# MIGRATION AND THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to consider how migration serves as a driving force for sustainable development, and how the private sector can impact this process.

**Approach:** This study emphasises the role of migration in sustainable development. It examines literature on the private sector in economic development, and analyses statistics on international migration and remittances, and their economic effects in African countries.

**Findings:** The restrictive economic conditions affecting migrants and refugees negatively impact both host countries and places of origin. The private sector can enhance outcomes for all involved by collaborating with governments and aid agencies to reduce obstacles hindering migrant employment, business development and social integration.

**Originality/Value:** Much research has focused on the negative effects of African migration, with fewer studies examining the broader impact of

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migration on local and regional economic growth and development, particularly the pivotal involvement of the private sector. The role of migration as a force in sustainable development is an issue of growing importance, yet remains under-investigated.

***Keywords:*** African-born migrants; international migration; migration of skills; migrant remittances; private sector

## INTRODUCTION

The displacement of millions of Africans to Europe and North America has contributed to an evolving migration crisis and raises new concerns that need to be addressed as a part of sustainable development goals. The loss of the skills and knowledge that accompanies large-scale outmigration is an increasingly studied aspect of this process. Migrant skills contribute to the economy of their country of origin, and the departure of these human resources eventually results in a shortage of skills, while the receiving nations benefit from the lower-cost labour they provide.

A report from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) showed that over one-third of migrants to developed countries comprise educated professionals, while a United Nations publication indicated that in 2010–2011 one in nine Africans with a tertiary education were living in developed countries. This represents a 50% increase over the past 10 years, and can be compared to the figures of one in 13 and one in 30 in Latin America and Asia, respectively (UN-DESA and OECD, 2013). In 2015, 39% of sub-Saharan Africans in the United States had at least a bachelor's degree (US Census Bureau, 2016). The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2014–2015 listed Uganda as the only African nation among the top 20 countries able to retain talented workers, while at the other end of the scale, Burundi, Algeria, Mauritania, Chad, Guinea and Sierra Leone were all included among the 20 nations whose top talent is most likely to leave (Schwab, 2014).

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were about 3.5 million new displacements in Africa in 2016 alone, of which 2.6 million were caused by conflict and violence (IDMC, 2017). These conditions engender poverty and lack of access to education for those affected, which has had a ripple effect on economic stability and growth. The effects of this brain drain are perhaps most prominent in the field of medical services, resulting in devastating impacts on the struggle to achieve health and fight disease and malnutrition. While some professionals move to other, more prosperous African countries such as South Africa, most travel further abroad to Europe, and increasingly, the United States, where they can obtain better access to education and economic opportunities.

However, many developing countries can benefit from the migration of some of its citizens through the remittances sent home; these payments help stabilise households and make improvements to nutrition, health, housing and education. An increasingly significant issue is how to effectively leverage these funds to aid in local economic growth and development, which has long been a challenge for individual governments and presents a range of opportunities for private sector involvement. This paper considers how migration can serve as a driving force for sustainable development and examines some ways that the private sector can contribute to this process.

## APPROACHING MIGRATION FROM A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

This study approaches the issue of migration from a perspective that emphasises its role in sustainable development, beginning at the household level. It examines data on private sector involvement in the migration crisis, analyses statistics on international migration and remittance amounts and uses, and their economic effects in African countries. These statistics have been compiled by such organisations as the UN, the IOM, the World Economic Forum, the IDMC and the World Bank.

Literature concerning modern migration patterns from Africa can be divided into two broad categories: a) studies examining the impact on the receiving countries; b) studies considering the impact on the home countries. Within the latter category, a great deal of research has focused on the negative effects of African migration on the shortage of medical professionals, which has been attributed as a significant factor in the continent's health crisis (Hagopian et al., 2004; Mlambo and Adetiba, 2017; Oberoi and Lin, 2006). A few studies have examined the broader impact of migration on local and regional economic growth and development (Adams et al., 2008; Mohapatra and Ratha, 2011; Ratha, 2011; World Bank, 2017), including the roles played by government institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and increasingly, the potential involvement of the private sector (IFC, 2011). However, while the role of migration as a force in sustainable development is an issue of growing importance, it remains under-investigated. Also, while a growing number of entrepreneurs and business leaders have become involved in the migration crisis, the issue of how to balance profitability with social responsibility is only beginning to be addressed (IFC, 2011).

