

Unpacked Narratives on migration governance and gender in West African

Presented

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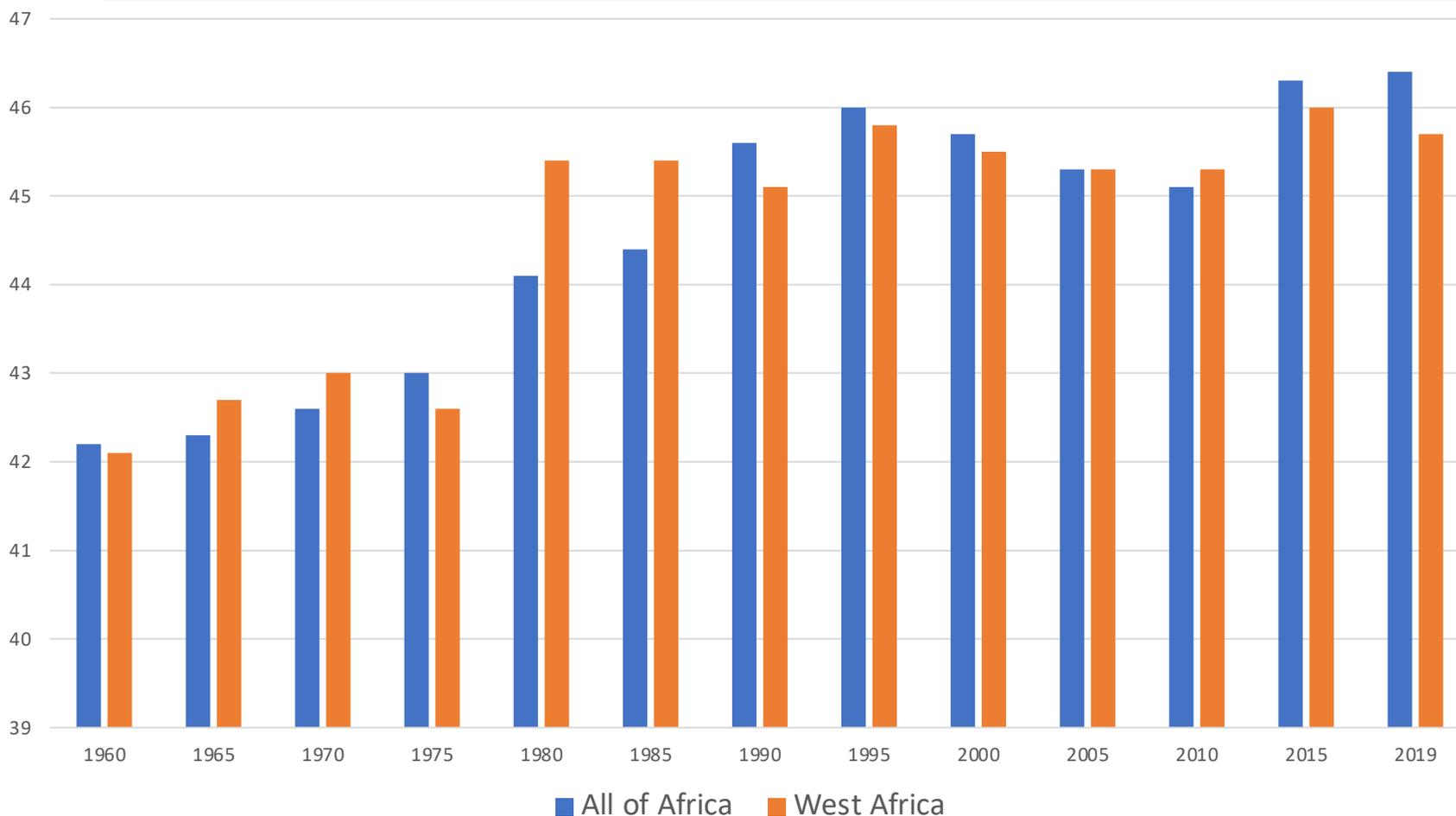
INTRODUCTION



- The overall proportion of international migrants has remained fairly constant at about **3.5%** over the past four decades (IOM, 2020).
- With about **48%** being women, an increase from **47.5%** in 2000.
- Over the period of 20 years (from 2000 to 2020) there has been an estimated **0.4%** increase in female international migration.
- A good number of single and married women migrate independently rather than accompanying family members (Setrana and Kleist, 2022).
- Yet not much has been done to narrate the positive impact of the increasing independent migration of these females in West Africa.
- In this presentation: *Unpack the discourses surrounding the linkages between migration governance and gender for a better understanding of the competing and counter narratives framing debates and policy; the actors of such narratives and the effects of the narratives in shaping migration governance and gendered issues within the region.*
- This presentation is based on desk review as well as the authors' own research works on the topic.

