la mejora de la información sobre migración que pueda informar las políticas públicas, fomentar la cooperación interregional entre las REC africanas para aprovechar el potencial de la migración intraafricana, y acelerar el establecimiento de un foro multilateral efectivo para África y Medio Oriente encaminado a las consultas políticas y la coordinación para garantizar sus intereses comunes.

Palabras clave: interregionalismo; migración intraafricana; foro multilateral; consulta y coordinación política.

INTRODUCTION

Migration has been part and parcel of human existence as people move from one place to the other with an intention of either settling in new places temporarily or permanently. From time to time, migration has been a strategy to reduce risks by diversifying income resources (Tacoli & Okali, 2001). Migration has also played an important role in the evolution of culture and civilisation (Dokos, 2017). Various turning points in world history including disintegration of the Middle Age societies and subsequent changes such as renaissance, commercial revolution, colonialisation, agricultural revolutions, industrial revolution, emergence of free market societies, modern education and technological advancement are some of the factors that have contributed to growth of international migration (Wimalaratana, 2017). Though migration is an age-old phenomenon, its manifestations and impacts have changed over time as the world becomes more globalised (IOM, 2020). Globalisation has increased the interconnectedness of countries thus speeding up the flow of people, ideas, and goods. While international migration pre-existed the age of globalisation, its scope and speed are unprecedented in a globalised world (Li, 2011).

Due to proximity and job opportunities, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have increasingly become a major destination for African migrants in recent years. The sectors that engage migrant workers are mainly domestic services, construction, and security (Atong *et al.*, 2018). The main push factors to the GCC states, especially Saudi Arabia,

United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Qatar include high unemployment, lack of decent jobs and lifestyle of migrants who return to their home countries in the continent. On the other hand, pull factors largely include better salaries and wages, a higher standard of living, welfare benefits, and education and medical facilities (Pineda *et al.*, 2016). African countries with significant migrant workers in the region include Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Africa, and Uganda. Despite bilateral labour agreements between African countries and their counterparts in GCC, cases of abuses and exploitation continue to be reported. Currently, Africa seems to lack concrete multilateral forum for dialogue with the destination countries on constructive and smooth cooperation between the two regions. It is for this reason that the African Union (AU) and African countries are exploring how to establish an interregional and multilateral forum for engaging their counterparts in the GCC countries and the greater Middle East region. This paper explores the potential of inter-regional cooperation between Africa and GCC to protect and promote rights and welfare of Africans who emigrate to the Gulf region. The paper relies on secondary data sources, relevant literature, and discourse analysis.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Since the causes and impacts of migration are diverse, this article is underpinned by a composite of selected migration theories to explain the initiation of migration from Africa, consequences of migration to both source

and destination countries and perpetuation of migration processes. Massey *et al.* (1993, 1998) and Schoorl (1995) distinguish theoretical approaches of international migration into two broad categories namely theoretical approaches explaining the initiation of migration and theoretical approaches explaining the continuation of migration (Jennissen, 2007). According to Wimalaratana (2017) migration theories are useful as they provide a theoretical framework to explain and understand the movement of people in a wider perspective. Furthermore, migration theories provide scientific knowledge on international migration and bring to light systematic and specific regularities related to migration and the relationships between them.

Migration theories employed in this paper include theoretical approaches explaining the initiation of migration, namely neoclassical economics theory, new economics of migration theory, dual labour market theory and world system theory; as well as theoretical approaches explaining the continuation of migration including network theory and institutional theory. Neoclassical economics theory focusses on the differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries and on migration costs (Massey, 1993; Thieme, 2006). In addition, the theory conceives of international migration as an individual decision for income maximisation. Both country of origin and destination country benefit from international migration through gain of remittances and labour force respectively (Wimalaratana, 2017).