This study examines aspects of African migration and its impact on regional economic development, namely the large-scale losses of medical professionals and its effects on efforts to manage disease and promote health. This has broader impacts on economic development, as well as some push factors involved in the departure of skilled workers from African countries. The study also considers the role of remittances in improving household nutrition, health and educational status, and how the private sector can help leverage these benefits into sustainable development initiatives.

## THE BRAIN DRAIN, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The shortage of African professionals is perhaps most acutely seen in the medical field. Globalisation has resulted in an increased demand for health workers, with an accompanying relaxation of the immigration regulations of many developed countries in order to attract highly skilled professionals, particularly engineers and health professionals. The overwhelming majority of sub-Saharan African-born physicians practicing in the United States originate from only three countries, namely Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana (Hagopian et al., 2004). In 1973, there were 7.76 doctors per 100,000 people in Liberia; by 2008, however, this figure had declined to only 1.37 doctors, leaving the country woefully undermanned to address the recent Ebola crisis (WHO, 2017).

Annually, 30–40% of the doctors who graduate in Kenya leave the country after completing their internship (WHO, 2017). Although some of these migrate to other African countries, a large majority move to the United States or Europe; thus enriching the human resources base in these regions at the expense of their home countries.

South Africa has been losing 17% of its qualified doctors each year (Mlambo and Adetiba, 2017), and West African-trained physicians have been migrating in large numbers, primarily to the US and the UK, since receiving access to medical education in the 1960s.

Studies have indicated that the predominant reasons for leaving include the higher workloads and occupational risks associated with providing medical care in developing countries, as well as better opportunities for job promotion and higher pay (WHO, 2017). The spread of HIV/AIDS and its concomitant dangers in hospitals lacking in infrastructural features related to hygiene and contamination has also been cited as a factor in the migration of health professionals from developing countries (Oberoi and Lin, 2006). Therefore, the very health crises that have increased the demand for medical professionals have also resulted in higher hazards and an enormous workload that drives them to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

The loss of these professionals has negatively impacted the functioning of the health sector, reducing the overall quality of medical care offered by the health institutions in many countries. Some countries, such as South Africa, have begun addressing the issue through policies aimed at improving and increasing the development and training of more health professionals. This has included constructing new medical colleges, sending medical students to Cuba for training, and requiring graduates to spend a certain period working domestically before accepting overseas positions.

Developing countries have long attempted to invest more in their health sectors; however, this is difficult due to slow economic growth and often uncertain political systems. Despite the billions in aid invested in the region annually, most countries spend far less on even essential health services than the recommended WHO standard of $34–$40 per capita (IFC, 2011). This creates an enormous gap, which is largely filled by the private health sector, and many governments are actively seeking to increase this contribution. The African health care market is estimated at some US$35 billion, with private companies responsible for about 50%–60% of health expenditures (IFC, 2011). The private sector can help further expand the market by collaborating with governments in the improvement of the infrastructure, as well as through investment in distribution and retail activities, pharmaceutical and medical product manufacturing, insurance, and medical education. Such investments will fund capacity expansion and new businesses through the development of innovative (and often less expensive and more accessible) enterprises for health care delivery. It will also help to drive down costs and improve existing conditions, which have been cited as a push factor by many departing medical workers.

### *Push Factors in African Migration*

Many observers have noted the importance of examining those factors that influence skilled workers to leave their home countries. While in some cases, the role of conflict and warfare, and their concomitant devastating effects on basic economic functioning are obvious in pushing those able to leave the country, in other cases, the situation is more complex. Mlambo and Adetiba (2017) note the applicability of neoclassical theory to the migration of South African health professionals, who commonly cite the desire for better wages as a major motivator for seeking employment in developed nations. A junior doctor in South Africa begins with a salary lower than that of some bus drivers (Mlambo and Adetiba, 2017). Other push/pull factors frequently cited by professionals and other skilled workers include poor working conditions and security, and better educational opportunities for their children.

Globalisation has created a strong demand for skilled workers in developed countries (Duncan, 2012), and their more advanced levels of economic growth and development both create and fuel this demand, allowing them the means to attract these professionals. Moreover, as universities have begun recruiting globally, many talented young people have been fleeing African countries for educational opportunities in Europe and North America. Ambitious African youth perceive the US and the UK as having better quality higher education, and are flocking there in large numbers. In 2014, 31,113 students from sub-Saharan Africa comprised 4% of the 886,052 international students in the US (Institute of International Education, 2015). Universities in the developed world are seen as providing more prestigious degrees and better career opportunities.