GENDERED DYNAMICS IN WEST AFRICA: OVERVIEW

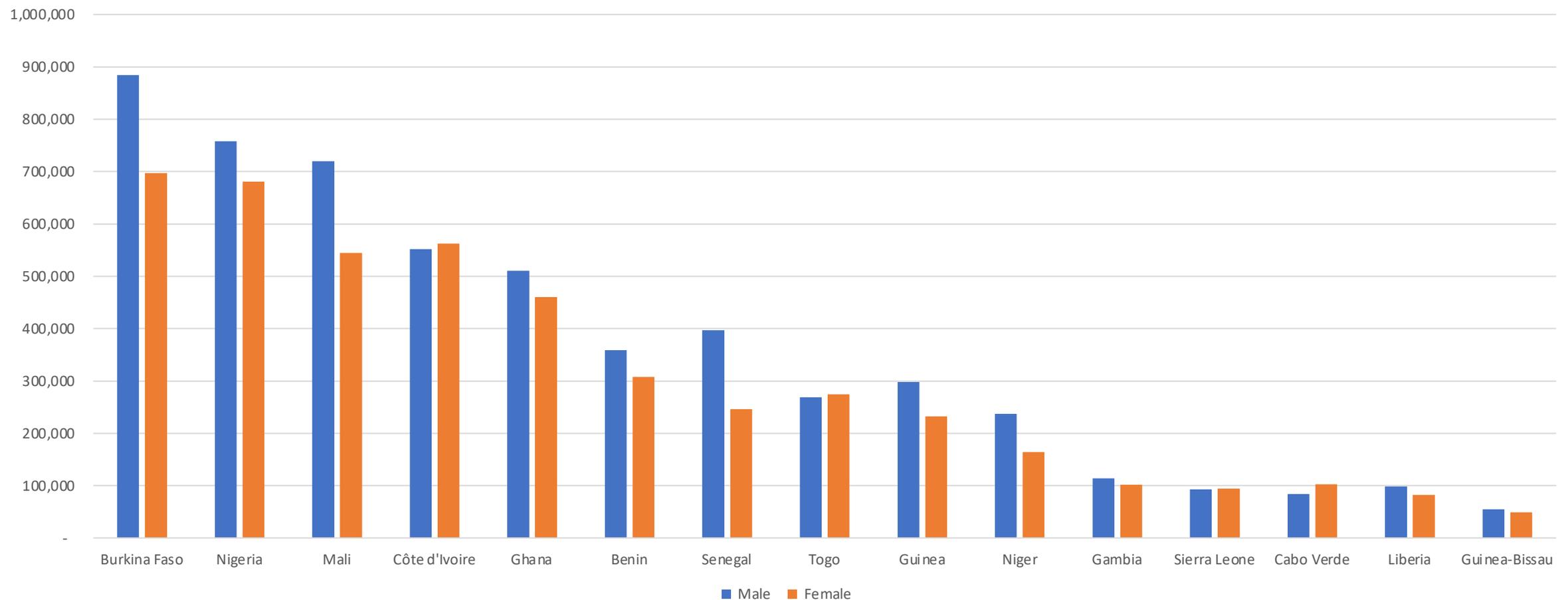
% of female migrants from Africa /West Africa



- increasing share of female migrants in West African movements
- This includes;
 - an increasing number of skilled and independent women
- Migrating to fulfil their personal and autonomous economic well-being (Setrana and Kleist, 2022)
 - in line with the global femininization of migration.

Gender analysis of International migrant stock in West Africa

Gender Distribution of West African Migrants



The conceptual relationships among gender, migration governance and narratives

- The media and advocacy organizations play a critical role in shaping migration narratives, using them to explore social issues and offer solutions (Teye, 2022).
- Other factors such as politics and interests have a significant impact on the political setting, while actors and networks facilitate the exchange of ideas.
- Micro-narratives generated by migrants and host communities can also have a significant impact on policy decisions and the experiences of these communities with migration (ibid).
- the narratives on gender and migration have cultural characteristics which combine with these factors to institutionalise or normalise the linkages between migration and gender.
- Here people's culture is of importance as they interact to determine what is the norm and what is not depending on the power dynamics.
- I draw my ideas from the multiple layers of the struggles of migrant women due to hegemonic migration narratives in the west african sub-region.
- Such narratives have been instituted by migration and border management policies in the sub-region.