New economics of migration theory views migration as a household decision un-

dertaken to minimise risks to family income to overcome capital constraints on family production activities (Massey, 1993). According to this theory, relatively poor households employ migration as a strategy to diversify their labour portfolio and to minimise financial risks (Thieme, 2006; Amaral, 2018). Remittances generated in receiver country are sent to sender country to boost incomes of migrants' households. Remittances are, therefore, acting as part of a mutually beneficial arrangement between the migrant and their family (Wimalaratana, 2017). Dual labour market theory argues that international migration is due to the intrinsic labour demands of industrialised and developed countries to facilitate their development agenda. The proponents of this theory contend that the demand for migrants is generated by the structural needs of the economy in receiver countries rather than the wage differentials or wishes of households of migrants. The theory, therefore, links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies (Massey, 1993; Thieme, 2006). According to the theory, there are two segments in the labour market, namely primary and secondary. While the primary segment is characterised by capital-intensive production methods and predominantly high-skilled labour, the secondary segment is largely labour-intensive and mainly low-skilled labour (Jennissen, 2007). The dual labour market theory assumes that international migration stems from labour demands in the labour-intensive segment of the receiving countries. World systems theory views migration as a natural consequence of economic globalisation and market penetration across national borders

(Massey, 1993; Thieme, 2006). The penetration of the global economy into the developing world is viewed as a catalyst for international movement as migrants search for better opportunities in relatively developed economies.

Network theory and institutional theory explain why international migration flows may increase even if initial incentive to migrate has diminished. Network theory refers to a set of interpersonal ties that connect migrants with their relatives, friends, and other compatriots in the home country. Interpersonal ties connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination countries (Thieme, 2006). Migration network is crucial in providing financial backups, facilitating employment opportunities, and conveying information about education possibilities or access to social security (Jennissen, 2007; Wimalaratana, 2017). Network is a form of social capital as it increases potential migrants' chances of access to employment opportunities in receiving countries. On the other hand, institutional theory is critical in creating a more favourable and strong policy framework for both labour-sending and receiving countries.

GLOBAL DIMENSION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migrants were estimated at 272 million (3.5 percent of the world population) worldwide in 2019 with two-third being labour migrants (IOM, 2020). The trend of only a small number of people crossing international borders is almost constant between 1970 and 2019 as shown in table 1. While 52 percent of international migrants were male, 48 percent

were female. International migration is shaped by economic, geographic, demographic, and other factors leading to distinct migration patterns. While most international migrants born in Africa, Asia, and Europe cross international borders within their respective regions, many migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean and Northern America reside outside their regions of birth. Overall, more than half of international migrants (estimated at 141 million) lived in Europe and Northern America in 2019. A significant number of people (estimated at 740 million in 2009) migrated within their countries. Globally, most people tend to migrate across borders due to work, family, or study reasons.

Table 1
International Migrants, 1970-2019

Year	Number of Migrants	Migrants as a % of the world's population
1970	83,460,125	2.3
1975	90,368,010	2.2
1980	101,983,149	2.3
1985	113,206,691	2.3
1990	153,011,473	2.9
1995	161,316,895	2.8
2000	173,588,441	2.8
2005	191,615,574	2.9
2010	220,781,909	3.2
2015	248,861,296	3.4
2019	271,642,105	3.5

Source: World Migration Report, 2020.

It is imperative to note that interregional migration is an important contributor to population change in less populous countries in Africa such as Equatorial Guinea. In 2005,

international migrants comprised less than 1 percent of Equatorial Guinea's population, but in 2019, the figure had increased to almost 17 percent of the total population of the country. Similarly, labour migration has contributed to significant population changes in the GCC as the population of international migrants is more than that of locals in Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, and Qatar.

STATE OF MIGRATION IN AFRICA

African migration is largely intra-African in nature due to a regional integration process that has facilitated free movement of people, goods, and services across borders within the continent (African Union & IOM, 2020; Atong *et al.*, 2018; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018). In other words, African migration is predominantly intra-regional with many migrants moving to neighbouring states (Abebe, 2017). Several studies have shown that most African migrations are not directed towards Europe as has been portrayed but towards African countries (Flahaux & Haas, 2016; Policy Centre for the New South, 2021). There is also spatial diversification of destinations outside Africa as African migrants not only emigrate to Europe and Northern America but also to the Gulf countries, other parts of Asia and Oceania (Atong *et al.*, 2018; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016).

Many African migrants are increasingly moving to China, India, Turkey, Brazil, Russia, and Argentina in search of education, work, and business opportunities. The geographical diversification is partly attributed to immigration restrictions by traditional European des-

tination countries, economic growth, labour demand and more liberal immigration regimes in the new destination countries and regions (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). The common idea that African emigration is fundamentally an irregular movement has also been debunked as studies show that most Africans engaging in extra-continental emigration have valid passports, visas, and other valid travel documents. In other words, African migration is not different from migration from other regions of the world.

