

RURAL MIGRATION AND THE NEW DYNAMICS OF STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF MIGRATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has a long history of internal and international migration. In 2015, UNDESA estimated that about 33 million of Africans were living outside their country of nationality, representing 14% of international migrants worldwide. These numbers mask substantial differences between migration flows originating from North Africa and SSA. While in the first case the great majority of migrants cross the continental borders to reach Europe, people in SSA tend to move mostly to neighbouring countries or within the region. While African overseas migration makes the breaking news and generate heated discussions worldwide, yet a stubborn reality is that SSA migration mostly takes place within Africa and is likely to remain as such in the future. SSA is « in motion », but mainly within the limits of the continent.

In relative terms, migration rates in Africa remained stable around 2% over the last 20 years. However, the demographic transition in the region has resulted in an unprecedented growth of the population, with the absolute numbers of intra-African migrants reaching about 16 million in 2015. Official estimates neither include the significant unrecorded migration within the continent, nor its substantial internal and mostly rural-urban migration flows. Indeed, despite the size and the political relevance of internal migratory flows, estimated globally to be six times greater than international migration, accurate data and statistics are still quite limited. Although the common wisdom considers sedentariness of rural societies as the norm, empirical evidence tends to show that mobility is much more widespread than it is often assumed.

MIGRATION IS PART OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Migration is deeply embedded in the permanent process of change of every society. In world's history, and long before the general development of national states, migration between and across continents and regions has always been a critical component of structural transformation. The progressive shift of humankind from rural societies to cities has been fueled by a continuous process of rural-urban migration which progressively accelerated over the last two centuries and has spread worldwide.

In certain circumstances, migration is not a choice. It can result from the impossibility of people to sustain their livelihoods in the places where

they live, due to poverty, food insecurity, or adverse conditions related to environmental issues or conflicts (or, in the African past, colonial coercion). In these contexts of migration by necessity or forced migration, people may likely prefer to stay if they could. If not, they can decide to return home after some time away when this option exists.

But migration is more often a process where rural households try to adapt and manage risk, where they innovate, diversify their activities and livelihoods, and adopt new life styles. Migration can be temporary, permanent, or circular between different places. It can be selective and

The data challenge

Understanding the extent and nature of migration is a difficult objective because mobility is most often an obstacle to measurement and statistics. Information about migration dynamics in SSA is even more difficult due to the weaknesses of many national statistical systems: limited human and budget resources impact the availability and quality of data and its updating. In addition to estimated numbers of migrants, essential disaggregated data on migrants' characteristics (age, gender, rural or urban location, occupations and skills, working conditions and wages, and social protection) is very fragmented and unreliable at national, regional and international levels.

There is a major difference between data on international migration and data on domestic migration. For international migration, the United Nations Population Division is the major source of reference; it uses data from national censuses to estimate international migrant stocks. However, census-based data are often uneven in terms of content and quality, or lack questions about migration, particularly temporary migration. Also based on census data completed by national population register records, the Global Bilateral Migration Database (GBMD) managed by the World Bank has more recently increased the potential to assess long-term migration trends. The database contains bilateral migration population (observed stocks) for 50 SSA countries for each decade from 1960 to 2000.

Temporary and transit migration are not reported, which explains the lack of information about migration from SSA to North Africa. These two types of migration are partly included in informal migration data for which IOM provides a useful approach and information sources. Short-term (i.e. for less than 12 months) and seasonal migration remains difficult to capture. Similarly, labour migration as well as reliable estimates of the economically active migrant population at the regional level are still largely lacking - despite efforts and ongoing initiative by ILO to develop labour migration modules in censuses and to implement labor force surveys (Zimbabwe is the only country in SSA).

only concern one household's member when the others continue to live and work at home, or involve the entire household.

Even if migration might be challenging, especially in the short run, it is potentially positive for migrants because it may open a space of opportunities, give access to new options, and facilitate their economic and social mobility. It can benefit both countries of origin and destination. At destination, migrants can act as agents of development and provide their labour force and skills. At origin, migration can reduce pressure over natural resources and foster more efficient allocation of rural la-

Internal migration has received less attention. Even if some data is also available through censuses, with the same limitations, most of the information relies on case studies. Only a limited number of countries have developed specific surveys on migrant households and on the measurement of remittances. Overall research on internal migration relies on indirect sources, notably on household surveys which are not specifically designed to capture migration, like the Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) - implemented in 9 SSA countries for different years - or information from Health and Demographic Surveillance Systems (HDSS). The major constraint of these sources is the limited possibility for cross-country analysis due to non-standardized questions and methodology.

