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Bringing migration into the post-2015 agenda: Notes, reflections and policy directions

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Bringing Migration into the Post-2015 Agenda: Notes, Reflections and Policy Directions*

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Abstract

Migration was not an explicit goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), rightly so in this writer's view, but it was indirectly an integral part of achieving many, if not all, of the goals themselves. As we move towards the end of the MDG period in 2015, it is worth reflecting upon what will follow, and if and how migration should be incorporated into what is to follow. Two dimensions are central to such a discussion: first, the nature of the development goals post-2015; second, how migration might fit into these goals. These notes and reflections will conclude with a possible policy direction that just might provide a path towards integrating migration into development.

Keywords: Migration and Development; Post 2015 Development Agenda, Millennium Development Goals

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The MDGs and the post-2015 agenda

The eight existing MDGs have two clear advantages:

- They are simple, focused, easy-to-understand goals that can be monitored over time and space.
- Most critically, they were agreed by 189 countries as the path towards solving the central issues in development, particularly extreme poverty. Governments became stakeholders in a development agenda. They were truly a "compact among nations".

These strengths are also their weakness. The focused nature of the MDGs meant that the issue being addressed could be taken out of its context, with closely related issues being ignored. A broadening of focus could have addressed other important issues at relatively little additional cost, perhaps most importantly in the health and education goals. The widespread agreement on the goals obviously meant that compromises had to be made and important dimensions of development were left to one side.

In looking towards the post-2015 agenda, the key question revolves around whether we will have "more of the same", or an extension of the existing MDGs, albeit with minor additions and modifications, or whether a completely new approach will be advocated. This central point is still unknown as countries debate this issue over the next two years. However, one can perhaps speculate that the result will probably be "a bit of both". Not all the current goals will have been met in several parts of the world and it would seem unreasonable to drop targets that have been agreed in the past. To shift entirely away from a focus on poverty reduction, or on programmes to reduce infant, child and maternal mortality, might seem short-sighted, especially when infrastructure and financial instruments have been put in place to deal with these issues. Nevertheless, the MDGs were a child of their time and we can also expect some significant shifts in approach after some fifteen years, when not only have the realities of global development changed but the thinking about that development has also changed.

The continuities will most probably be seen in the health and education fields, with attempts to broaden the focus from HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases to include other types of disease such as non-communicable diseases, and towards secondary education respectively. These shifts

can probably bring significant development impact at relatively little increased logistical or even financial cost.

Nevertheless, significant changes in approach are perhaps to be expected. The MDGs had an essentially developing-country focus and any future goals are likely to be more global in intent to include the developed world. In 2015, the simple bipolar division between developed and developing, or Global North and Global South, has become much less meaningful with the emergence of centres of economic dynamism not just in many parts of Asia but in Latin America and parts of Africa. However, it is also clear that each of these areas, and countries within each of these areas, are taking different approaches and routes to their development that will fit uneasily within any limited definitions of “development”. Generally, however, the world has become much more urban, and urban poverty has emerged as an important global issue. Urban poverty, in contrast with absolute poverty, which is still associated primarily with rural areas, appears different in nature and its eradication will require different strategic approaches.

The importance of good governance to development, and particularly attempts to reduce corruption, are seen as more towards the centre of development concerns than just two decades ago. However, it is perhaps issues around global environmental change that have come most to the fore. Certainly, MDG 7, Ensure environmental sustainability, had already identified this issue as important but subsequent data and analysis often point to this issue as the most important development concern. However, the experience of Copenhagen in 2009, brings a cautionary note to attempts to focus on this issue: countries are not going to collaborate on any goals that might be seen to prejudice their own development paths or prevent them from achieving or surpassing the levels of prosperity that are common throughout Europe, North America and Australasia.

Hence, a focus on global governance and the design of institutions to bring about the rights and responsibilities of nations for a sustained development for all seems to be an area that will have to be at the centre of any future development strategy. Again, this approach, to some extent, is a continuation of the existing MDG 8, to “Develop a Global Partnership for Development”. Nevertheless, with global trade talks through the World Trade Organization moribund and the world itself less globalized than it was at the end of the last century, the quest for such critical multilateral approaches will be difficult indeed. Nevertheless, the development issues that face the international community in 2015 should demand a perspective that goes beyond the simple, focused previous MDG framework. The world has become more diverse geopolitically,

economically and socially and it will be exceedingly difficult to attain near universal agreements on such complexity. It is in this developmental context that migration has to be placed.

Migration in the MDGs

Migration was long associated with a lack of development: that people fled poverty to seek opportunity in the most developed parts of the world. However, evidence that demonstrated that the poorest seldom moved internationally and, more importantly, that migration was positively associated with development led analysts to question earlier assumptions. Migration came to be seen in a more positive light and that, if better managed, could work for the benefit of millions of people. Nevertheless, migration also has its costs and very real challenges to countries of origin, destination and the migrants themselves still need to be recognized.