Key narratives on gender and migration in the context West Africa

Migrant men as “bread winners” and “movers”

- An important part of the literature on West African migration and gender focuses on
 - males’ *social becoming and migration as a (hoped-for) pathways of improvement*
 - *and adulthood, especially for male youth.*
- Adulthood is generally perceived as desirable in West Africa with adult masculinity being seen as
 - *related to strong family values, marriage and provision (Example; McLean, 2020).*
- In Francophone West Africa, *aller en aventure* – going on adventure –
 - *is a commonly used term for primarily male youth migration to ‘unknown places’ where the migrant does not have pre-existing strong social networks (Jónson 2008: 18, Bredeloup 2017).*



Counter Narrative: Migrant women as independent migration decision-makers and movers

- We often overlook the fact that West African women
 - *have been migrating independently for decades*
 - *aspiring to change their lives and future*
- The social becoming and a pathway to a better future pertains to women as well.
- There is a counter narrative from a period of low participation of females in the migration processes to a period of increasing female participation.

Reasons for Migration

“..no one should assume I have been trafficked or smuggled, no, I went in search of greener pasture just as my brothers and male friends do. I couldn't achieve my migration dream as planned but it is not because I am a woman so I am being treated as someone who didn't have the will power to make a choice when I was ready to migrate. I planned and I moved. No one influenced me”