Many people in Africa move across borders in search of opportunities including trade, employment, studies, and safety. Cross-border trade is increasingly driving intra-African migration as it offers economic opportunities to citizens across borders. Some of the busiest border posts in the region include Busia and Malava between Kenya and Uganda, Rwanda-Democratic Republic of Congo in Gisenyi and Goma, Beitbridge border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe, and Seme-Krake joint border between Nigeria and Benin.

Africa was the second largest origin and producer of international migrants after Asia between 2000 and 2017 (Atong *et al.*, 2018). Migrants in the continent accounted for 10 percent of the total number of migrants worldwide in 2019. Asia hosted 31 percent of the world's 272 million international migrants. The share of other regions are as follows: Europe (30 percent), North America (22 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean (4 percent) and Oceania (3 percent). In the same year, international migrants in Africa comprised two per cent of the total population in the continent. The share of international mi-

Figure 1
Major Routes of Migration in Africa



Source: Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (2019).

grants in the total population of other world regions is as follows: Oceania (21.2 percent), Northern America (16 percent) and Europe (11 percent), but lower in both Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean (1.8 percent each).

There was a disproportionate increase of African migrants between 2015 and 2019 in comparison to other global regions (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2021). Migrants increased from 23.5 million in 2015 to 26.5 million in 2019, equivalent to 13 per cent. Even though most Africa's in-

ternational migrants live within the continent, the number of extra-continental migrants is almost catching up with the former (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018). For instance, there were 19,359,848 (53.4 percent) intra-African international migrants in 2017 while extra-continental migrants were 16,906,580 (46.6 percent). Most international migrants from North Africa tend to be extra-continental while about 75 per cent of international migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa live within Africa (European Union, 2020).

In 2019, Eastern Africa hosted the largest share of all international migrants in Africa (30 per cent), followed by Western Africa (28 per cent), Southern Africa (17 per cent), Central Africa (14 per cent) and Northern Africa (11 per cent). However, in relation to Africa's total population, Southern Africa hosted the largest migrant population (6.7 percent), followed by Central Africa (2.2 percent), Western Africa (1.9 percent), Eastern Africa (1.8 percent) and Northern Africa (1.2 percent) (International Organisation for Migration, 2020).

Egypt had the largest number of people living abroad. Other African countries contributing to the high number of international migrants include Morocco, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Algeria. On the other hand, South Africa was the most significant destination country in the continent with over four (4) million international migrants in 2017 (Dick *et al.*, 2018). Other major destinations of intra-African international migrants were Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Most of the migration corridors within and from Africa to other continents are related to geographic proximity, colonial, linguistic and cultural ties, and displacement factors (European Union, 2020). The major routes for migration in Eastern and Southern Africa are eastern routes to the Arab Peninsula and other destinations in the Middle East, southern routes towards South Africa and northern routes to North Africa, Europe, and North America. The top corridors in this region include South Sudan-Uganda (0.9 million), Mozambique-South Africa (0.7 million), the Sudan-South Sudan (0.5 million),

Somalia-Kenya (485,000), Somalia-Ethiopia (467,000), Lesotho-South Africa (312,000), Benin-Nigeria (362,000), the Sudan-Chad (344,000) and Burundi-Tanzania (208,000). In West and Central Africa, the main routes link regional countries to the vital hubs in Niger and Nigeria. Some of the corridors in the region include Burkina Faso-Cote d'Ivoire (1.3 million) and Mali-Cote d'Ivoire (359,000) (European Union, 2020). Nonetheless, interregional migration within Africa is a key feature of migration patterns in the continent.

DRIVERS OF MIGRATION IN AFRICA

Factors that drive internal and international migration are complex. Globalisation is seen to accelerate structural causes that prompt cross-border migration flows including labour market imbalances, technological changes, economic restructuring, and demographic factors (African Union *et al.*, 2015). Van Hear *et al.* (2012) contend that the relationships between determinants of migration are normally entrenched in the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental context, hence it is critical to distinguish between predisposing, proximate, precipitating, and mediating factors.

Predisposing factors largely contribute to the creation of the context in which migration is likely to take place. For instance, structural disparities between the country of origin and the destination country. On the other hand, proximate factors have more bearing on migration. In the country of origin, proximate factors could be economic downturn or worsening security situations. Proximate factors could

be prospects of opportunities in a destination country. While precipitating factors are those that trigger departure, mediating factors enable, facilitate, or constrain migration. Some of the facilitating factors include presence of transport, communication, information, and resources for the envisaged journey.

