Regional Integration and Migrant Labour as Poverty Alleviation Strategies in Southern Africa: A Case Study of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Africa has numerous regional integration groupings, with at least two or more or more in each sub-region. Many African countries are members of more than one regional groupings. In theory, memberships of more than one regional grouping should be resulting in African countries and/or their inhabitants benefiting from preferential economic integration. Regional integration between African countries is a spring board of reduction of inequality or poverty within and among African countries if properly implemented. However, the reality that follows the conclusion of the regional integration agreements is the promulgation of xenophobic and/or domestic anti-migration laws. This article argues for the opening of borders and adoption of pro-migration policies in Southern Africa as a means to allow for free flow of trained human capital between countries. In conclusion, it is argued that regional migration could contribute towards poverty eradication, growth of the economies and ultimate reduction in inequalities within and among countries in the sub-region.

Keywords: Migration; regional integration; southern Africa; migrant labour; Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1960s, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) became the champion of regional integration known for its proposal of the division of Africa into regions for the purposes of economic development (Matthews, 2003). Baldwin (2006) states that the positive model of the domino theory of regionalism asserts that a nation's decision to join a Regional Economic Community (REC) is determined by its domestic political equilibrium that balances pro-membership and anti-membership forces. The theory associates the pro-joiners with the nation's exporters that gain from preferential access if the nation joins and suffer from discrimination if the nation stays out (Baldwin, 2006). A country makes a balancing of interests exercise through a cost-benefit analysis of some sort.

Geographic location justifies membership of more than one REC and also potentially allows a country to profit from the benefits offered by its economic integration in the different RECs (Nene, 2014). Many countries in Africa try to reap benefits from preferential integration by entering several agreements (Sukuta, 2016). The overlapping membership can be viewed as a hub and spokes system with the individual country as the hub and the other countries with which it has an overlapping Regional Trade Agreement (RTA) as the spokes countries. In the context of increasing bilateralism, the hub country through multi RTA membership reduces the probability of becoming the victim of trade discrimination from the spokes countries that are non-members of the hub's original RTA (Afesorgbor and van Bergjeik, 2011).

Another benefit of multiple memberships in RTAs is the ability to shift law-making initiatives from one international venue to another which may not offer the same advantages. This is referred to as regime shifting (Gathii, 2009). Essentially, the existence of multiple, discrete regimes, any one of which may plausibly serve as a site for future policy development, leaves considerable room for manoeuvring by different states seeking to maximise their respective interests (Gathii, 2009).

Theoretically, the deepening of regional integration is not only limited to preferential intra-trade within the RECs, but also include the opening of the borders or relaxation of immigration laws to facilitate the free movement of people between countries. Integration allows for people to access employment opportunities in other countries within the region which they ordinarily would have no access to. The movement of people is beneficial to the receiving country in a sense that it has access to skilled and qualified personnel. Furthermore, the country that is exporting human capital benefits through remittances from migrant workers which also address unemployment and poverty in exporting countries.

While an array of studies have highlighted the contribution of remittances to poverty reduction, predominantly in countries with relatively long histories of labour migration (see generally Mundaca, 2005; Jongwanich, 2007; Tevera and Chikada, 2009), there is dearth of research on the Southern African sub-region generally, and countries such as Zimbabwe in particular, that have experienced lower levels of labour migration until recently. This study seeks to draw a link between regional integration, labour migration and poverty alleviation. The paper argues that anti-migration laws and policies limit the social and economic growth of nation states within the Southern African sub-region.

The paper is arranged as follows. The second section reviews regional integration and migration in Southern Africa through highlighting a brief history of intra-regional migration in the sub-region and outlining the benefits of expatriate employment. The third section reviews the migration governance and regulatory framework within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The forth section analyses the potential impacts of remittances on household economies in Zimbabwe. The last section makes concluding remarks.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Brief history of intra-regional migration in Southern Africa

By the end of 2013, more than 232 million people globally were estimated to be migrants, of which 19 million were estimated to be in Africa (International Organisation of Migration, 2014). Southern Africa has a long history of intra-regional migration, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century (Cush *et al.*, 2005). Migration was probably the single most important factor tying together all of the various colonies and countries of the sub-continent into a single regional labour market during the twentieth century (Cush *et al.*, 2005). Cross-border migration for employment within Southern Africa sub-region was prevalent long before the drawing of colonial boundaries, dating back at least 150 years (Cush *et al.*, 2005). People movement and expatriate employment are not new phenomenon in this sub-region. They predate the conclusion of regional integration agreements in Africa, and they served the purpose which this paper proposes.