An attempt to conduct surveys specifically focused on migration-related issues led to the Migration and Remittances Households Surveys (MRHS) project, coordinated by the World Bank and implemented in between 2009 and 2010. Although very useful, this initiative involved only a limited number of sub-Saharan African countries (Burkina Faso, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and South Africa). Furthermore, in all the considered countries, MRHS have been performed only once, resulting in a dataset referring to a single point in time. The lack of panel data, allowing to build time series and study the evolution of migration dynamics and determinants over time, reduce the relevance of the collected information. Furthermore, the absence or scarcity of data on issues, such as circular migration and use of remittances for agricultural investments, limit the extent to which this data could be used to study the interrelations between migration and structural transformation in SSA. IPUMS-International or USAID's Demographic and Health Survey Program are other initiatives that try to harmonize and provide data on population from censuses or specific surveys worldwide.

A better understanding of migration flows in SSA, their patterns and characteristics, as well as the opportunities and challenges they represent would definitely need a coordinated and substantial effort of African countries and the international community to collect and analyse data on rural migration.

bour. Diaspora organizations and return migrants can help rural areas through investments, skills and technology transfers, know-how and social networks. Remittances directly contribute to the diversification of income sources and risk mitigation. As such, they help to escape poverty and food insecurity. On both sides, migration contributes to the overall process of economic diversification and to social change.

THE UNIQUE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

SSA's population is expected to increase by 1.4 billion by 2050 which is an unprecedented demographic push. Despite a strong urbanization process, SSA remains a rural continent. Its rural population keeps growing, resulting in a challenging densification of rural areas, with direct impacts on rural livelihoods. This unique population dynamic translates into a massive increase of the labour force. This represents both an opportunity for growth but also a challenge for SSA countries which will need a conducive economic and institutional environment to foster economic diversification, boost job creation and absorb new labour market entrants in the next decades.

However, a singular feature of SSA's economic transformation is that urbanization developed without industrialization. Cities' growth has been mostly supported by the expansion of informal activities which has resulted in limited increase of average income, and sometimes persistent poverty levels. A weak fiscal base limits the capacity of cities and governments to provide the necessary public goods at the required scale.

In this unique context, migration and rural migration in SSA cannot develop along the same lines as the historical pattern observed in other regions of the world, where a definitive rural-urban migration directly fed the transformation process. In today's globalized world, massive overseas migration will not play the same historical role than in Europe. Between 1850 and 1930, in a context of European political hegemony and through coercion, about 60 million European people emigrated to the "new worlds", facilitating European transition and the decline of poverty. As a result, the conditions of SSA's structural transformation are leading to renewed processes of change and new characteristics for migration.

SSA'S RURAL MIGRATION IS SHAPING NEW LIVELIHOODS AND TERRITORIAL DYNAMICS

Fueled by this growing and still dominant rural population, SSA's rural migration activates different mechanisms. The adaptation of rural livelihoods to a changing environment includes the diversification of activities and an increased mobility, and rural migration is a core component of

new occupational and spatial dynamics. Despite regional differences, empirical evidence suggests that rural households are overwhelmingly engaged in agriculture, but most of them are also engaged in other activities, and 50 to 80% of them have at least one migrant member.

African migration has become a more complex process, with more categories of people in motion, going to a larger number of destinations, both within their own country and to other African countries, or moving in steps – first internally and then internationally. If rural-urban migration is a prominent feature related to urbanization, limited formal employment opportunities and a broad precarious informal sector in most African cities foster propensity for mobility, not just into towns, but also out of them. Rural-rural migration and important seasonal and circular migration – both internal and international – also significantly contribute to the distribution of the population and the reshaping of livelihoods.

In the last decades, renewed and diversified migration patterns have thrived between capital cities, small and regional towns, and their rural hinterlands, creating new functional spaces that are shaped by social and economic networks which can often cross national borders. These dynamics strengthen the territorial fabric of SSA countries and regional integration. They are also blurring boundaries between rural and urban areas. Rural-urban linkages, embedded within strong social, cultural and political dimensions are gaining a growing importance. The static and questionable "rural" and "urban" categories no longer capture the spatial and occupational complexity of rural and urban livelihoods.

