

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 3, Session 3.2, Report 01

Proceedings of Session 3.2 (Meeting Room2)

Policy and Institutional Coherence in Migration and Development Within Government

Chairperson: Gemma Adaba

Speakers: Susan Martin and Denis Drechsler

Rapporteur: Frans Bouwen assisted by Wilkamp?

The Chair began by speaking to a set of questions / considerations to guide the discussions and outcomes for the session. These are as follows:

1. What do we mean by “policy coherence”? What are the ways to achieve policy coherence in developing countries?
2. There are a number of actors involved in government especially in terms of achieving policy coherence on the nexus between migration and development. Which agencies of government address migration and development issues? Are these agencies able to talk to each other and coordinate their efforts?
3. Who are the relevant stakeholders to achieving policy coherence? Is government able to bring in other relevant stakeholders from civil society? Who should these stakeholders be? What best practices may be cited?

The first resource person to speak was Prof. Susan Martin on the topic of policy and institutional coherence. She noted the progress made by both source and destination countries in integrating migration and development concerns in their National Development Plans as well as in their Poverty Reduction Strategies. She observed a lot of changes in this area although the achievements have been described as spotty.

Prof. Martin remarked that poverty reduction strategies in relation to the nexus between migration and development seek to identify the root causes of migration relevant to underdevelopment. Lack of economic opportunities at migrant sending nations was cited as the leading cause of migration. Likewise, there is an increasing attention to gender inequality as part of the push factors that are causing migration where women do not have access to social safety nets and proper insurance in receiving countries.

According to Prof. Martin, another area where migration and development impact on each other is capitalizing on migrants and their resources for development. She noted that source nations have established agencies that sought not only to extend services to migrants abroad, but also to facilitate diaspora investment and philanthropy. Remittances are a major focus of attention but there is an even greater attention that needs to be given to the skills that migrants and diaspora communities could bring back as well as the reintegration of migrants as a focus of attention for poverty alleviation strategies particularly in post-crisis situations. The case of Afghanistan is a fairly recent example.

A final area that she identified is in the context of general agreement on trade in services particularly in the context highly skilled migrants. A strategy is how to deal with the impact of migration in their own countries in the context of labor migration but also in terms of refugee movements. Other developed countries invested in programs to strengthen migration management and border authorities in developing countries. Still others provided funds for

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migration research to help countries design better migration policies. Reducing the costs of remittances, initiating return and reintegration programs are quite common options in addressing the negative implications of the nexus between migration and development.

According to Prof. Martin, in terms of institutional coherence there are the establishment of task forces that are mandated with looking at policy coherence within governments. There has also been renewed attention in developing countries in looking at their respective diaspora experiences like the Philippines and other countries are looking at them as examples. However, Prof. Martin also noted the weakness within civil society in terms of a lack of coherence and cooperation between migrant diaspora groups and development agencies. Improving relations within civil society itself can be a key area of concern.

Focusing on the development country perspective, Messrs. Denis Drechsler and Jason Gagnon began with a brief discussion on the issue of motivation for why there is concern over policy coherence in relation to the nexus between migration and development. There is renewed interest on migration in the OECD. According to Mr. Drechsler, this is not just about the integration of migrants but also on highlighting the development component that migration plays. Case studies have also played an important role in highlighting the importance of the nexus and they cover a broad spectrum of countries including old OECD members and new OECD members as well as non-OECD countries.

Mr. Drechsler noted that the policy tools that are available to developing countries fall into three categories:

- migration policies narrowly conceived
- international agreements
- non-migration policies that have an impact on migration and development

He also argued that the best policy response depends on the problem that you want to target and depends on the migration situation the country is in.

Mr. Gagnon discussed the four challenges to effective migration management. These are the lack of coherence between policies of migrant sending and receiving countries because of their opposing interests; flawed institutional coordination within countries as well as discrepancies between policies and action; inadequate data and information that can inform policy decisions; and poor inter-country cooperation due in part to the absence of a multilateral entity to coordinate and monitor policies.

He also outlined some best practices in the area of migration policies (remittances, etc.) and the initiative in the Philippines and Mexico. International agreements need to provide a better assessment of labor in origin and receiving countries. Systematic consultations can be put in place among all regional bodies and infrastructure investment decisions need to be taken into account.

Mr. Gagnon also argued that non-migration development policies must be adopted to the considerations of migration. They need to be integrated into the migration framework.

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The Chairperson then opened the floor for discussions from the delegates. The interventions from the floor dealt mainly with the following key areas of concern.

Some of the participants criticized the notion of the migration and development paradigm as enunciated by the resource persons and suggested an alternative notion that looks at the broader framework and how national development strategies are able to incorporate migration policy.

Concern among the participants also centered on the need to clearly see a rights-based approach to establishing policy coherence. Many of the participants did not agree with the term “managing migration” as it connotes the disembodied character of the migrants. Some participants also argued that labor migration policies should not be included in financial and trade agreements. Migrants are human beings.

Some participants noted that there has to be greater coordination between and among the different agencies or ministries of government (e.g., finance, labor, the interior, etc.) including those that manage migration. A similar concern was raised with respect to the fact that members of the executive branch do not solely handle public policies and that there is a need to consider actors working in parliament and in local governments in establishing policy coherence.

A few participants were of the position that there has not been any policy coherence between receiving and sending governments. There is no real relationship between them.

On the migration-development nexus, a few have observed that there is “schizophrenia” within governments in terms of instituting and implementing migration and development policies. Migration policies are divorced from development policies and which are in turn divorced from their people.

Some participants also took issue with the dissonance or contradiction between declared policies and practice. There is a problem in engaging governments to make sure that the policies in place are put into action. This is a challenge to civil society organizations. One way to leverage governments to promote and sustain institutional cooperation with all relevant stakeholders is by keeping the issue of migration and development within the United Nations framework and mandate so as to convince governments to comply with regulations and standards to protect and promote the rights of migrants. Establishing a permanent office in the UN that will address migration and development issues can do this.

A participant raised the question of how much the Forum has progressed since last year. He noted that a lot of the questions and concerns raised in this session, were also raised in 2007. He said that there is a need to review these earlier concerns and recommendations so that the results of the Forum are able to move the participants forward.

The question of good and sustainable development was raised. A participant took issue with the migration cycle as presented by one of resource persons is ahistorical in that it ignores the fact that resources were extracted from developing countries by developed countries creating conditions for why people move from developing countries to developed countries.

A participant observed that there is a special need to achieve policy coherence at this point given the economic crisis affecting the world today. The emerging impulse in many of receiving societies is to restrict immigration. There is a need for the Forum to say clearly / coherently that

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countries cannot react to these economic challenges with xenophobia, scapegoating, and coherent in a wrong way that will ruin more lives and societies.

Another participant sounded the call for stronger and reliable data and research to determine which policies will be effective in dealing with specific development and migration problems and concerns like brain drain so as to avoid dealing with issues on an ad hoc basis.