

**CRITICAL MIGRATION POLICY NARRATIVES FROM
WEST AFRICA**

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Introduction

- While migration has historically been an integral part of livelihoods in West Africa (Adepoju, 2006), there are contesting views on its causes and impacts (Awumbila et al, 2014; Teye et al, 2019).
- Although it is acknowledged that a deeper understanding of the interests and perspectives of various policy actors can help identify potential areas of engagement with different stakeholders, there is little understanding of the migration policy narratives of different policy actors.
- Relying on key migration policy documents and data collected from government officials, migrants and recruitment agencies, this presentation seeks to map and examine the narratives shaping migration governance in West Africa, a region with a highly mobile population.
- The key issues that will be examined include:
 - a) *Key narratives shaping the debate and policy on migration*
 - b) *Actors behind key migration narratives*
 - c) *Factors which contribute to the formation/emergence of various narratives*
 - d) *Effects of various narratives on migration policy*
 - e) *Evidence supporting key migration policy narratives*

Introduction Cont.

- The remaining presentation will focus on:
- Socio-economic context of migration in West Africa
- Migration patterns in West Africa
- Conceptual Framework
- Policy narratives on migration in West Africa
- Concluding remarks

Socio-Economic Context: Countries in West Africa



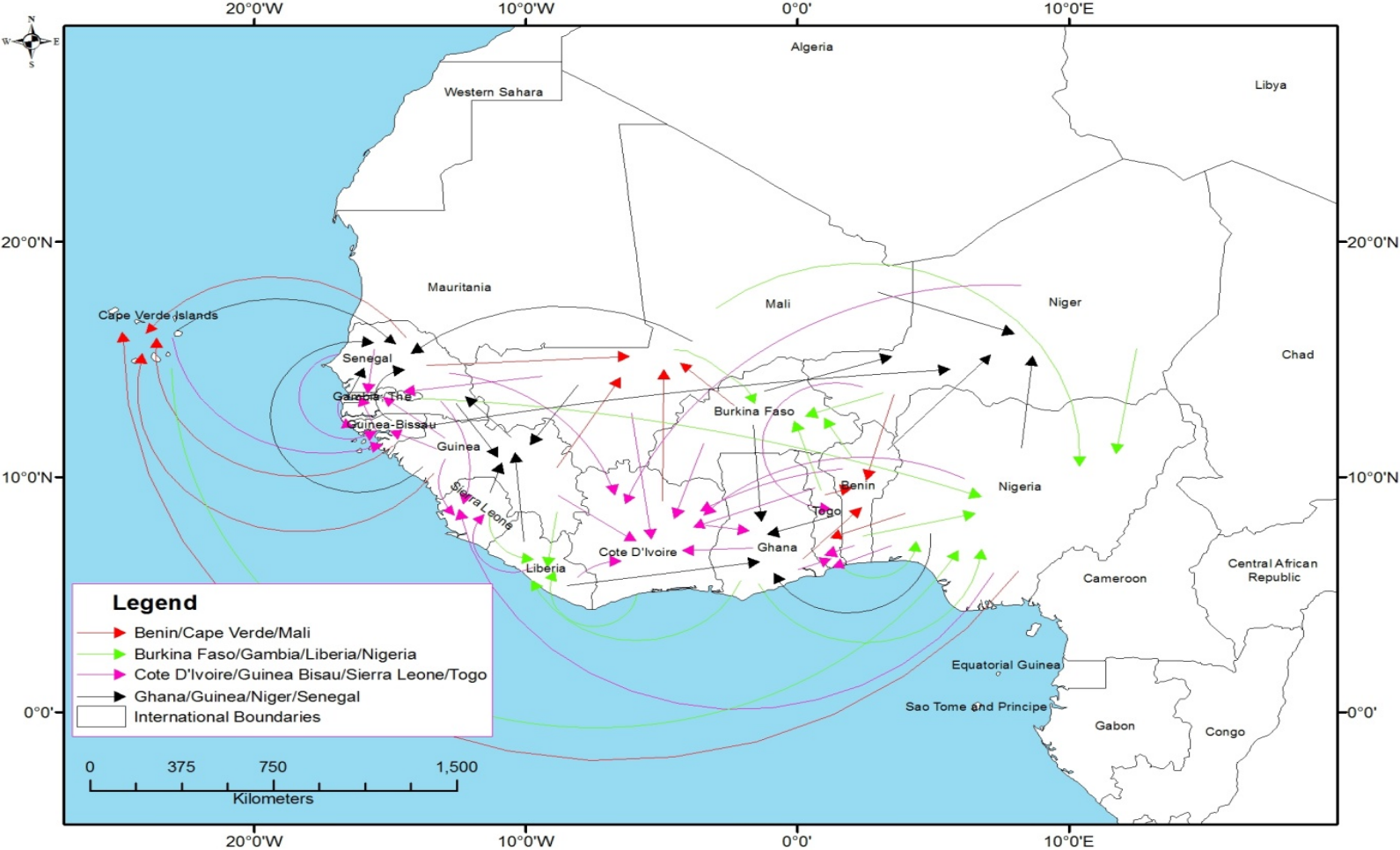
Socio-economic context

- Estimated population of 362.8 million people (Nyamongo and Shilabukha, 2017) with a 2.5% growth rate.
- A majority of West African countries are listed among the poorest countries in the world (UNDP, 2018).
- Marked variations are observable in the levels of national poverty across countries in the sub-region, with countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Cape Verde and Cote d'Ivoire, being relatively more developed.
- Despite significant strides made in democratic governance, internal conflicts and political volatility persists in the sub-region.

Migration Patterns in West Africa

- Current migration trends in West Africa are deeply rooted in historical antecedents.. West African sub-region was seen as a borderless area within which goods and people moved freely (Adepoju, 2005).
- The colonial regime altered the motivation and direction of migration :
 - --- Forced migration to Europe and America (slave trade);