UNVEILING THE INTERPLAY OF COMPLEX DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

The decision to migrate is complex and influenced by a myriad of interlinked factors. Considering the role of rural migration in SSA's transformation process, it is crucial to unravel the mechanisms at play, and identify their drivers and their combination within the diversity of regional contexts.

Migration is often perceived as an erratic phenomenon largely driven by a desperate move to better-off cities in order to escape poverty, or by forced movement related to adverse local conditions. This perception, which partly reflects the traditional "push-pull" model of migration, is insufficient to fully capture the complexity of migration in contemporary Africa. It ignores the ambivalent and complex relationships between poverty and migration and misses the understanding of the agency of African migrants, even when they face enormous constraints. Overall, this vision fails to account for "non-economic" cultural and social or political factors, which play a decisive role in determining not only the direction

but also the characteristics of the migration flow (migrants' gender, age, education), as well as the type of movements. Many migrants are not only "driven" by effective labour demand, but also by perceived economic opportunities, educational or socio-cultural motivations. Migrants have diverse socio economic profiles and different expectations, responding to diverse opportunities according to economic, political and cultural circumstances—changing over time, sometimes under the influence of migration itself.

This calls for a more comprehensive approach considering the different socioeconomic, political, demographic, cultural and environmental dimensions of the drivers of migration and the time, geographical, and social scales they operate in. This perspective on complexity also invites to a conception where drivers of migration do not work in isolation to initiate or to shape the migration process. On the contrary, drivers of migration generally operate in combination, in what can be called "drivers complexes", which shape the specific form and structure of population movements.

Blurred rural and urban categories

Understanding rural migration as well as evolving population trends is complicated by the lack of an internationally agreed definition of rural areas. Although rural areas were historically the matrix of economic and social development and have always been at the centre of the development debate, they do not have a clear-cut definition: what is rural is what is not urban.

According to the UN Statistics Division, the rural population can be identified as a residual number after subtracting urban population from the total population. However, an additional difficulty is that cities do not have any standardised definition. The definition of urban areas varies broadly between countries. The main component is the size of population, with a threshold above which an agglomeration becomes urban. Other criteria are used, such as the percentage of households engaged in agriculture, administrative boundaries or service provision, and a mixed approach is sometimes adopted. This categorization issue has resulted in an ongoing debate on the right definition of rural areas, to which the FAO is contributing.

However, beyond the difficulty to set a standard definition, the idea that there is a clear division between an urban and a rural area misshapes the reality of what rural, urban, growing peri-urban and "rurban" areas are today. Remote rural areas still exist, particularly in SSA, but generally the improved access to ICTs, information, and to transportation networks, as well as better educational standards foster the movement of people, blurring the limits of the old rural – urban divide. Changing settlement, more integrated food systems, commuting and migration patterns and new lifestyles contribute to an interface where often population and activities cannot anymore be spatially categorised in a strict manner.

AN ATLAS ON PATTERNS, DYNAMICS, AND DRIVERS OF RURAL MIGRATION

This atlas on rural migration in sub-Saharan Africa adopts this comprehensive approach. Its primary focus is on intra-African migration, both within and between countries, and the very specific situation of internally displaced persons and refugees has not been specifically addressed. The first part of the atlas provides a global picture of migration dynamics, highlighting the contrasted patterns and diversity of migration in SSA and its different regions, as well as their potential for development, with a specific attention to rural-out migration. This part mostly relies on literature review and international databases completed by specific existing household surveys.

Drawing from a diversity of case studies, the second part aims to provide a better understanding of the importance of local conditions. Migration drivers and motivations are place-based and the diverse and multifaceted factors that shape sub-Saharan African migration dynamics reflect the diversity of the continent. In many countries and regions, rural migration is a complementary resource for households which are most of the time engaged in family farming. Their level of income is shaped by their farm assets, their productivity, their type of production and their connection to markets, as well as their environmental, economic and institutional conditions. It also depends on the diversification of their livelihoods linked to both their financial and social capital and the existing socio-economic opportunities. Therefore, the case studies highlight this diversity reflected in migration patterns and drivers.