Flahaux & De Haas (2016) observe that the relation between development and migration is fundamentally non-linear. Processes of modernisation and economic development seem to coincide with rural-to-urban migration subsequently leading to an increase to emigration. According to this line of thought when countries become wealthier, emigration declines but immigration increases. In other words, developing countries tend to have less emigration than middle-income and wealthier countries. Migration is a function of people's aspirations and capabilities. For instance, one needs to have material resources, social network, education, and knowledge to realise their aspirations of moving to another country. This explains why the skilled and relatively wealthier people tend to migrate more over long distances.

Historically, the role of the State in either promoting or hindering migration is key in understanding drivers and patterns of international migration in Africa. Colonial rule and subsequent forced labour and recruitment have shaped the contemporary migration patterns. In the early years of independence, most Africans tended to move to former colonial and metropolitan centres in Europe. State formation processes have had an impact on population mobility as instability, tensions, and conflicts provide incentives to sections of

citizenry to relocate to neighbouring countries or to intercontinental destinations. However, it is evident that most of the displaced persons tend to move from their country of origin to adjacent countries. Nevertheless, certain African governments have also undertaken measures to discourage emigration and restrict immigration of foreigners.

Contemporary international migration is also increasingly being shaped by climate change and environmental degradation in some parts of Africa (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018). There is an emerging consensus that extreme weather conditions could play a key role in driving international migration as such harsh environments adversely affect food production, livelihoods, health, and economies of communities (European Union, 2020). Regions already experiencing extreme weather situations include the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Maghreb, parts of the Horn of Africa and southern Africa. Environmental hazards such as persistent and prolonged droughts have more long-term impacts. Labour migration, therefore, becomes an important coping strategy for households to diversify their source of livelihoods. Nevertheless, the mechanisms through which environmental impacts contribute to migration should be seen as a complex process in which economic, political, cultural, and demographic factors interact with environmental drivers to shape people's intentions to move or stay in their homeland (International Organisation for Migration, 2019). The mounting pressures caused by the interactions could make remaining *in situ* less attractive.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATION INITIATIVES IN AFRICA

It is important to understand why regional migration governance is preferable. Statistics show that significant cross-border movements occur within regional spaces. Secondly, regional agreements might be easier to reach compared to multilateral/global frameworks due to small number of countries involved. This could also be influenced by similar levels of socio-economic development of countries in a particular geopolitical region. Regional arrangements might also have certain advantages over bilateral agreements as sending countries could enhance their bargaining power in inter-regional arrangement than if they engage with receiver countries in a bilateral arrangement.

The solution to the contemporary intra-African migration challenges could be found in the promotion of regional integration at continental, regional and sub-regional levels. Efforts of Africa's integration can be traced to the ideals of Pan-Africanism that culminated in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Other milestones in the integration processes in Africa include the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Final Act of Lagos (1980), the Abuja Treaty (1991) and Sitre Declaration (1999) that led to the transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in 2002 and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted by the now-defunct OAU in 2001 but ratified by the AU in 2002.

The popularisation of the African Renaissance by former South African President Tha-

bo Mbeki in the late 1990s and at the turn of the 21st century was critical in understanding the aspirations of the continent in post-Cold War era. The concept of the African Renaissance as articulated by Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop between 1946 and 1960 refers to the idea that African people would overcome challenges confronting the continent through cultural, scientific, and economic renewal. According to Mbeki, ideals of African Renaissance can be realised through the establishment of democratic political systems and the achievement of sustainable economic development to position the continent in the world economy and to increase Africa's voice in world politics. Efforts towards Africa's unity and cohesion, and its political, economic, and cultural renewal as well as regional integration are key in enhancing intra-African migration for the benefit of countries of origin and destination in the continent.

The 1991 Abuja Treaty that espoused the establishment of the African Economic Community (AEC) was a major milestone in realising African integration and was anchored on the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). According to Article 4(2)i of the Treaty, "the gradual removal of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and the right of residence and establishment" is a critical step in realising African unity and integration. Further, the strengthening of the existing RECs, harmonisation, and coordination of policies amongst RECs and sub-regional organisations, liberalisation of trade and adoption of a common trade policy, promotion of joint investment programmes in the production and trade of major products are

imperative not only in promoting continental and regional integration but also in strengthening intra-African migration.