The private sector can aid in the retention of talented professionals by investing in these students, many of whom are attracted to foreign universities by scholarships. Much as governments and organisations in the developed world often finance the education of talented employees in such critical sectors as health, technology and engineering in exchange for a certain period of service, companies operating in African countries can sponsor scholarships that require students to return to work in their home countries for a specified period of time after graduating. Such solutions benefit companies as well as the students by providing them with educated insiders, thus reducing the expenses involved in importing and training staff that may be less familiar with local conditions.

### *Can Remittances Aid in Sustainable Development?*

One way in which international migration has been helpful to African economic growth is through remittances, the monies sent home to family members by departed workers. Remittances increase household consumption and provide insurance against food shortages and natural disasters. Countries in Northern Africa, particularly Morocco, Algeria and Egypt, receive significant influxes from remittances, and Eastern African countries such as Somalia are also heavily dependent on these monies, as are Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana in the west. Average annual remittances per migrant reach almost US$1,200 per year, representing 3% of GDP and 27% of exports on average per country, compared to 1.9% of GDP for all developing countries (IFAD, 2017b). Remittances often form an even more significant share of GDP, such as in Liberia, where they account for 31%, Comoros (20%), and the Gambia (22%) (IFAD, 2017b).

Remittances from African migrants comprised 6% of worldwide remittances in 2015, with total money transfers to home regions through formal channels reaching US$35.2 billion. It is estimated that including monies sent through informal channels quadruples that amount (IFAD, 2017b). However, the US$134.4 billion in annual transfers by African migrants to their homes from 2011–2015 is a small figure compared to the estimated US$50 billion in financial flows out of the continent (Kar and Cartwright-Smith, 2008). Additionally, operation costs are higher for money transfers in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions, with an average cost of 9.8% to send as little as US$200; in some cases, such as Ghana, this rises as high as 16% (World Bank, 2017). Several high-income countries are considering taxation of outward remittances to discourage migration and raise their own faltering revenues (Malit and Naufal, 2016). Moreover, although expected to recover in 2017, over the past two years, economic difficulties in Europe and North America have trickled down to Africa, resulting in a decline of remittances estimated at 6.1% in 2016 (World Bank, 2017). In addition to the slow economic growth in remittance-sending countries, other issues affecting the inflows of migrant monies include a reduction in commodity prices, especially oil, and the diversion of remittances to informal channels.

One means of enhancing the benefits of remittances is to reduce the exorbitant fees involved in sending money to African countries, which is enabled by the near-monopolies held by only a few companies who control such transfers. The majority of international remittances to Africa are channelled through a few large international money transfer agencies, which often work exclusively with banks and post offices. The World Bank has established a sustainable development goal target of 3% (World Bank, 2017); however, as noted above, the average cost of sending US$200 is significantly higher across sub-Saharan Africa. Of the total official payments for the entire region of Western Africa, 70% are handled by one Money Transfer Organisation (MTO). In Nigeria, nearly 80% of transfers are handled by a single MTO; this MTO prohibits other MTOs from forming agreements with banks, which are the sole remittance payers in the country (IFAD, 2017b). Regulatory environments often prevent other non-banking financial institutions from making transfers; thus few participate, and many banks do not cater to lower-income individuals. The issue of high operations costs particularly affects the ability of the several million migrants within Africa to send remittances; moreover, some countries also restrict financial access to citizens and legal residents, thus making it even more difficult to send money home. As a result, a good portion of intra-African remittances are accomplished through informal channels, although this option is not available for remittances from outside the continent.