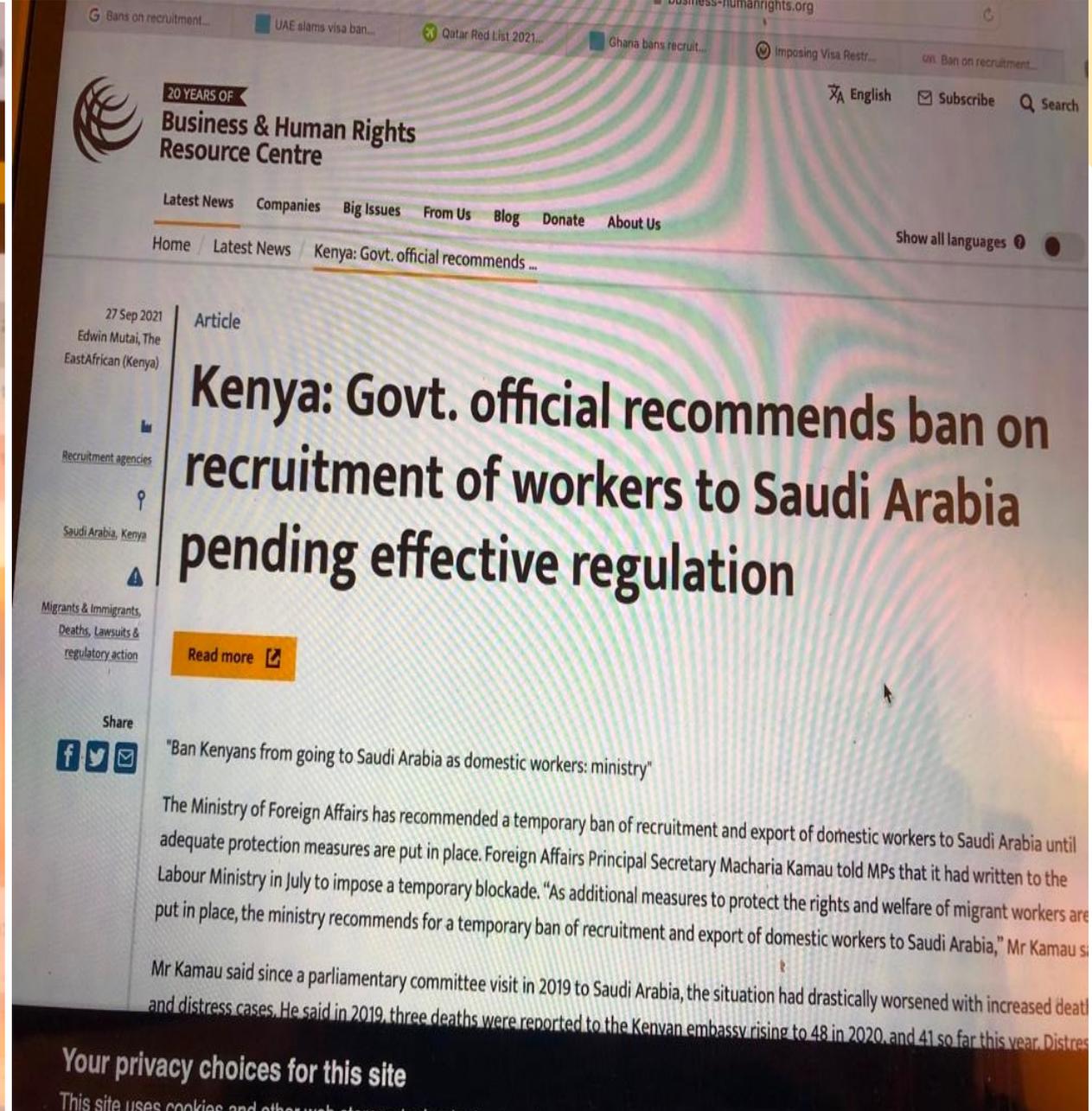
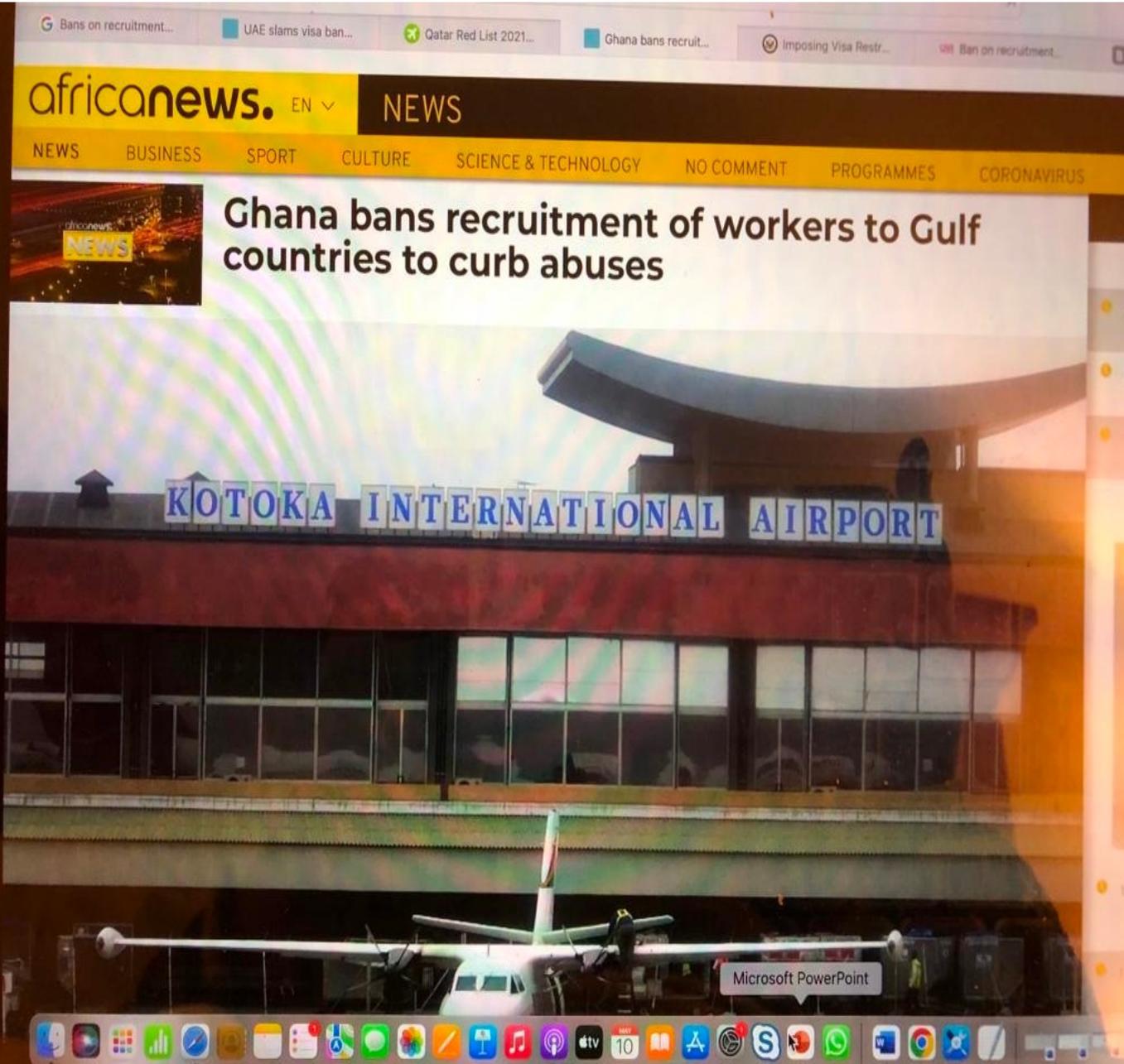
(A West African female migrant)



Female migrants as vulnerable and victims of migration

- In the name of protecting migrant women, the media reports and policy discourses find ways of describing and protecting the perceived vulnerable migrant women
- Such narratives have resulted in some tragic emergency emigration restrictions mainly targeted at migrant women.
- Studies have also demonstrated that certain social norms have compelled boys and men to migrate using irregular means to provide for their families ((US Department of State, 2020,)).
- Some are trafficked for sex organs and forced labour in plantations but have not received as much negative narratives as the migrant women in similar situations ((US Department of State, 2020,)).