The African Union Commission (AUC) played a significant role in the integration process by developing the Minimum Integration Programme (MIP) in 2009. MIP serves as the connecting link for African continental integration actors. Similarly, MIP consists of a variety of activities on which the RECs and parties involved should agree upon to speed up and bring to a successful conclusion regional and continental integration process. In 2018, the AU adopted the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Rights of Residence and Right of Establishment (also known as Free Movement Protocol).

Regional organisations including RECs are increasingly engaged in the management of migration as they seek potential benefits of intra-African migration and to address the challenges associated with irregular or forced migration (Dick *et al.*, 2018). As a result, migration issues are entrenched in regional integration agreements. Though Africa has eight recognised RECs, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) appear to be most relevant in the management of migration (European Union, 2020). The three regional blocs dominate vast parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and extends to North Africa as Egypt, and Tunisia are COMESA member states. The

three blocs comprise major recipient, transit, and sender migration countries. Moreover, nearly all main migration corridors for both intra-African and extra-continental migration pass through the three RECs in the continent.

While the actual and potential contributions of the regional organisations to orderly, safe, and regular migration have not been sufficiently acknowledged, there have been renewed interests towards strengthening regional migration governance through bringing about broader continental integration objectives and in the establishment of regional migration frameworks. Through establishment of the AfCFTA and subsequent customs union and common market for Africa's RECs, freedom of movement of persons across African countries is guaranteed. Further, right to residence and establishment are equally assured. On the other hand, there are efforts at continental and regional levels in establishing migration protection frameworks.

The establishment of continental and regional migration governance structures is key in harnessing the potential benefits of intra-African migration. Migration can lead to significant benefits by fuelling growth, innovation and entrepreneurship in both origin and destination countries (Dick *et al.*, 2018). In addition, migration offers employment opportunities, raises incomes, and improves standards of living. Migrants are known to facilitate the flow of goods, finance and knowledge between origin and destination countries. The migrants also establish networks that could be beneficial to their countries of origin. Remittances and diaspora investments are considerable benefits of migration. In 2018, estimated USD 528 bil-

lion went to developing countries with USD 81 billion going to Africa (African Union and IOM, 2019). It has been noted that Africa is the most expensive region to send remittances. To reap maximum benefits from migration, it is imperative to develop effective institutional frameworks for regional migration governance that aims orderly, safe, and regular migration.

Regional migration governance systems can be seen in three formats, namely regional organisations espousing regional migration related activities, Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs), and inter-regional cooperation processes such as the Khartoum and Rabat processes (Dick *et al.*, 2018). While the first one is more institutionalised, the last two are more informal dialogue platforms with the involvement of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), or external actors such as the European Union. In the first format, regional organisations develop common mechanisms to government the movement of people (Nita, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between instruments that govern intra-regional migration flows and those that handle movement of people from outside the respective region. Intra-regional migration flows exist within a regional bloc/organisation that ultimately aim at establishing a common or internal market comprising movement of people, services, and capital. On the other hand, a few regional organisations have developed a common mechanism for dealing with migration from outside their respective regions. The RCPs are informal and non-binding with an overall objective to establish networks of information exchange between participating

states to build trust between actors engaged and thereby facilitate a common understanding of regional mobility issues that could lead to convergence in policies and practices (Nakayama, 2018).

Under the RCPs, informality refers to a depoliticised space in which participants freely discuss issues of mutual interests. RCPs are non-binding because the participating states neither negotiate binding rules, nor are they obliged to implement the outcomes of deliberations reached at the meetings. One of the distinct features of RCPs is a minimum administrative structure with a secretariat that is normally hosted by an international organisation. RCPs are processes that are neither one time-events nor are they comparable to formal regional organisations (Nita, 2013). RCPs have four pillars of strategic priority namely organising mobility and legal migration; improving border management and combating irregular migration; strengthening the synergies between migration and development; and promotion of international protection (Nakayama, 2018).

Despite efforts being made to improve regional migration governance, certain factors impede effective management of regional migration. There tend to be limited technical and funding capacities that undermine effectiveness of migration governance. Similarly, a low level of legalisation or inadequate of supranational executive and judicial body is likely to diminish enforcement capacities of regional policies and strategies. Despite heightened regional integration processes on the continent within the five regions (East, Central, West, South and North), there are

sub-regions of Africa that still face low levels of economic integration and intra-regional trade like the Horn of Africa. In such scenarios, there are scant incentives for enforcement of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)'s Regional Migration Policy Framework.