In West Africa, migration dynamics are mostly concentrated in the sub-region. They reveal different systems which largely depend upon diaspora and forms of circulation that have directly contributed to maintaining the viability of local and regional economies. Parallel to strong migration overseas and in the region, Senegal has developed intense internal migration which provides answers to local constraints and the increasing difficulty of migration to Europe. In Zambia, back and forth movements of population between urban and rural areas have followed the dynamics of the mining industry over time. In South Africa, rural people migrate as a result of unemployment and poor social services. These migratory patterns are linked to a persistent rural-urban gap, rooted in the legacy of apartheid, which broke up local agriculture and economies. In Madagascar, rural migration is broadly oriented towards other rural areas. Migrants search for jobs and land, and struggle to open up new land frontiers.

The third part of the atlas illustrates the non-deterministic relation between a driver of migration and a migration pattern, highlighting the relevance of drivers complexes.

Migration patterns of rural families can deeply and quickly evolve over time as shown in the case of Mozambique. Shifting and relatively complex combinations of drivers are rooted locally and in the political economy of national and regional spaces. They are also linked to more global factors. Among them, climate change entertains a complex relationship with rural migration. Self-reinforcing, sometimes opposed, trends and unexpected disruptions are at play. Climatic events almost always combine with other natural, social, political, economic and technological factors, affecting population already vulnerable due to the fragility of their livelihoods.

What does the future hold now for rural migration in SSA? The complexity of the drivers of rural migration makes it impossible to predict how many people will migrate, why, who they will be, or where they will go. Yet, it is possible to explore how this complex system of interdependent forces could evolve, and to engage in proactive decisions and actions. Under the current international conditions and due to the economic, social, political and cultural characteristics of neighbouring Europe or Middle East, SSA rural migrants are unlikely to be in a favorable position to migrate out of Africa. The future nature of rural migration in the context of a booming rural population is one of the greatest challenge and uncertainty for the future prosperity of the continent. It calls for innovative strategies for agriculture and rural development, for harnessing the potential of migration for development, and for improving the skills and capacity of migrants in order to help them to become pro-active decision-makers.

INFORMING STRATEGIES TO HARNESS MIGRATION INTO A DESIRABLE PROCESS OF RURAL TRANSFORMATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Disentangling this complex relationship is necessary but not sufficient for the design of adapted multi-faceted strategies in order to turn African migration dynamics into a development process of SSA.

The diverse migration patterns of rural individuals and families are responses to a diversity of constraints and contexts, and they are part of the structural transformation of SSA. They are all contributing to the reshaping of national and regional spaces and to the emergence of new functional territories. As such, they call for a necessary territorial approach in development strategies, avoiding the excessive sectorial segmentation of public policies and taking advantage of growing rural-urban relationships shaped by migration dynamics.

The spreads in this atlas offer elements of reflection about possible strategies, with the aim to inform public decision and action. They show that migration has been, is and will remain an evolving adaptive process of human agency. The complexity of rural migration calls for better policy

coherence between migration and sectoral policies. It calls for strategies for inclusive growth that create conditions to leave in peace and prosperity, by fostering rural-urban linkages, creating income generating opportunities and diversification to off-farm activities in rural areas, promoting investments in agriculture and rural development, increasing resilience of rural livelihoods, fostering climate change adaptation, and promoting territorial and integrated approaches to develop sustainable food systems. It also requires a political commitment to look at migration as an opportunity for the development of both countries of origin and destination and to promote a better management of migratory flows, through regular and safe migration channels.

Migrants can be agents of development and policies that harness this potential are of utmost importance. In the past, migration has been largely shaped by contingent factors and long term trends, but its future can fully be built by a commitment to make it the result of a choice not a necessity.

Note:

A selection of references is provided in annex for every spread (limited to five references) and for the introduction.

All the sources and documentation used for the figures are also presented in annex, as well as technical notes when needed.