Clearly, in order to improve this situation, it is necessary to both break the monopolies held by these MTOs and reduce the exclusivity of the process to increase financial access for lower-income individuals. This is an area in which the private sector can be hugely impactful in collaborating with governments and NGOs to provide cheaper alternatives. Reducing the costs of money transfers would increase the remittances sent by migrants, in turn making more resources available to recipient households. A number of countries, beginning with Kenya in 2007, but now including South Africa and much of East and West Africa, are seeking to increase financial access by leveraging remittance transfers through the use of mobile telephones, which are widely accessible and provide a less formal means of accessing funds sent from relatives (IFAD, 2017b; Mohapatra and Ratha, 2011; World Bank, 2017). The wider adoption and availability of innovative mobile-money transfer and branchless banking technologies for domestic transfers would greatly improve the system of remittances and broader financial services in Africa, thus allowing people to send smaller amounts of money and send money more often. These services can be expanded to incorporate inter-country money transfers as well, which would increase access to financial services such as low-cost savings and credit products (Mohapatra and Ratha, 2011; Clifton, 2012).

The participation of the private sector continues to be critical in providing cheaper money transfers. In some sub-regions, a few telecommunications corporations that operate across countries have already helped facilitate the process by offering cross-border remittances. In partnership with CitiBank and Standard Chartered Bank, ZainZap allows its customers to send money to any bank in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and to receive money from any bank account in the world (Mohapatra and Ratha, 2011). In 2015, the Finnish digital payments platform company MONI created a microbanking program called Pennanen. This program makes it easier for migrants to send and receive money, and helps streamline administrative processes for governments; it has grown to include thousands of refugees (Heath, 2016). The expansion of these cheaper cross-border and international services is urgently needed to reduce remittance costs so that more of this money can be applied to the sustainable development of African homes and businesses. Policies designed to increase financial sector development would also extend the reach of remittances by encouraging greater competition among banks. It would also stimulate the growth and expansion of alternative providers such as microfinance institutions or credit cooperatives. The potential for private sector involvement need not be limited to large, multinational corporations, as seen in the case of WorldRemit, an online remittance business founded by a Somalian immigrant to the UK in 2010. WorldRemit operates in 50 countries to help migrants send money home through mobile technology, cash pickups, or bank account deposits (LSE Business Review, 2017).

A number of policymakers and observers have also suggested increasing the role of African post offices, rural banks, and microfinancing institutions in remittances by having them partner with destination-country institutions and companies to extend existing money-order facilities to international remittances (Mohapatra and Ratha, 2011). These localised institutions can incorporate new technologies into their services to create integrated management information systems and establish small-scale banking operations, such as basic savings accounts for the payment of remittances and deposits of smaller savings amounts. Collaboration between the European Commission and several UN and World Bank organisations, among others, has resulted in the African Postal Financial Services Initiative (APFSI), which aims to facilitate competition in the African remittance market by promoting and enabling post offices in Africa to offer remittances and financial services (IFAD, 2017a). This project seeks to reduce the cost of remittances to and within the African continent as well as reduce transaction times, broaden the network of rural locations involved in money transfers, and deepen the range of financial services available to rural areas, such as savings, loans and insurance products (IFAD, 2017a). The private sector can increase its participation in this process by forming partnerships with the rural banks and microfinancers to offer cheaper remittance costs and expand financial services. The rural areas are a critical area for private sector development, as helping farmers extend remittance funds further increases the growth and development of smaller farms and fosters a successful agricultural system with reliable access to financing and robust markets (IFC, 2011).

Revenue from remittances in hard currency can be applied more directly to aid sustainable development through their use as collateral to raise financing. The securitisation of future remittance flows can increase the access of African banks and firms to international capital markets, and can also fund longer term development and infrastructure projects. On a smaller scale, studies have indicated that remittances contribute to sustainable development even on a household level by being leveraged into funding for food, housing, education, land purchases and small business development. A countries' economic growth can therefore be directly affected by remittance levels through consumption and investment patterns; in turn, the increased spending on food, health and education contributes to long-term well-being and productivity for households and individuals (Clifton, 2012).

More than half of the households in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria receiving remittances from outside Africa are among the wealthiest 40% of their populations (Ratha, 2011). In Eritrea, where a quarter of the population lives abroad, a study by Kifle (2007) demonstrated a relationship between household income increases based on remittances and the ratio of educated people in an area. In Nigeria and Uganda, households receiving remittances from outside Africa have nearly twice the number of household members with a secondary education, and nearly three times the number of university-educated members than those not receiving remittances (Clifton, 2012). The World Bank found that Ghanaian households receiving remittances spend less money on food and as much as 33% more on education (Adams et al., 2008). A similar study focused on Kenya and Nigeria observed that more than half of total remittance spending is invested in homebuilding, land purchases and farm improvements, while in Senegal, more than half is spent on food, education, and health care (Randazzo and Piracha, 2014; Ratha, 2011). Remittances also increase access to information and communication technology, as seen in Burkina Faso, where approximately 66% of households receiving international remittances have access to a mobile phone, compared with only about 41% of others; 14% own computers compared to 2% among non-recipients (Clifton, 2012).