Countries in sub-regions facing conflicts and insecurity such as the Horn of Africa tend to enforce border control and limit free movement of persons across international borders, hence undermining intra-African migration. While regional organisations and free movement policies are meant to promote intraregional mobility on the continent, interests of certain external actors have partly been an obstacle to the liberalisation of mobility. For instance, initiatives such as the 2014 EU Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process) and the 2006 Europe Africa Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process) tend to place more priority on countering of irregular migration. In some cases, powerful countries or regional hegemony in some RECs may be more inclined to bilateral migration agreements thus undermining regional migration governance arrangements.

The AU key migration documents include the Migration Policy Framework for Africa, the AU Plan of Action on Employment Promotion and Poverty Alleviation, the African Common Position on Migration and Development, the AU Framework on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (Kampala Convention), the Minimum Integration Programme (MIP), the AU Plan of Action on Boosting Intra-African Trade Initiatives, the Labour Market Information System,

the Khartoum Declaration on AU-Horn of Africa Initiative on Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants, the Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration, and the 2016 Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030). The revised Migration Policy Framework is critical as it aims at guiding the AU member states and RECs in the management of migration by taking into consideration AU priorities, Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international migration policies and standards (European Union, 2020). The fact that most of the continental migration policies are not binding is a concern with regards to monitoring implementation and progress made.

PATTERNS OF AFRICAN MIGRATION TO GCC AND MIDDLE EAST

The GCC countries and other Middle East countries have emerged as the preferred choice of destination by African labour migrants in recent years. Factors that have contributed to the movements of Africans to the Gulf Region include high growth, economic and job opportunities, education and joining of their family members, religious and cultural ties, increasing and emerging challenges for getting visas and other immigration restrictions to Europe and North America. The major destination countries in the Gulf region are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar and Kuwait.

Traditionally most African migrants in the Gulf region have come from Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Chad, and Somalia. However, the dynamics and complexities

have changed over the years with substantial African migrants to the Gulf coming from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda. Various International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports show many of the migrant workers in the Gulf region are domestic workers who face numerous challenges. Reports of exploitation and abuses could be attributed to lack of or inadequate governance structures to protect migrant workers.

INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION FOR MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Interregionalism can be defined as a process in which two or more specified regions interact as regions, that is, region-to-region relations (Soderbaum & Baert, 2014). In other words, interregionalism is institutionalised inter-regional relations. Hanggi (2000) contends that there are three forms of interregionalism, namely relations between regional groupings, bioregions and transregional arrangements, and hybrids such as relations between regional groupings. The partnership between European Community/Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) is considered as a model of group-to-group interregionalism. Biregionalism and transregionalism emerged in the context of the new Triad, that is, the triangular relationship between the three world economic regions namely North America, Western Europe, and East Asia. Due to emergence of economic powers across the globe, this form of interregional arrangement has spread to other parts of the world. The third form is largely relations between regional groupings and single powers.

The concept of interregionalism or transregionalism is emerging in migration governance discourse to illustrate how two or more regions (comprising origin, transit, and destination countries) can establish a forum for dialogue on mobility labour and migrant protection issues. An example of interregional migration governance is Inter-regional Forums on Migration (IRFs). Such IRFs may be designed to bring together states located along migration corridor (International Organisation for Migration, 2019). IRFs may be established around a specific theme such as the Abu Dhabi Dialogue which focuses on labour mobility across Asia and the Middle East.

Specifically, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue is a voluntary and non-binding inter-governmental consultative process, engaging seven Asian labour destination countries namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE; and eleven (11) countries of origin: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The objective of the Dialogue process is to provide a forum for the discussion of new ideas and concrete activities towards the enhancement of bilateral and regional cooperation and partnership aimed at better administration of the temporary contract employment cycle and maximising its benefits to contract workers, employers and the economies of origin and destination countries. The two sides also aim to promote the welfare and well-being of migrants, the development of both origin and destination countries and enhance cooperation and collaboration.

EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH AFRICA-MIDDLE EAST INTERREGIONAL FORUM

The engagement of the African Union Commission (AUC) with the Diaspora in the Gulf began in 2016 with the desk study that mapped African diaspora living in the Gulf to understand the modes and the waves of migration. In 2018, African experts drawn from major countries of origin of migrant workers in the GCC and Middle East met to share experiences on international labour migration governance and to explore avenues for policy dialogue with Middle East states. It was noted that a joint voice of many African countries would have a greater impact than a single country. The AU's Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018-2030) and Plan of Action identifies inter-state and inter-regional cooperation as key in enhancing regional migration governance.