Social and economic benefits of expatriate employment

In 2013, the Southern African region recorded over four million migrants, excluding irregular migrants, of which 44 per cent were female and 20 per cent were under 19 years of age (International Organisation of Migration, 2014). By far, the largest number of migrants is found in South Africa (2.4 million, including some 1.5 million from Zimbabwe) followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (447,000) and 361 000 for Zimbabwe (International Organisation of Migration, 2014). This data is inclusive of illegal and/or undocumented immigrants who fled their native countries for various reasons including but not limited to war, political instability political persecution and economic reasons. Unlike legal residents, illegal immigrants live under desperate conditions that may have economic, social and especially psychological ramifications (Campbell, 2006). They are therefore quite illusive due especially to the social networks that protect them from legal apprehension (Campbell, 2006). Though some of them work in the formal sector, their activities are shrouded in relative secrecy and are not always consistent with receiving countries' economic, social and political enhancement (Campbell, 2006). Unless there is policy intervention, there shall be no positive correlation between the number of the migrants and their contribution to the economy of the host countries.

Due to insufficient statistics, it is also difficult to examine the direct effects of skilled immigration in southern Africa (Rasool and Tigere, 2011). However, it may be conjectured that skilled migration contributes significantly towards economic efficiency at the destination. This process affords receiving countries opportunities to employ the best skills, subject to demand and supply factors. The existing set-up, which seems to be largely anti-migration, in most Southern African countries ends up forcing most people to be illegally in their host country. This is detrimental to the socio-economic development of the region. Countries lose on unpaid taxes on the incomes of illegal immigrants who otherwise would be contributing meaningfully if there were legally recognised as working and residing in that country.

Remittances, economic development and poverty reduction

Given the effects of globalisation and the huge amount of money remitted each year, the focus of research gas shifted towards the dynamics of poverty and remittances within the framework of international migration (Campbell, 2008). Before 1970, when poverty was rife and education levels very low in Botswana, emigration to South Africa was an important means of moderating poverty (Campbell, 2008). There is no doubt that that migration plays a critical role in reducing poverty thus improving the socio-economic status of the migrants and/or their dependant through remittances from the host countries back to the country of origin of the migrant.

Available data estimates suggest that approximately 45% to 55% of SADC economic migrants are active remitters, and that the average annual remittance for those that do remit is between US$ 298 and US$ 431 per year (Finmark Trust, 2012). According to the Finmark Trust (2012) fact sheet, the estimated average will vary from country to country. Furthermore, both the proportion of migrants remitting and the average remittance size are affected by such country specific factors as proximity to South Africa, economic crisis in the home country, compulsory remittances for mining sector workers and relative wealth of remitters affect both the proportion of migrants (Finmark Trust, 2012). It is estimated that the total volume of remittances from South Africa into the rest of SADC is between R9.3 billion and R13.0 billion, with a mid-point estimate of around R11.2 billion (Finmark Trust, 2012). Approximately R7.6 billion of these funds were sent via informal channels, based on the proportion of migrants estimated to be undocumented, and thus unable to access formal financial channels (Finmark Trust, 2012).

Within Southern Africa, remittances have long been recognised as an important contributor to the economies of traditional migrant-sending countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique (Pendleton et al., 2006). At the same time, within the south, there is greater inequality between households with and without access to migrant income (Pendleton et al., 2006). Remittances clearly play a vital role in supporting Southern African households. Not only do migrants, whether male or female, demonstrate an unusually high tendency to send money home to their families, but those remittances are fundamental in enabling families to meet their everyday needs (Dobson et al., 2008).

Traditionally in the Southern African region, migrant workers were largely males working in South African mines and commercial farms. However, there is an emerging trend of young and educated female migrant workers who are making equal contribution to the socio-economic contribution and development of their families. Female migrants' remittances, like those of male migrants, play an important role in household livelihoods, contributing to poverty reduction and providing a vital social safety net for many families. It is argued that in the households which send migrants, women's economic migration is no less significant than male economic migration in terms of the role of remittances in securing basic household livelihoods (Ndlovu and Tigere, 2018). Human mobility benefits not only migrants and their families, but their countries of origin and destination as well (Sutherland, 2013). The flow of foreign currency to remittance-receiving countries helps support the balance of payments. This makes it easier for countries to pay for critical imports, gain access to capital markets and pay lower interest rates on sovereign debt.