Female migrants as vulnerable and victims of migration



Counter narrative: W/A Women migrants are empowered

Migrant association representative key informant said:

“The women in my organization have benefitted a lot from migration. They are traders; some move to Togo, Burkina Faso, China and many other places to buy goods. They bring them to Ghana to sell. As an organization of migrant women, we can testify that our families and friends have benefitted from our movement and trading activities in other parts of the world. We give money to Togo, London and US. You know we go with cash, we transact business and it is money. During the covid when our husbands could not work, we the women managed to still link up with our partners. We supported our homes and our husbands”.

Women migrant empowerment and emancipation has challenged the dominant narrative of the male as a ‘breadwinner.’

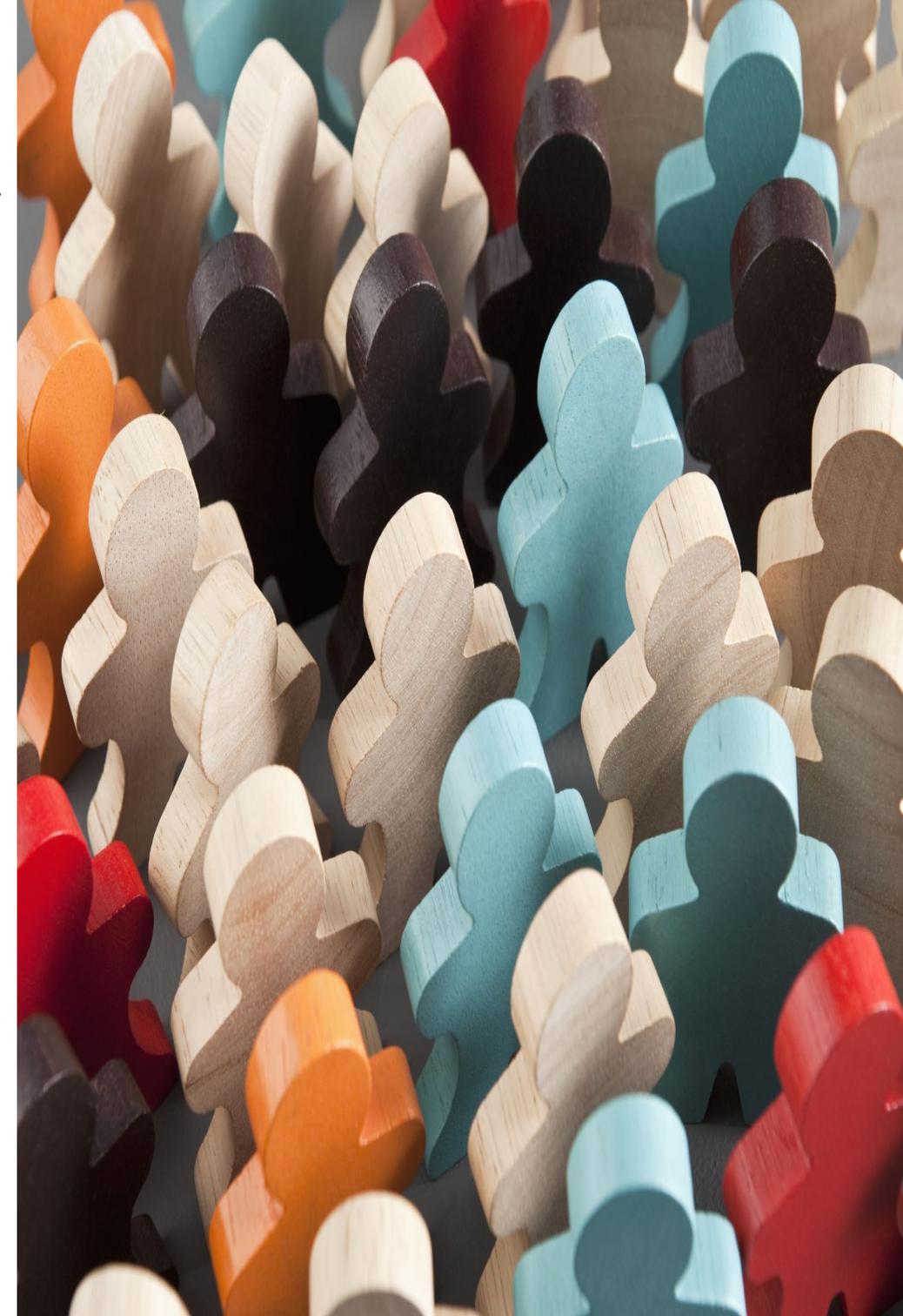
- west African women are migrating to educate themselves, find care work and occupy important job positions.
- The increasing demand for services in care and domestic work across the various neighbouring countries and beyond;
- *The quest to find work in in the urban areas via independent livelihood migration Kayayoo (head portage)*



Women migration as a tool for break-down of traditional family systems compared to men migration

“When children are delinquent, the independent migrant wife is blamed for not staying at home. When the migrant woman crosses international border to educate herself or find job, she is described as uncaring and prostitute. Yet, the husband, the uncle and the son who is migrant, receives no such labelling because migration is seen as a man’s rightful obligation. Negative perceptions are deep-seated patriarchal ideas in the culture of the people”

- Female migration has been cited as a major contributing factor to the breaking down of traditional family systems across many cultures.
- As more women leave their homes in search of better opportunities, either within their own countries or abroad, they often leave behind family members who depended on their presence for emotional and social stability.
- In certain places of origin, the left-behind men enforce their patriarchal rights by handing over the productive work to another female of his or the spouse’s family.
- Rigid traditional expectations between husbands and wives at destination areas has created tension leading to domestic violence, separation and sometimes divorce (Sam and Setrana, 2020).