 - ---Export-oriented economic policies prompted movement of migrants from the northern countries to the mining and plantation areas (Bump, 2006);
- Since 1980s, migration flows from several ECOWAS countries have increased, in line with global migration trends.
- Intra-regional migration is dominant, with about 71.8% of West African migrants remain in the region (UNTACT, 2018).
- Mixed migration flows (labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers etc)
- Intra-regional migration flows are still dominated by a north-south movement from countries of Sahel West Africa (e.g. Mali and Burkina Faso), to the mineral-rich and plantation-rich coastal countries.

Migration Flows within West Africa



Stock of ECOWAS Immigrants (Source: Awumbila et al, 2014)

Receiving Country	ECOWAS immigrants	Percentage Contributions by Country of Origins (Top Four Countries)			
Benin	132,567	Niger (37.2)	Togo (23.6)	Nigeria (21.9)	Ghana (4.9)
Burkina Faso	53,086	Togo (16.4)	Benin (11)	Niger (10.7)	Nigeria (9.9)
Cape Verde	8,782	G. Bissau (63.2)	Senegal (18.6)	Nigeria (8.4)	Guinea (5.2)
Cote d' Ivoire	2,350,024	Burkina Faso (55.8)	Mali (18.8)	Guinea (5.7)	Ghana (4.7)
Gambia	278,793	Senegal (58.3)	Guinea (35.6)	G. Bissau (2.3)	Mali (1.3)
Ghana	409,910	Nigeria (30.4)	Togo (7.8)	B. Faso (7.5)	Liberia (3.3)
Guinea	381,315	Liberia (49.7)	S. Leone (41.2)	Mali (4)	Senegal (1.7)
Guinea Bissau	15,985	Senegal (61.4)	Guinea (30.2)	Gambia (5.7)	C. Verde (2.7)
Liberia	69,321	Guinea (48.7)	S. Leone (17.1)	Cote d' Ivoire (13.2)	Ghana (9.7)
Mali	65,949	Burkina Faso (33.6)	Cote d' Ivoire (28.3)	Guinea (24.9)	Senegal (7.7)
Niger	176,877	Mali (39.5)	Nigeria (17.0)	B. Faso (16.9)	Benin (15.7)
Nigeria	823,743	Benin (29.0)	Ghana (22.6)	Mali (16.2)	Togo (14.1)
Senegal	137,626	Guinea (58.7)	G. Bissau (17.6)	Mali (12.7)	C. Verde (6.8)
Sierra Leone	87,199	Guinea (67.3)	Liberia (24.2)	Gambia (2.7)	Nigeria (2.3)
Togo	215,409	Benin (31.4)	Niger (28.4)	Ghana (13.7)	Nigeria (13.6)

Migration Patterns in West Africa

- Outside Africa, Europe is the most popular destination of West African migrants. North America is also a popular destination.
- Restrictive migration policies in Europe (strict border control and securitization of migration) and employment opportunities in some Asian countries have resulted in migration to Asia, especially the Gulf region.
- Although international migration has received more attention in recent debates on migration, internal migration is also very important in terms of number of migrants in West Africa (Awumbila et al, 2014).