Fig. 0.1: Frequency of criteria in the definition of «rural»

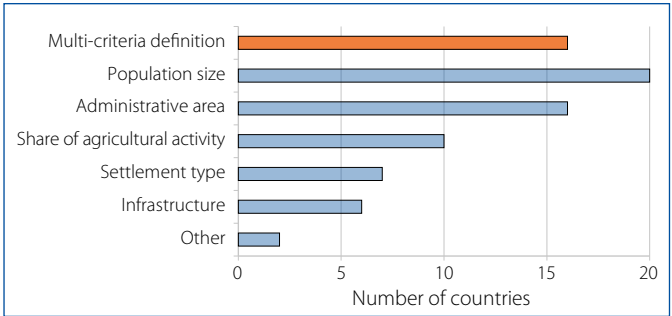


Fig. 0.2: African States and case studies

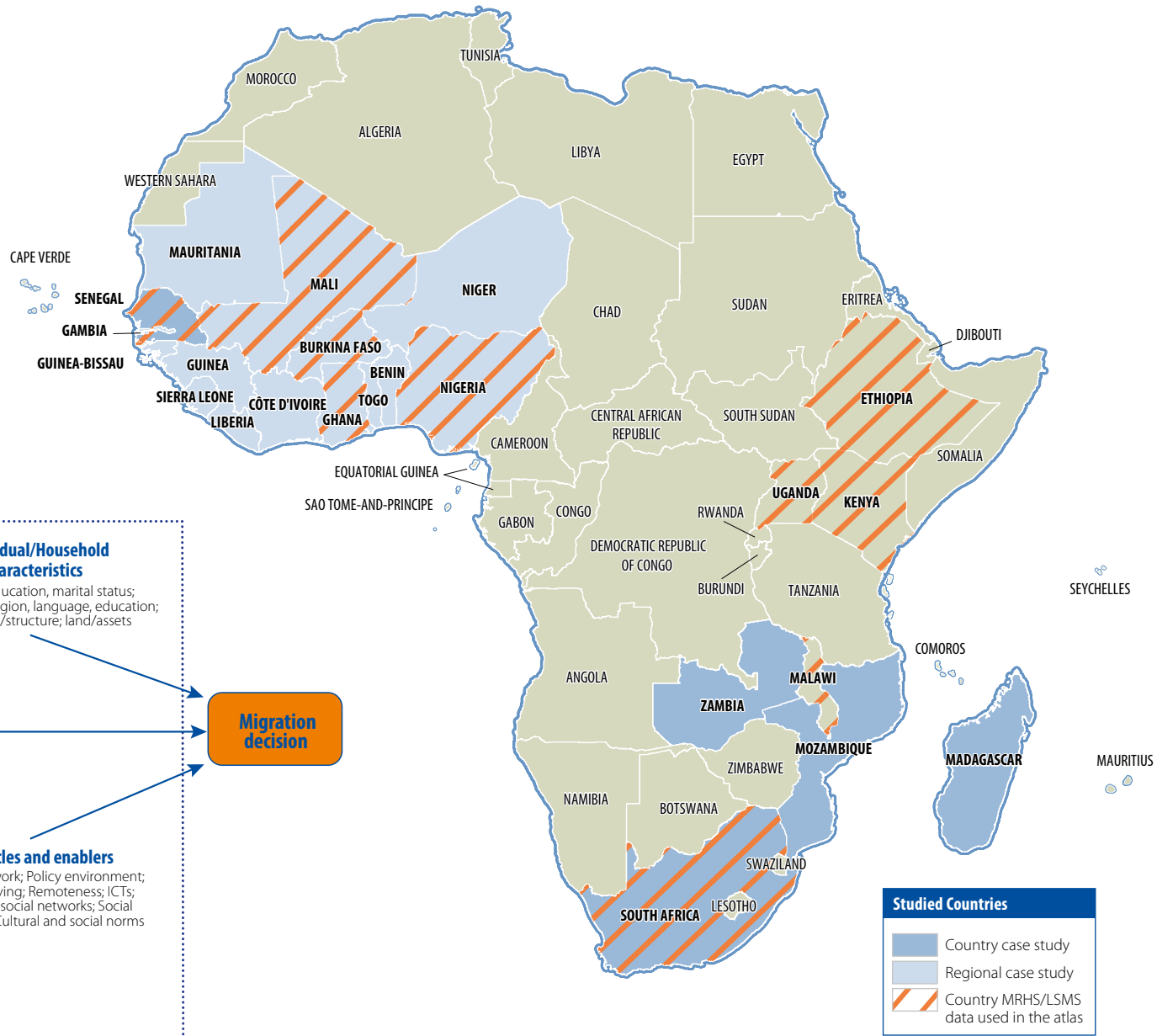


Fig. 0.3: The multifaceted drivers of rural migration