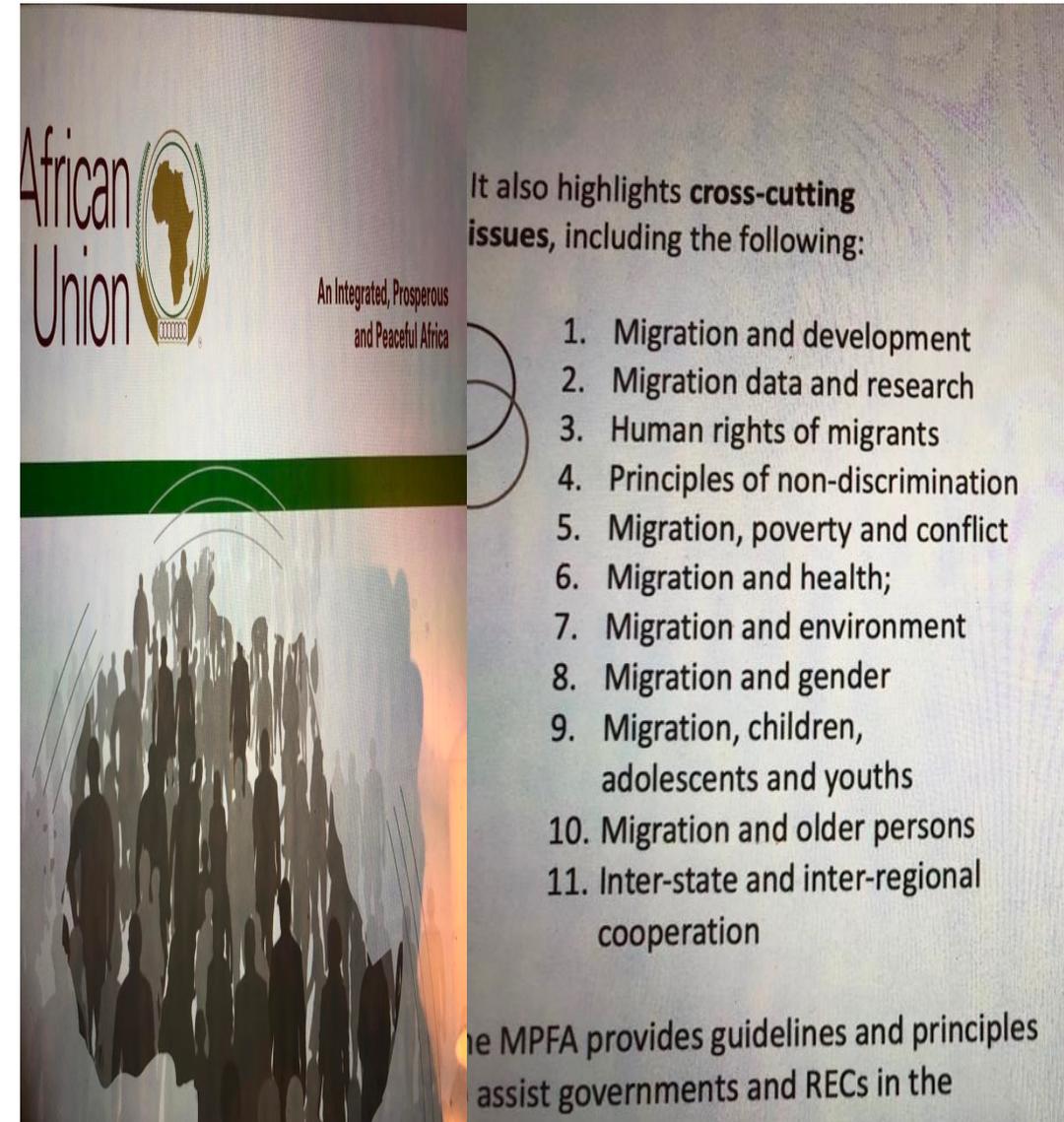


Effective Balancing life of the W/A migrant woman

- The dominant narrative compels women to combine domestic labour with breadwinning responsibilities either as the left-behind spouse or migrant woman.
- The ability for migrant women to mother their children from elsewhere is an important aspect of remittances and care.
- Through social and economic remittances, the traditional role of women as caregivers for their children has been transformed.
- West African migrant women in China, for instance, use mobile phones, laptops and mediums such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype and Zoom to carry on with their childcaring responsibilities and to avoid being accused of abandoning their motherly duties (Kwami 2016).
- They remit to pay for their children's school fees, feeding, hospital bills and daily expenses among others. International migration may thus pay for school enrolment – if parents send remittances, that is.