Generally, remittances contribute to improved standards of living, better access to health care and education and to a less extent are invested in productive activities (Davis and Lopez-Carr, 2010). However, for the developmental potential of remittances to be fully realised, there is need for collaborative effort involving the government, migrant groups, the local community, non-governmental organisations and international organisations to seek ways of encouraging the flow and creating an environment for investing remittances in a more sustainable way (Davis and Lopez-Carr, 2010). These call for policy reforms, governmental cooperation and most importantly the official encouragement of migration within the Southern African region through the promulgation of enabling laws as a paradigm shift from the existing environment which can safely be viewed as being anti-migration and pro-nationalism.

Societal view towards African immigration has to be shaped into being welcoming to avoid the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa. However, to achieve this, an overhaul of the regulatory and legislative framework to align them to the international treaties and/or agreements which in place in the sub-region and Africa generally have to be embarked into sooner than later.

MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK WITHIN THE SADC REGION

It has been established that more regular, legal movement increases the ease with which migrants can send home remittances through legal channels (African Development Bank, 2008). Creative solutions are clearly necessary since efforts to thwart cross-border movements typically come at a high price to the individuals concerned, are politically unpopular, and are usually ineffective (Massey et al., 2015).

Most governments have *de facto* or *de jure* policies towards emigration based on the perceived or actual rate of emigration. Most of these laws and policies are largely protectionist and discourage the movement of persons across borders (Williams, 2002). This nationalistic and inward looking philosophy of nation states is slowly fading away, at least theoretically, to be replaced by development regionalism. The notion of developmental regionalism departs from the concept of a developmental state where the state intervention is seen as crucial to promoting a national development agenda. This concept refers to a concerted efforts from a group of countries within a geographical region to increase the complementary and capacity of the total regional economy as finding the right balance between function and territory (Chandra, 2009).

As the SADC region is moving closer towards free trade - the free movement of capital and goods - and economic integration, the issue of free movement of persons comes into prominence (Williams, 2002). Comparatively, the European integration has so progressed that members have surrendered aspects of their sovereignty to supranational regional institutions while the contrary obtains in the SADC region (Nshimbi and Fioramonti, 2014). Nshimbi and Fioramonti (2014) further argue that an established regional migration governance system than ad hoc and/or individualistic approaches will serve SADC better and efficiently.

The above is not intended to suggest that there are no agreed regional norms and values pertaining to the SADC region. There are regional agreements in respect to migration which still subsist under national laws and policies. The SADC Treaty and Facilitation Protocol (the Protocol) provides for a Southern African regional migration framework. The treaty envisions free regional movement of labour, capital, goods and services. Unfortunately, it is yet to be fully enforced (Kitimbo, 2014). Presently, thirteen (13) SADC member states have signed and adopted it. However, only six (6) members (South Africa, Zambia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana and Swaziland) have ratified it (Kitimbo, 2014).

Nation states within the SADC region have for years acted contrary to the objectives of the Protocol through the adoption of extremely restrictionist and exclusionary immigration policies and laws (Amit and Kriger, 2014). The focus of migration policies and laws within nation states across the world is nationalistic and is premised on enforcement, control and exclusion (Ngandwe, 2013). The ratification and implementation of the Protocol might be as a result of fear of porous borders and uncontrollable migration which may result in illicit activities and promotion of criminal behaviour. These fears are not premised on any conclusive and/or scientific data to an effect that migration results in criminal activities. The fear of the unknown diverts attention from the positive outcomes brought about by increased migration to the economy of the receiving state, improved household economies in sending states which ultimately, more often than not, would lead to the reduction of trans-boundary crimes resulting from unemployment and poverty.

