



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT A PERSPECTIVE FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

The complexity of international migration, recognizing both its positive impact on development and poverty reduction as well as its potential negative effects, contributes to the fact that it is difficult to draw unequivocal conclusions about how migration affects development. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the issue, nor –given the enormous interest in recent years- do we wish to. But even with the dramatically increased interest for migration and development, it is not apparent what the *policy margins* of specific government measures are and what the effects of these measures are in the long run. It is always suggested that migration represents a small but crucial source of development potential for countries of origin. However, migrants' ability to realise this potential depends partly on economic and political circumstances in countries of origin [and their socioeconomic and residential status of the migrant in the host country].

The central question therefore is if we should focus our attention more towards shaping favourable conditions for positive development impacts of migration to occur. Can migration spark off development in thorny investment environments? Or should we consider more co-development projects of governments and migrant organisations? Without proper impact assessments of the wide range of activities currently implemented in the field of migration and development however, we do not know to what extent the countless trial-and-error projects deliver the required results.

New ways for the Netherlands

For the time being, the migration and development community shares the ‘developmentalist beliefs’ in the migration and development nexus, and is attempting to find ways to make it work. The Netherlands Government is no exception in this. With the publication of a White Paper on Migration and Development as early as 2004 [and a recent policy paper in 2008], The Netherlands practices what it preaches, i.e. a *whole-of-government approach* and follows the principle that ‘coherence starts at home’. The coherent approach of the Netherlands gave a.o. way to the following programs:

1. Pilot Circular Migration

Although circular migration is a very topical subject in international forums on migration, there are still many doubts about how it works in practice. The current pilot will help the Netherlands understand the risks, opportunities and limitations, and assess whether or not circular migration as a new approach to development cooperation will bring added value.

Agreements will be made with a country of origin (on cooperation on return etc.) and the companies that will be involved. The circular migrants involved will already have completed basic vocational training and will return to their country of origin after a period of two years to share their knowledge and experience. The Netherlands government will arrange with the employers for recipients to at least receive the minimum wage. Two pilots will operate in two countries, each country involving a maximum of 80 migrants. The World Bank will monitor and evaluate this pilot.

Three ministries in the Netherlands are involved: Foreign Affairs/Development Cooperation, Social Affairs and Labour and Justice. For the benefit of the pilot residence permits will be issued without restrictions, i.e. a labour market test.

2. Encouraging sustainable return and reintegration

The Netherlands believes that the return of failed asylum seekers should form an integral part of the migration and development discourse. In order to manage and maintain support for

Dutch asylum and immigration policy, it is important that migrants who are not (or who are no longer) entitled to remain lawfully in the Netherlands leave the country, preferably voluntarily.

In recent years the Netherlands has gained some experience with the assistance of voluntary return in various ways. Besides purely financial reintegration assistance, there is reintegration assistance in kind. The latter provides assistance with education and job placement. The details of the support are established in consultation with the executing agencies, who have experience in the field. Given variations in buying power in countries to which people will be returning and individuals' specific reintegration preferences, the type of support offered will be tailored to each case. There will be no fixed price tag, although there will be an maximum amount for the support to each adult and to each child. Depending on what the countries of origin are able to offer, reintegration support may include guidance in setting up a business (including access to microcredit), help in finding a job (with a special focus on potential cooperation with Dutch companies), training or housing.

In this program, nine mainly non-governmental organisations are involved, each to contribute from their specific background. The purpose is to create a platform with a clear program for voluntary returning failed asylum seekers.

3. Temporary assignment from the Netherlands to the country of origin

Since 2004 the Netherlands has been providing grants to organisations temporarily assigning migrants living in the Netherlands to the developing countries from which they originate. The kind of projects involved are demand-driven (depending on the needs of the labour market in the countries in question) and voluntary (migrants apply to the organisations themselves and are selected if they match existing demand). In supporting these projects The Netherlands is building on the EU-Africa partnership, which calls on countries to deploy the knowledge and expertise of diasporas in their countries of origin.

Two examples of projects which have been in operation for some time are the IOM's Ghana Health Project, in cooperation with Ghana's Millennium Development Authority (MiDA), and its Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals (TRQN) project.

4. Migrants as development actors

The Netherlands is of the opinion that the role migrants can play in the development of their countries of origin must not be underestimated. Remittances, networks and other forms of involvement can make a useful contribution to poverty reduction and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Migrants have always contributed to development, but mostly outside existing frameworks. What has changed is, that migrants' contribution is now more visible, and there is more and better communication between the migrants and the government.

The Netherlands Government observes that the aim of a number of migrant organisations is to grow into fully fledged, valuable partners in development cooperation. We are making efforts to involve migrant organisations more closely when establishing, discussing and carrying out policy related to development cooperation. The goal is to make use of migrants' thematic and/or country-specific knowledge and expertise.

During the last years we actively involved migrant organisations in various ways. The Netherlands Government organises annual consultations with those organisations and has regular meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also participate in different activities organised by migrant organisations. In general, positive feedback on our efforts was received, but more recently the migrant organisations also strike a different note. The organisations feel that they are invited to share their knowledge but that their ideas are not utilized in the implementation of plans. The organisations also perceive it as a task of the Ministry to 'enlighten' them what is required of them, what their focus should be and how they are to realise their goals. The government therefore faces the challenge of communicating to the migrant organisations that the Ministry is able to assist migrant organizations who come up with a good plan that fits within the government policy.

The potential added value of the Dutch Approach

Having stated in the introduction that impact assessments on what works and what not in the field of migration and development are urgently required, this short note makes clear that this applies just as much for the programs of the Netherlands Government, which have started

partly on the basis of a trial-and-error approach. The cases discussed in the paper are based on the premises that:

- (i) circular migration as a new approach to development cooperation will bring added value to the home countries;
- (ii) failed asylum seekers returning to their country of origin supported by a reintegration package in kind will have an meaningful impact on their communities;
- (iii) temporarily assigning migrants living in the Netherlands to the developing countries brings the appropriate expertise to these countries; and
- (iv) migrant organisations mainstreamed into development cooperation generates additional thematic and country-specific knowledge.

All programs will be thoroughly reviewed. The World Bank is in charge of the monitoring and evaluation of the pilot circular migration. A study currently carried out attempts to reveal the conditions under which the supposedly added value of migrants can be put to the best possible use. This should lead to empirical information and indications on how to proceed within the migration and development agenda.

Obviously, the question comes to mind why the Netherlands Government included these projects in the migration and development portfolio. One of the key elements in the approach was that genuine learning occurs through a trial-and-error process, and (to use colloquial speech) to make a choice for win-win situations, without having much evidence of the possible (triple) win for the country of origin, country of departure and returnee.

Furthermore, it is evident that the domestic agenda plays a role in the selection of programs as well. Sustainable return and reintegration features high in the interior debate, and migrant organisations push strong lobby efforts into receiving affirmative action in their attempts to become part and parcel of 'regular' development cooperation.

The argument could be made therefore that migration and development is partly a donor-driven concept: migrants perceive themselves as development actors, countries of the North fill their labour demand with circular migrants from the South, failed asylum seekers are to leave the countries of destination with a package that would support their country of origin. Obviously, there is another side to the argument, which is that many developing countries are

committed to involving and reaching out to the diaspora, and formulate national policy on international migration and development. But in general, developing countries have tended not to include migration, or at least its positive impact, in national development planning. A clear commitment from their side is required to achieve a more evenly matched agenda setting in the migration and development programming.

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