Conceptualising relationship between Narratives and migration policy

- The conceptual framework employed to explain relationship between narratives and migration policy is the **'narrative-actor-politics framework'** (Keeley and Scoones 2003).
- Public policy processes are influenced by an interaction of three components- **narratives and discourses; actors and networks; and politics and interests.**
- The **'policy narratives'** define the problem to be solved and provides possible solutions/interventions.
- **Actors and networks'** refer to coalitions of interest groups with a shared vision (e.g. governments of host countries, recruitment agencies, migrants)
- The **'politics and interests'** component of the framework assumes that the political context is shaped by the interests of particular regime authorities to remain in power.

Influence of key narratives on migration policies in west Africa

- An assessment of formal declarations, policy frameworks and informal communications on migration in West Africa shows that different narratives are championed by different policy actors on different migration issues.
- Key narratives that have influenced migration policies in west Africa
 - (a) Narratives on trends of emigration
 - (b) Narratives on the drivers of emigration
 - (c) Narratives on effects of migration from West Africa
 - (d) Narratives on immigration and Free movement in West Africa
 - (e) Narratives on internal migration
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Narratives on trends of migration from West Africa

A. Exodus of highly skilled migrants from West Africa results in brain drain and under-development in West Africa (1980-2000)

- ***Actors/Narrators:*** Governments of West Africa, general public; some development partners.
- ***Factors/Evidence for narratives:*** *High level of emigration of health professionals. In Ghana, more than 50 percent of doctors trained migrated after 3 years (Dovlo, 2004)*
- ***Counter narratives from highly skilled migrants:*** Migration to developed countries leads to brain gain (see Alhassan, 2010)
- ***Policy strategies:*** Efforts to reduce emigration through bonding of some professionals for some years; Engagement with some governments and international organizations (WHO) to ensure that developed countries do not actively recruit health professionals from poor countries.
- Since 2000, these narratives are not very popular as some of the West African countries (e.g Nigeria, Ghana) are unable to employ all the qualified health professionals they trained. However, some development practitioners /politicians still talk about brain drain in major policy documents (e.g. Migration policy in Sierra Leone)

Narratives on trends of emigration from West Africa

B. Increased irregular migration from west Africa to Europe as a threat to national security, socio-economic development and cultural survival in Europe

- **Actors and networks:** Western media, some European politicians, some European citizens.
- **Factors contributing to this narrative:** Flow of irregular migrants /refugees to Europe in recent years (see IOM, 2018)
- **Policy strategies :** Containment strategies such as combating irregular migration and smuggling of migrants, enhanced border management, reducing the numbers of arriving refugees (Knoll and de Weijer 2016); **In recent years development assistance and cooperation with AU and countries of transit/origin**
- **Evidence supporting narrative:** A significant proportion of irregular migrants arriving in Europe are indeed from West Africa. In 2017, countries of origin of illegal arrivals in Italy: **Nigerian (13% of all arrivals); Guinea (13%);** Bangladesh (12%); **Ivory Coast (10%); Gambia (9%); Senegal (8%);** Morocco (7%); **Mali (5%);** Somalia (3%); Eritrea (3%)
- Over 2000 migrants died within the Mediterranean in 2015 alone.

Increased irregular migration from west Africa to Europe

- However, the numbers of nationals from key countries in Western Africa legally entering the EU have mostly exceeded irregular sea arrivals via the Central Mediterranean Route (de Haas, 2014; IOM , 2018).
- Counter narratives from African governments: There is no mass exodus from west Africa and that irregular migration can be reduced by creating legal migration opportunities to Europe.
- Counter narratives from EU migration experts: Migration needed to deal with aging population and potential labour market problems in future.

Narratives on Drivers of Migration from West Africa

- **A: Migration is driven by push factors such as poverty and political instability in migrant sending countries (i.e. so called root causes).**
- **Policy Actors:** Governments of West Africa and host countries.
- **Policies:** Working with EU to deal with the root causes of (irregular) migration, through development assistance. Rabat process.
- **Evidence supporting** these narratives is quite weak. Poorer Sahel countries in West Africa (e.g. Niger) do not really send out many irregular migrants to Europe.
- International migrants from West Africa are not the poorest of the poor(see Teye et al, 2018).