Assessing Migration and Gender issues in the ECOWAS Protocols and National Policies

- To what extent does ECOWAS conventions incorporate issues of gender?
- The 2008, ECOWAS Common Approach policy on free movement, is considered as the first policy to account for issues on gender and migration in the West Africa subregion.
- The dedicated section considered special needs and interest of migrant women, to improve decision making, and reduce inequalities in the migration process.
- The ECOWAS protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment has altered the patterns and trends of West African migration
 - *From a huge male-dominated experience to an almost equal gender composition*
 - *Increasing labour migration of women joining the already high numbers of migrating men*
 - *Infrastructural development*
 - *Increasing cash crop production (such as cocoa, coffee and groundnut)*
 - *The development of the mining sectors and oil discovery*



African Union
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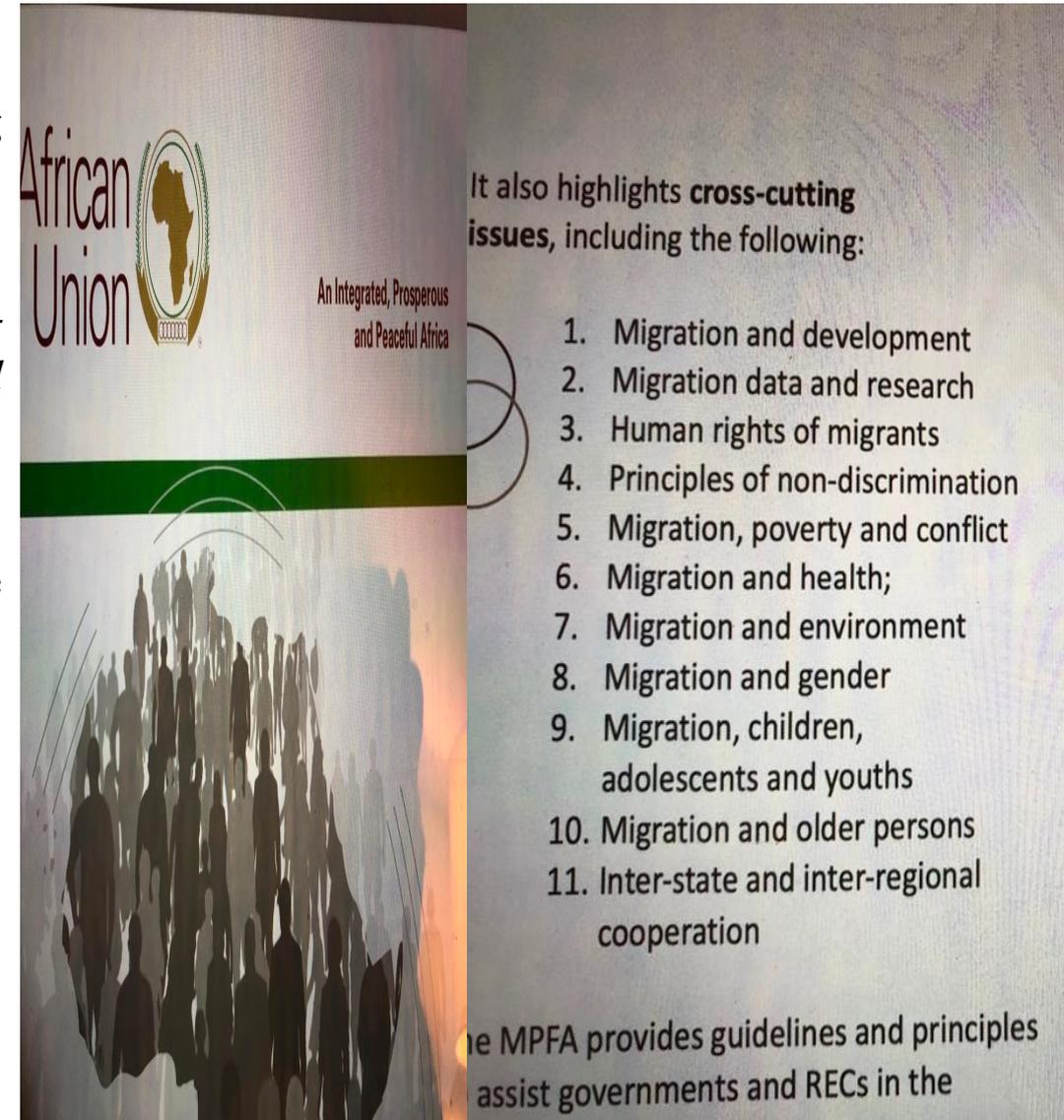
It also highlights **cross-cutting issues**, including the following:

