THE ROLE OF MIGRATION IN THE POST-2015 UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

SUMMARY

On 17 December 2014, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) held a briefing on “The Role of Migration in the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda”. This event was part of the New York Migration Series consisting of two briefings and three trainings, organized by IOM to enhance knowledge and raise awareness of migration amongst Permanent Missions, representatives of United Nations (UN) agencies, civil society and other stakeholders at UN Headquarters. This briefing was co-chaired by the Governments of Germany and Costa Rica.

Introduction

Ambassador Heiko Thoms, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, stated that Germany as a country with a substantial migration experience considered migrants to be central partners and agents of development as well as cultural, social, financial and economic bridge builders between countries of origin and destination.

Session I: High-Level discussion on migration as a development enabler

The first panel was moderated by Ambassador Heiko Thoms, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations. The three speakers were Mr. Gibril Faal, Senior Research Associate of the Foreign Policy Centre, Chairman of the Africa Foundation for Development (AFFORD) and Director of GK Partners; Dr. Melissa Siegel, Associate Professor/Senior Researcher at Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Head of Migration Studies Training & Research Projects and Ms. Laura Porras Alfaro, Associate of Migration, Remittances and Development, Inter-American Dialogue.

In his opening remarks Ambassador Heiko Thoms noticed that national and international policies need to support save human mobility with a development sensitive and migrant-centered approach. Germany takes an active role in promoting the link between migration and development not only on a national level but especially within the post-2015 negotiations. Germany welcomes the prominent place of migration within the 17 goals of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development.

Mr. Gibril Faal recommended that intergovernmental negotiations in the post 2015 process focus on partnerships, transnational communities and means of implementation. The motivation for member states to address migration and development within the post-2015 negotiations is two-fold. Firstly in an
increasingly transnational world migration will ultimately benefit countries of origin, transit and destination as well as migrants themselves. Secondly it is in the interest of states to engage Diasporas as important promoters of development who dispose of vast networks supporting 1 billion persons worldwide. The abolition of costs for remittance sending, tax relief schemes, direct funding on remittances, and mechanisms for transnational development could enhance Diaspora’s ability to promote development.

**Dr. Melissa Siegel** made the assumption that migration is positive for development and thus concluded that all actors had to consider how to create an enabling environment for human mobility in safety and dignity. However, she stated a huge gap between research results and policy implementations in the area of migration and development. On the one side more data on migration is necessary but on the other side central issues are overlooked or framed in a wrong way by policy makers. Among the factors overlooked are the ability to migrate as a factor of inequality; migration as a powerful way of overcoming poverty; as well as policies aimed at countries of destination, fostering integration as a multi-dimensional process. Dr. Siegel emphasized that migrants with a regular legal status could contribute easier to development and engage better in circular migration than those who have not been regularized. In addition she outlined wrongly framed factors inter alia the strong concentration of governments on permanent return instead of temporary or virtual return as well as circular migration. In addition the link between migration and development is often limited to poverty reduction and education even though migrants are early adopters who create and engage in enabling environments and use their multiplier effects for development. These factors need to be addressed through institutional coherence spilling over in policy coherence creating a whole of government approach towards migration as has been adopted by the Suisse government. To support such approaches the World Bank is currently elaborating developing indicators for countries of origin and destination which will be published shortly. Especially fragile and developing states have the unique opportunity to mainstream the migration development nexus into their state building efforts.

**Ms. Laura Porras Aldaro** addressed key issues for migration policies such as different migration drivers, different forms of migration, engagement of migrants and diaspora in decision making as well as implementation and respect for human and labor rights of migrants. Ms. Porras Aldora linked migration with a consideration of transnational frameworks inter alia transport, tourisms, telecommunication, trade-nostalgic (goods and foods from home), and transfers such as family or personal remittances, migrant capital investment and migrant philanthropy. She outlined that remittances impact at the household level but equally on countries international currency stocks and savings, anti-money laundering policies have thus to be carefully tailored in order not to force remittances into irregular channels.
Q&A

During a lively Q&A session questions were asked about the gap between research and policies (EU, International Catholic Migration Commission), policy coherence (EU), possible links between the work of the OWG and financing for development priorities (EU) as well as saving and spending of migrants in host countries (International Catholic Migration Commission). H.E. Ambassador Abulkalam Abdul Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations outlined the importance of the social and economic impact of remittances on health care, schooling, housing, sanitations and trade in Bangladesh especially during the financial crises. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of concrete migration targets within the post-2015 agenda engaging migrants in decision making and evaluation of migration policies. Dr. Melissa Siegel pointed out that part of the gap between research and policy implementation was due to the lack of political will especially in a European environment that is politically moving more and more towards the right wing. Ms. Laura Porras Aldora underlined that concerning remittances policy makers often focus on investment instead of consumption, considered as bases. This overlooks the fact that in order to create an environment where investment is possible families need to address their basic needs first. Mr. Gibril Faal declared that governments often neglect major transformative diaspora innovations, especially new technologies to communicate, transfer money to relatives or even invest in countries of origin.