Narratives on Drivers of migration

Cont

- Migration is an integral part of social transformation (de Haas, 2015). The migrant hump theory suggests that early stages of development , migration will increase (Faist 2008; de Haas 2010).
- Migrants perspectives show that social prestige and migration culture shape migration decisions.
- Misconception that life abroad is easy due to social media:
- *“I was first farming but later managed to buy a taxi so I started driving. .. I sold the car last year and gave the money to a connection man to help me go to Spain but he chopped the money. I have met another man who is charging 3000 Euro . I asked my uncle to help me with that so that if I get there I will work to pay within one month” (Nunu, 34 years)*

Narratives on drivers of Migration Cont

- **B. Irregular migrants are victims of trafficking and smuggling and must therefore be protected.**
- Migrants are assumed to be highly vulnerable and lack agency when it comes to migration decision-making
- **Policy Actors:** Civil society groups, development partners (ILO, IOM, ICMPD) and governments of West Africa
- **Policy strategies:** Enhanced regulatory framework, ethical recruitment procedures, Labour migration policies, ban on recruitment to some countries, such as Gulf region (Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Sierra Leone).
- **Supporting Evidence:** Increasing violation of migrants rights supports these narratives. However, in some cases migrants knew of the risks associated with irregular migration. Brokers are not always traffickers. Banning of formal recruitment of migrants may rather increase irregular migration and trafficking (see Teye et al, 2019).
- Migrants perspectives from West Africa: More legal channels should be part of protection strategies (Awumbila et al, 2019)

Narratives on effects of migration

A: Migration is not good for development in migrant sending areas (linked to Brain drain).

- This is not popular in West Africa in recent years

B. Migration is good for poverty reduction and promoting socio-economic development in migrant sending areas:

- **Policy actors/ narrators:** Governments; Development partners; migrants; People in the diaspora
- **Policy strategies:** Development of Migration and Diaspora engagement policies and programmes to **facilitate skills transfers; bilateral labour agreements; leveraging remittances; promoting safe, orderly and free flow of migrants; engaging the diaspora for development** (Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Togo) with support from IOM, ILO, ECOWAS, EU. World Bank
- **Evidence:** Strong evidence from West Africa. Increased remittances flows: This narrative is most closely connected to reality, although it is also sometimes oversimplified.

Narratives on immigration and Free Movement

- Most of the key narratives on immigration are linked to impact of immigrants from the sub-region.
- Late 1950s to late 1970s: Blaming of West African immigrants for economic challenges, unemployment and political/religious disturbances in some west African countries.
- Main policy actors: Largely traders and others in the informal sector.
- Factors that contributed to these narratives: Economic challenges
- Policy response to narratives: Mass expulsions of West African non-nationals: Deportations from Ghana of Nigerians in 1954, Cote d'Ivoire deportation of Togolese, Dahomeyans (from Benin) and Nigerians in 1958, and deportation of aliens (mostly Nigerians) from Ghana in 1969; Nigeria deported Ghanaians and others in 1983, (Peil, 1971).
- 1979 - Present, narratives on benefits of free movement and regional cooperation.

Narratives on Immigration

- Main Actors: Development partners and academics based on EU experience.
- Effects on migration governance: In 1979, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment
- In 2015, Free movement protocol has been developed for entire Africa
- However, several cases of policy contradictions and ambiguities in recent years due to strong resentment narratives and agitations by some nationals and lack of commitment.
- Many nationals tend to think there are too many ECOWAS immigrants in their countries.

Narratives of rural-urban migration

- **Rural-urban migration is negative and largely leading to an increase in urban poverty, urban slums**
- Policy actors: City planning officials; Municipal governments
- Counter narratives by civil society groups not accepted by policy makers
- **Policy prescription:** Policies that seek to discourage rural people from moving to urban areas, e.g. slum evictions (Lagos, Accra, Sierra Leone)
- Evidence: Policies not based on perspectives of migrants.
- “Migration has been helpful to me based on the things that I told you I have gotten. And even though migration has not improved my education, through migration I have been able to continuously support the education of my brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews at home” (Abiyato, Old Fadama)
- Studies however show that rural urban migrants in slums are optimistically making the most of their capabilities, despite obvious difficulties and trying to move out of poverty (Owusu, 2008; Awumbila et al, 2014).

Economic Activities of rural-urban migrants



Concluding Remarks

- Policy changes on emigration and immigration in response to changing narratives by powerful policy actors, especially the media and politicians.
- **Emigration:** From brain drain narratives and restrictive policies to narratives on the development potentials of emigration. This led to the development of policies aimed at harnessing the benefits of migration. International organizations, IOM, ILO, ICMPD, EU have offered support.
- **Immigration:** Shift from restrictive policies to free movement but there are still policy ambiguities and contradictions.
- **Internal Migration: Policies that seek to discourage rural people from moving to urban areas**
- There were situations where these narratives were not supported by any strong evidence. The perspectives of migrants hardly influence the development of migration policies
- Civil society groups must work with migrants to ensure that their interests and perspectives are incorporated into migration policy development.
- International initiatives such as Global Compact on Migration can help West African governments develop and implement effective migration policies.

THANK YOU