Experts and ambassadors of African countries supplying labour migrants to the Middle East and the GCC met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 29 October 2019, to explore avenues for cooperating with the destination countries. The meeting followed recommendations made by labour migration governance stakeholders for Africa to initiate multilateral negotiations that would enhance protection for over three million African migrant workers in the Middle East. The meeting was also crucial as the African side consolidated their position ahead of an African-Middle East dialogue. During the discussion, it was emphasised that Africa could learn from existing multilateral processes like the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, which have helped to

improve the situation of Asian migrant workers in the Middle East and Gulf countries.

An inter-regional mechanism is critical to support African countries in engaging the Middle East countries to establish pathways for protection of migrant workers and their families, and to allow for a dignified return and reintegration of migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin. An improved labour migration governance will contribute to policy and structural reforms in critical areas including training and ethical recruitment, decent jobs, skills improvement, legal and consular services and protection of human rights and liberties in accordance with international standards. A multilateral framework on labour migration management will also address issues of mutual and common interests between Africa and the Middle East. The meeting was organised by the AU-ILO-IOM-ECA Joint Labour Migration Governance Programme (JLMP) for Regional Development and Integration in Africa. The JLMP was adopted in January 2015 by Africa's Heads of State and Government to contribute to the improvement of labour migration governance to realise safe, orderly, and regular migration in the continent.

The African Union, in collaboration with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and Africa's RECs, developed a regional programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration in Africa. The programme focuses on critical areas of facilitating free movement of workers as a crucial means of advancing regional integration and

development in Africa. The broad objective is to strengthen the effective governance and regulation of labour migration and mobility in Africa under the rule of law and with the involvement of key stakeholders across government, legislatures, private sector employers, workers, migrants, international organisations, NGOs, and civil society organisations.

The programme's long-term expectations are to: extend decent work and social protection to migrant workers and their families; strengthen regional integration and inclusive development; encourage productivity, productive investment, and business success; enable better social and economic integration of migrants, effective labour and social protection mechanisms, and sustainable labour market systems (African Union *et al.*, 2015). One of the immediate purposes of the regional programme is to establish regional mechanisms for tripartite policy consultation and coordination on labour migration issues and to facilitate consultation and cooperation with other regions. Regions here could rightly be understood as inter-continental destinations in which African migrants move to outside the continent. Therefore, the ongoing discussion and efforts on how to establish a multilateral framework between Africa and the Middle East and GCC countries is timely.

LESSONS FROM THE COLOMBO PROCESS

The Regional Consultative Process on Overseas Employment and Contractual Labour for Countries of Origin in Asia (popularly known as the Colombo Process) is a voluntary and non-binding regional consultative

process comprising 12 Member States from Asia (countries of origin of migrant workers), which generally serves as a forum for exchange of best practices on the management of overseas employment and contractual labour. The objective of the Colombo Process is to provide a forum for the countries of origin of temporary contractual workers to share experiences and lessons learned, and best practices on overseas contractual employment, consult on issues faced by overseas workers and propose practical solutions for the well-being of overseas workers particularly the most vulnerable ones, optimise development benefits from organised overseas employment, and enhance dialogue with countries of destination. It also reviews and monitors the implementation of ministerial recommendations and identify further steps for action.

The Colombo Process is governed by Ministerial Consultations in which recommendations and action plans are discussed and adopted by the ministers of the participating Member States. The Colombo Process provides its member countries, observer countries and external organisations a non-binding and informal environment to engage in dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual benefits on labour migration (International Organisation for Migration, 2012). There are five Thematic Area Working Groups (TAWGs): skills and qualification recognition; fostering ethical recruitment; pre-departure orientation and empowerment; remittances and labour market analysis. The participating countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Member countries of the Colombo Process have accomplished concrete steps to improve the management of labour migration. These include revising policies and regulations, enhancing greater cooperation between Colombo Process countries and destination countries, and launching various initiatives such as awareness-raising campaigns, orientation training, recruitment drives, remittance investment and welfare programmes (International Organisation for Migration, 2012). The member countries have also amended their existing regulations or adopted new labour migration laws. They have established new government structures dedicated to managing labour movements and welfare of migrants abroad. Most member countries signed bilateral agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) with destination countries. In addition, Colombo Process countries have launched specific programmes and activities at various levels of government to disseminate migration related information, regulate recruitment process, provide welfare support at origin and destination, maximise the benefits of labour migration.