The restrictionist and exclusionary approach to migration currently existing in SADC negates what Pan Africanism is all about and the very exist of the SADC itself. As Ngandwe (2013) succinctly puts it, the approach is repugnant to the exigent objectives of regionalism and globalisation as it hinders the free movement of people with the region. It limits the economic and social growth potential of the nation states within SADC and their inhabitants. Poverty eradication post-2015 would require much more creative and robust ideas to be achieved. Closing of the borders and attempts to keep ‘foreigners’ away is not a solution in dealing with poverty and inequality within SADC. Anti-migration polices and/or laws would only achieve the opposite goals such as increasing undocumented migrants which makes it very difficult to combat crime because migrants are being forced to go underground. In the process, economic growth would be inhibited as undocumented migrants are being excluded from participating in the formal economy, therefore not paying much needed taxes and other government revenues.

Further, it has been observed that good governance and leadership (and the accountability requirements embedded therein) are vital preconditions for Africa’s economic development and social transformation (Muuka and Ezumah, 2015). Regional integration often builds on commitment and mutual trust among states and their leaders. This implies that the political will for binding cooperation among states is more likely to exist when states practice similar types of governance i.e. democracy. However, most African states are relatively young and many are somewhat autocratic in nature, which limits the willingness to hand over sovereignty to a regional body (Thonke and Spliid, 2012). Therefore, the rule of law, democracy and good governance are necessary in attaining deeper regional integration in Southern Africa and Africa in general.

To some extent, poor regionalism can also be due to the region's low developmental capacity which is mainly attributable wide-spread corruption and clientelism (Tavares and Tang, 2011). The SADC region is characterised by acute economic imbalances and inequalities, thus heterogeneity of SADC economies has been viewed as a challenge to regional integration because such economies cannot be integrated, especially given that stronger economies, like South Africa, end up dictating the terms of reference and operation to poorer and weaker members of the regional grouping (Mapuva and Muyengwa-Mapuva, 2014).

Notwithstanding the deepening of integration in the Southern African region, migration due to economic, personal and political circumstances continue to increase. The Zimbabwean economic and political meltdown beginning from 2000 resulted into a rise in Zimbabwe political and economic refugees who earned a living outside the borders of their country. Whether their migration was voluntary or involuntary, the Zimbabwean migrants remitted money to their country. The next section discusses the impacts of remittances on household economies in Zimbabwe.

REMITTANCES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION: IMPACT ON THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIES IN ZIMBABWE

It is increasingly recognised that migrants provide an invaluable resource for development and poverty reduction in their home countries (Mishi and Mudziwapasi, 2014). The most visible and tangible link between migration and development is through the impact of remittances. Indeed, there has been a notable increase in the global flow of remittances over the years (Zhou et al., 2013). While there is a consensus that remittance flows to Africa are increasing, little attention has been paid to the impact of these transfers on poverty alleviation (Tevera and Chikada, 2009).

Zimbabwe experienced a dramatic turn in political and economic fortunes since 1999 which saw the number of people migrating out of the country rise exponentially (Ncube and Houggard, 2010). Migration in some instances acts as a social security mechanism for poor households and/or sudden loss of employment in an economy that had dived into a persistent downward trend in all spheres (Mishi and Mudziwapasi, 2014). Remittances by migrants positively contribute to stability in crisis situations. This is largely because this form of income is constant and has low volatility, which allows households to absorb shocks and economic downturns, acting as a form of insurance for use at a time of urgent need (Harvey, 2007; Suleri and Savage, 2006). While livelihood and survival strategies are diverse and multiple, for many poor people, migration represents a central component of these strategies (Mukwedeya, 2009). Families view migration as a form of portfolio diversification in which remittances thus can be a great positive outcome. Such households invest in migrants leaving with the expectation of returns in the form of remittances (Mishi and Mudziwapasi, 2014).

Research undertaken throughout sub-Saharan Africa has highlighted the importance of earnings from non-farm activities (Reardon et al., 1997; Turner et al., 1993: Carswell, 2002). Income source diversification highly influences the well-being of households in rural areas. This assists in an attempt to generate an adequate and sustainable livelihood that is resilient to shock (D’Haese and Kirsten, 2003). In Zimbabwe, migration income serves as a source of diversified household income. In terms of the proportion of households that receive remittance income, most Zimbabwean households have a least a member outside the country and are receiving remittances (Mukwedeya, 2009).