Session II: Migration across the post-2015 agenda

The second panel focused on ways to integrate migration into the post-2015 agenda. The discussion was moderated by Ambassador Juan Carlos Mendoza-Garcia, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN. The three speakers were Ambassador William Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration, Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Ms. Jane Stewart, Special Representative to the UN and Director, ILO Office for the UN.

In his opening remarks Ambassador Juan Carlos Mendoza-Garcia spoke about the multidimensional nature of migration. As an important development enabler in developed and developing countries migration should be at the core of the international development agenda. The Ambassador considers the recent adoption of a 2nd Committee resolution on Migration and Development as a step in the right direction. Furthermore, states have to assume leadership in creating the necessary public policies to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach towards human mobility, respecting migrants’ human rights irrespective of their legal status. Focusing not only on South-North but equally on South-South migration including concerns about climate change and natural disasters as drivers of migration.
Ambassador William Swing called attention to the fact that in an interconnected world migration is not only inevitable but highly desirable. Migrants are first order development agents in countries of origin and destination, where due to demographic and economic changes migrant work force is urgently needed. In this increasingly multi-polar and multi-cultural world the need to accept and embrace social, ethnic, and religious diversity is crucial. However, the percentaged increase in forced migration due to either natural disasters or human trafficking leads to a negative perception of migration. Especially in traditional countries of origin transforming into countries of destination IOM witnessed unprecedented anti-migrant and anti-foreign sentiments for fear of social and economic downturn and loss of identity. There is very little political leadership for this widely unpopular issue. Therefore IOM will host a Mayors Conference on Migration in 2015. Regarding the post-2015 agenda Ambassador Swing pointed out that the integration of migration into the goals and targets of the OWG is of high importance. The post-2015 agenda needs to be people-centered and rights based, with a positive migration narrative, a focus on saving migrants’ lives and concrete implementation mechanisms. The major challenge will be to conjugate the dilemma between national and individual security.

Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein emphasized that there is no such thing as an illegal human being, all migrants regular or irregular have an inalienable claim to dignity and human rights. This claim is in praxis violated by human traffickers and employers exploiting migrants and treating them as sub-human being often with the tacit knowledge of governments. In addition migrants are often excluded from health care, social security benefits and education which prevents their integration and proves extremely short sighted from the part of host governments, depriving their own countries from benefiting of migrants potential to be powerful drivers for development. OHCHR welcomes the SG’s Synthesis Report as well as the report of the OWG. Those targets should however be outlined in a clear way not giving room for misinterpretations focusing solely on security issues. In cooperation with IOM, UNICEF and other actors OCHCHR develops human rights indicators for migrants.

Ms. Jane Stewart analyzed the global normative framework of human and labor rights as the UN’s comparative advantage in the development field. This framework has the potential to serve as basis for the coherent elaboration of SDGs as well as the post-2015 agenda. Important in this regard are mechanisms of implementation and evaluation. Furthermore Ms. Stewart spoke about migration drivers and integration. She pointed out that approximately 50% of all migrants move for economic reasons, the remaining 50% flee natural disasters or other threats, but ultimately all migrants will be in need of employment to sustain their livelihoods. Host countries should link inclusive economic growth with employment and comprehensive opportunities.
Q&A

During the Q&A session the following issues were addressed: engagement of non-governmental actors at an early stage of policy elaboration (NGO Committee on Migration), unsufficient human rights language within the OWH document (International Association of Schools and Social Work), operationalization of OWG targets into expressed national policies (UN DESA), possible monitoring mechanisms (DESA), save, orderly and regular migration as well as decent work as possible parts of the post-2015 agenda, partnerships for international migration (Turkey) and remittances for poverty eradication (American Families Association in NY to the UN). Ms. Jane Stewart pointed out that there is a risk that OWG targets on migration and development will not be maintained in the post-2015 agenda because member states consider them too difficult in implementation and evaluation. It is therefore crucial to communicate to member states that there are existing solutions such as indicators and frameworks enabling countries to benefit from migration. Mr. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein declared that real political leadership framing migration in a positive way is a pre-requisite for effective partnerships for migration and development. New technologies enable migrants to contribute to development but contain equally the danger of preventing real integration. Mr. William Swing showed confidence that migration will figure prominently in the post-2015 agenda and underlined that indicators evaluating progress in targets on migration should be designed in a rather simple and straightforward way. As examples he mentioned the number of new channels for legal migration, new laws on decriminalizing irregular migration, the question whether or not migrants were detained in prisons, priorities for saving migrants’ lives, measures against human trafficking and exploiting recruitment agencies, portability of social security and progress in dialogue. More awareness for the positive effects of migration is necessary; the WHS can play an important role in this regard.

Closing

Short closing remarks were provided by Ambassador Juan Carlos Mendoza-Garcia thanking the panelists as well as the audience for their interest and engagement in the area of migration and underlining the importance of incorporating migration related issues into the post-2015 agenda.