Specific achievements of the Colombo Process include; sharing of good practices, data and information through regular dialogue among countries of origin of overseas contractual workers in Asia; comprehensive training curriculum for labour attachés and overseas employment administrators was developed; and joint training courses were implemented in Kuwait (2004), Bangkok (2005), China (2006) and Islamabad (2006); and regional workshop for employment agencies in Asia on placing workers in Europe and ethical recruit-

ment was held in Manila (2006). Furthermore, several policy studies have been carried out to support the efforts of the Colombo Process' participating governments on the following topics: protection of migrant workers, capacity building and inter-state cooperation, regulatory frameworks for recruitment of migrant workers, minimum standard employment contracts, pre-departure orientation programs, best practices, welfare funds for migrant workers. They also include training and skill development for migrant labour; flow, and utilisation policies on migrant workers' remittances (South Asian Regional Trade Union Council, 2019). The Colombo Process has become instrumental in hosting consultation meetings with regions including the GCC countries, and Europe Union member states.

Despite modest progress realised under the Colombo Process, a myriad of challenges persists. While steps have been undertaken to protect the rights of migrant workers in most South Asian countries, there have been lags in policy implementation stemming from difficulties in achieving consensus between countries of destination and countries of origin (Moyo, 2018). The Colombo Process tends to be State-centric, yet the contribution of civil society organisations and the private sector is crucial for the discussion, planning and implementation as these non-state actors have rich experience in labour rights issues and advocacy. Therefore, leveraging their knowledge and experience could be of great benefit to both countries of destination and countries of origin. Lack of dissemination of information to migrants has exacerbated the inadequate awareness about labour rights,

grievance/complaints mechanisms and redressal measures. While some countries have introduced pre-departure orientation and post-arrival training, there are concerns about the full implementation of the programmes. The Non-binding nature of the Colombo Process means that the member states are not obliged to comply with its principles hence inadequate monitoring of compliance.

The Colombo Process is an important form of regional consultative processes (RCPs) that could offer lessons for Africa in its engagement with the Gulf region on regional migration governance and address challenges African migrants face in the destination countries. The focus of the Colombo Process comprising protection and provision of services to migrant workers, optimisation of benefits of organised labour migration, and capacity building, data collection and inter-state cooperation forms foundation of migrant workers in the Gulf region that African countries could learn from as the continent plans to have a structured engagement with the GCC countries. In their engagement with the GCC countries, African nations could also consider thematic areas including skills and qualification recognition processes, ethical recruitment, pre-departure orientation, training and empowerment, promotion of cheaper and faster transfer of remittances, labour market analysis, migrant health, operationalisation of the migration-related elements of sustainable development goals, promotion of equality for woman migrant workers, and consular support for migrant workers.

CONCLUSION

African migration is predominantly intra-African in nature with many migrants moving to within their respective regions in the continent. The ongoing regional integration both at continental and regional levels and the establishment of various regional migration policy frameworks and strategies are likely to contribute to enhanced regional migration governance. Among the extra continental migration destinations, North America, Western Europe, the Middle East and the GCC countries are likely to remain preferable for African migrant workers. Due to proximity, cultural and religious ties and emerging economic opportunities, the number of African migrants to GCC countries is expected to rise in the coming years despite lack of multilateral forum for African governments to engage their counterparts in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and other destinations in the Middle East. Comprehensive understanding of the migration dynamics within Africa and African migrants moving to other world regions outside the continent is still a challenge in terms to capture data especially to new frontier destinations. Experience from Abu Dhabi Dialogue and Colombo Process with regards to interregional engagement between Middle East and Asian countries has rich lessons for the AU and its member states as the continent embark on the journey to establish its own forum to engage with destination countries in the Middle East and GCC countries.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening of free movement policies and strategies is critical for the AU and member states in ensuring that the rights and liberties of African migrants are protected within Africa.

The African Union and Africa's RECs should work in collaboration with national governments in Africa to put in place measures to improve on migration data.

Interregional cooperation between Africa's RECs is critical in protecting African migrants and enhancing the potential of intra-African migration.

The African Union and member states should fast-track negotiations with Middle Eastern and GCC countries on a multilateral forum.

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