1. Migration and development
2. Migration data and research
3. Human rights of migrants
4. Principles of non-discrimination
5. Migration, poverty and conflict
6. Migration and health;
7. Migration and environment
8. Migration and gender
9. Migration, children, adolescents and youths
10. Migration and older persons
11. Inter-state and inter-regional cooperation

...the MPFA provides guidelines and principles to assist governments and RECs in the

Assessing Migration and Gender issues in the ECOWAS Protocols and National Policies

- **ECOWAS Gender and Migration Framework and Plan of Action**, adopted in 2015. The five-year (2015-2020) strategic plan of action was to be implemented by member states.
- There were five key areas of the plan, aimed at promoting and facilitating issues of gender and migration.
- *The areas include trading along the borders of member states, trafficking of persons, conflict induced displacement, tourism (including sexual tourism), and domestic workers.*
- Member states were encouraged to align national policies, to reflect the regional framework (ECOWAS Commission, 2008).
- In the sub-region for instance, member states have incorporated gendered aspects in national migration policies.
- In deed, countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal etc all have policies and program that have cross cutting names –Gender mainstreaming and migration



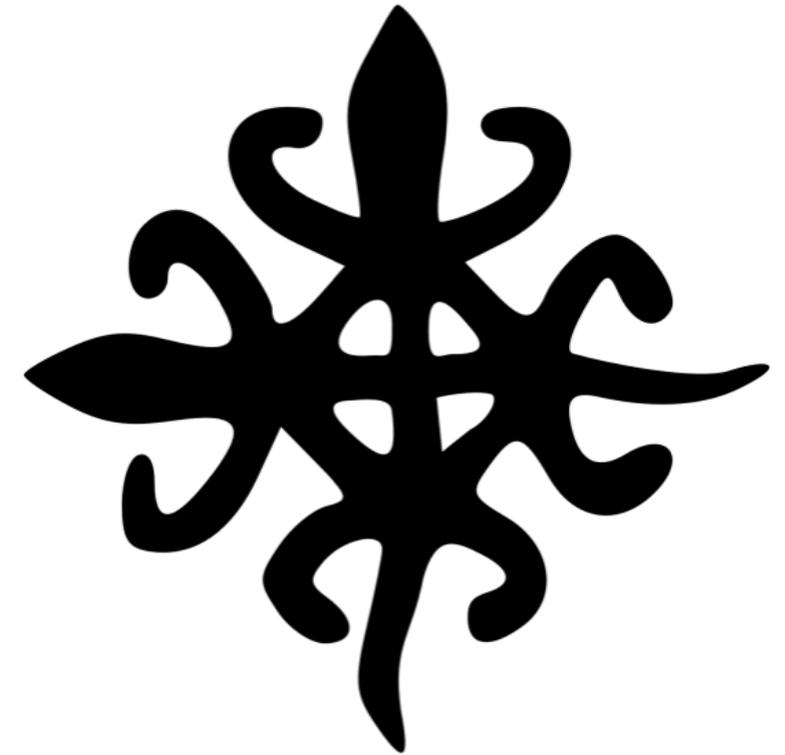


Assessing Migration and Gender issues in the ECOWAS Protocols and National Policies

- **Challenges:** certain obsolete practices in member countries continue to undermine the agency of female migrants.
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- An example is nations who require women to obtain permission from husbands or fathers, to receive travel documents such as passports.
 - In such nations, women are not allowed to travel with children without the father's permission.
 - This limits the right of women to migrate freely, since travel documents are essential requirements for legal cross-border migration.
 - Women crossing borders for trading activities still face exploitation, paying fees and charges levied on imports and produce etc

Reflections?

- *People should not gather to make policies and suddenly realise that there is a need for a woman so they try to invite a few gender experts and migrant women to “add” and “stir” to address the gender problems. No, this is not what we want, we want to have a voice, we want to equally be represented to make suggestions as to what works best in the interest of both women and men” (key informant)*
- There is the need for a narrative change on migration governance and gender
- And maximising the agency of migrant women by
 - increasing female participation in migration decision and policy making at all levels of the society, micro, macro and meso
- Reflect, challenge and transform(eg. socialisation, education, sensitization, media reports) existing restrictive structural systems embedded highly in
 - patriarchal norms, colonisation legacies etc
 - that oppress and discriminate



FUNTUNFUNEFU- DENKYEMFUNEFU
"Siamese Crocodiles" -Inclusiveness and
no discrimination



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**Thank
You**