The vast majority of migrants regularly send back remittances in cash and/or kind. Indeed, the figure is so high that earning money to remit is clearly a major motivator for migration in the first place (Tevera and Chikanda, 2009). This has had significant impact on the national economy of Zimbabwe contributing larger portions to the Gross Domestic Product. The Central Bank of Zimbabwe has noted that the diaspora remittances surged by 200% from 2009-2014 amounting to US$3, 5 billion (Majaka, 2015). A large proportion of household budgets derived from remittance income is used towards daily household expenses such as food, health care, school fees, building and home improvement (Maphosa, 2009). It is undoubted that remittances is playing a significant role in sustaining daily livelihood of many households in Zimbabweans, in a country that has been facing major macroeconomic and political instabilities in the past two decades.

CONCLUSION

Poverty reduction and/or poverty alleviation as argued throughout this paper can be dealt with through regional integration by means of human migration. African governments have a unique opportunity to make the 21st century an African century. The continent has had a relatively good economic growth performance over the past decade. However, there has also been an increase in the absolute number of poor people on the continent and employment creation remains a major challenge. The massive differences in income across countries allow individuals and households to escape from poverty through international migration.

To date, the human and labour rights of migrants and the human development aspects of migration remain inadequately incorporated in national, regional and global development plans and programmes. Even though migration was highlighted in the Millennium Declaration, it was missing from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) despite having a significant and documented impact on key MDG areas. The post-2015 UN Development Agenda provides a unique opportunity to remedy this omission.

Reality is human beings are mobile beings. Any attempt to stifle their movement in search of better livelihood and as an escape valve from poverty is bound to fail and create problems for restrictionist governments. For the human race to achieve common and/or shared sustainable development, human migration should be encouraged as an option to reduce inequality within and between countries. The SADC region must embrace further and deeper integration characterised by free labour migration between member states.

Southern Africa needs a radically different approach to migration management, given the imbalances of the past and the debatable outcomes of current policies, with a view to strengthening sustainable development and regional cohesion. Other African economic regional bodies such as ECOWAS has enforced an ambitious protocol on free movement, residence and establishment as early as 1980. Furthermore, in East Africa, regional cooperation has resulted in a common East African (Matthews, 2003) passport and freely exchangeable currencies throughout the East African Community (EAC). Evidence from other areas of the world shows that a clear regional framework for labour migration is less destabilising than many in Southern African would have us believe.

PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Munck and Hyland (2014) note that regional integration, migration and social transformation are becoming increasingly intertwined. Migrant labour is an integral aspect of international restructuring of capital (Jones and Finlay., 1998). Essentially labour migration and regional integration play a vital role in addressing issues of household poverty through remittances. Similar studies in relative deeper integrated regions of the world such as the European Union, the West African States and the East African Community have revealed the importance of migration and regional integration. There is fewer academic work done on the benefits of regional integration in the SADC regional. Essentially this article may be of importance to international civil servants in the SADC Secretariat and policy makers in individual member states of SADC.

Notwithstanding having been in existence for almost four decade, the SADC region remains a closed one with somewhat resistance to open up borders by its member states in encouraging free movement of people. These official policies are not helping in discouraging xenophobic sentiments prevalent is the regions big and relatively stable economics. Migration remains to be viewed and accepted as a tool for encouraging economic growth through the recruitment of skilled manpower to contribute towards innovation in the receiving states. As a result, SADC end up losing highly skilled manpower to developed countries whom until recently have been receptive of migrants before the growing sentiments of nationalism in the west.

In both the colonial and some decades in the post-colonial era, labour migration in Southern Africa with specific reference to migrating to South African mines was one of the main sources of household income to most families in Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. These case studies provide evidence of how regional movement of labour, both skilled and unskilled can be beneficial to both the receiving state and the labour exporting nations if harnessed properly. It is for these reason that the SADC member states are implored to relook their inward looking restrictive immigration policies. The failure to recognise the importance of being accommodative to migrant labour will result in the continuing brain drain to those countries which value the contribution of migrants in attaining economic growth.

One major limitation of this study is that it is a review article focusing only on one SADC country. It is recommended that more studies, especially those involving primary data gathering amongst expatriate communities cutting across more than one SADC nations to understand the extent of the contribution of remittances to household economies be carried. Future studies should also investigate the leakages arising due to restrictive migration polices in the SADC region. Such studies will be helpful in giving much clearer picture to policy makers on the reforms that ought to be introduced at a regional level in SADC for implementation by individual states.

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