The private sector's collaboration with governments to expand banking and financial industries is critical to this process. In Algeria, for example, over a dozen private sector banks have been established since the country opened to private operators, fostering competition to reduce remittance costs and maximise those funds through small investments (IFC, 2011). Further involvement is needed by the private sector to both lower costs and expand the reach of financial services to rural areas and other populations who currently lack access to banking services.

## THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND MIGRANT REFUGEES

While remittances can be a significant resource for economic development in developing countries, the current migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and Europe has exacerbated the recent economic decline and overwhelmed many job markets. Many countries have made efforts to absorb these refugees, yet numerous people remain interred in camps and health facilities, creating a burden for the host countries and leaving a social and economic vacuum in the places they have left behind.

There is a growing sense among many members of the private sector that we can no longer rely on the traditional methods and organisations to deliver effective humanitarian aid and integrate refugees into European societies. Moreover, it is recognised that sustainable development involves more than resettling and absorbing these refugees; it also involves delivering security, stability, and economic opportunities to poor and fragile communities, thereby enhancing local markets and preventing people from having to flee their lives. While local governments are feeling overwhelmed by the migrant influxes, and have largely failed to develop any sustainable solutions for their settlement and integration into the community, the private sector has played a pivotal role in assisting vulnerable migrants and affected communities.

Beyond the provision of critical goods and services, the private sector can increase its role in mitigating the economic burden created by refugees. This can be done through providing employment and business opportunities, creating innovative business models that are both profitable and deliver social impact, and leveraging their networks and relationships with governments and aid organisations to advocate for policies that improve conditions for refugees as well as benefitting host communities and businesses (Huang, 2017). For example, IKEA has introduced initiatives to bring renewable energy to refugee camps in Jordan (Huang, 2017), while in partnership with UNHCR, the Vodafone Foundation has created an easily assembled digital instant classroom for use among refugees in areas where electricity and Internet connectivity are lacking or unreliable. Other companies are focusing on helping to better integrate the migrants into social and economic life. European software maker SAP is producing a free smartphone application that would help migrants arriving in Germany to navigate bureaucracy and assist their registration; while the German real estate firm LEG has approached the migrant issue as an opportunity to rejuvenate towns with declining populations, and has made about 450 flats available for migrants (Reuters, 2015). Similarly, Starbucks has committed to hire and employ 10,000 refugees worldwide (Huang, 2017), and refugees account for around 30% of US company Chobani's total workforce (Gelles, 2016). In 2015, Chobani's CEO, an immigrant from Turkey named Hamdi Ulukaya, founded the Tent Foundation to help other companies effectively integrate refugees into global work forces (Gelles, 2016), and Cisco, IBM and Salesforce are among other global operators who have joined the organisation's efforts.

In addition to directly providing employment and business opportunities, global companies can influence subsidiaries and partners to similarly participate by creating incentives to hire refugees and source from refugee-owned businesses or local companies that employ significant numbers of refugees. They can also promote policies that reduce restrictions on work, property ownership and business registration, and develop education and language and work skills among migrants. Integrating refugees into local labour and business markets improves the economic impact of migration for the host communities, and generates resources that enable the migrants to contribute to sustainable development in their countries of origin through the monies sent home to families.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined impacts of African migration patterns on the continent's economic development, with a focus on ways the private sector can increase its participation to improve migrant outcomes. Forces in the private sector, such as philanthropists, private companies and other non-governmental organisations, have often provided support for new migrants and refugees through different initiatives involving accommodation, education, employment, and business opportunities. Although migration causes a skill shortage in many African countries, it also creates opportunities for sustainable development, particularly at the household level, where funds transferred through remittances have been applied not only to satisfy basic nutritional and health needs, but also to improve housing, education and incomes, thus engendering the seeds of wealth. The private sector's involvement is critical to this process, particularly through investment in African education and health care services. The private sector is also involved in business opportunities and expanding banking and other financial services to those who have long been excluded from participation in wider market activities.

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