The tension between positive and negative consequences of migration still exists even if clear economic benefits are associated with increasing migration. Simply by increasing developed-country quotas of skilled and unskilled workers by about 3 per cent has been estimated to generate an increase in world welfare of over \$US150 billion per annum (Walmsley and Winters 2005). It is not so much the magnitude of this estimate that is important but the argument that an environment favourable to the increased movement of people leads to increased wealth that is the central point. Conversely, restricting population movements, whether internally or internationally through the erection of barriers, seems counterproductive and likely to limit growth.

Despite the evidence demonstrating economic benefits to increased migration at the global level, attempts to liberalize such movement seem destined to fail. Migration is about much more than economics and it is the social, cultural and political dimensions of the phenomenon that will drive policies towards migration, even if the drivers of migration itself are ultimately economic, paradoxical though this might appear. Migration can bring people from very different backgrounds together who are not just different from each other but, most importantly, they are all distinct from the host populations. This diversity can be celebrated, introducing new foods, goods and colour to neighbourhoods, but it can also be seen to threaten. Fears of increased competition for jobs, real or imagined, or practices very different from those of the host population, drive public opinion against migration that can be manipulated for political purposes. The rapidity of change can give rise to xenophobia: the fear of the other. Citizenship of the nation state, still the basic building block of today's world, matters, and governments, if they wish to

remain in power, must act to protect the interests of their citizens. Migration becomes a "toxic" issue.

Hence, it will become impossible to obtain agreement among countries with very different patterns of migration and associated agendas: between countries that are principally areas of origin of migration, those that are principally countries of destination, and those that are countries of transit. In reality, all countries fall into all three categories and the relative importance of immigration, emigration and transit changes over time, but the main origin and destination areas can be readily identified. That said, it must always be recognized that the quality of information relating to migration is hardly robust and one recommendation to which all countries could probably agree would be to take measures to improve their migration-related data. However, such a recommendation is of an entirely different order of magnitude compared with the "big" development issues covered in the MDGs.

The growing complexity of migration and mobility at global, regional and local levels also mitigates against the formulation of universal goals and targets. Here, the word mobility is deliberately introduced as future debate on development-migration linkages needs to give much greater attention to shorter-distance and shorter-term migrations, and particularly migration within countries, internal migration, that important component of urbanization. Non-permanent forms of migration are common throughout the global migration system, perhaps even the norm, and have been recognized through the term "circular migration" or simply "circulation". Despite difficulties in defining the terms, they have been seized by policy makers as an ideal policy prescription as such migrants will fill gaps in the labour market without becoming permanent residents; they will go home at the end of their contracts. Leaving to one side how realistic such approaches are, they do bring to the fore another significant aspect of the process of migration that makes international agreements problematic: human rights. The process of bringing a large number of workers or other temporary migrants into a country but without access to longer-term residence, perhaps eventual citizenship, but often more prosaically basic services raises important ethical questions. The impossibility of securing agreement on international instruments such as the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families demonstrates the difficulty that any broader migration-focused development initiative would face if it were incorporated into the post-2015 agenda. Only members of sending states have ratified the convention.

Hence, it is argued in this paper that any explicit goals or targets for migration in the post-2015 agenda are likely to be still-born: agreement among countries will just not be possible. However, this does not mean that migration cannot be an integral part either of the existing MDGs or of what is to follow. The migration and development debate thus far has tended to show how migration may impact upon development, with a focus on remittances, the migration of the skilled and diasporas. While a broad consensus on action to lower the transaction costs of remittances could probably be achieved, the real impact of such an action on overall development, particularly poverty, is less clear. Remittances tend to flow neither to the poorest parts of countries nor to the poorest people in those areas and contribute to rising local and regional inequalities.

The data on the impact of migration on development, as alluded to above, are not robust and the findings are contested. It is clear, however, that migration does not "drive" development. That said, it might appear surprising why much less attention has been directed at how development, or more exactly specific development programmes, goals or targets, are likely to impact upon migration. Part of the answer might lie in the composition of the current principal forums and institutions that deal with migration and primarily the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD). These institutions are dominated by migration experts who view the world, perhaps hardly surprisingly, through a migration lens. Development specialists have been much less in evidence. It might seem appropriate for the upcoming High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2013 to re-direct the debate more towards a focus on development and migration rather than migration and development and work towards recommendations that development institutions and experts should be more fully integrated into the debate.

Virtually every development initiative has some impact on population mobility in one way or another. Poverty alleviation in rural areas is likely to involve some form of off-farm or out-of-village activity. Programmes to extend educational attainment may imply that youths move regularly to places where that education can best be provided. Health programmes may similarly imply travel to base hospitals for treatment. Away from the current MDGs, trade policy or industrial, housing and transport policies can all have implications for the movement of people, which are currently often hidden or unanticipated. It will be a central part of a post-2015 agenda to work towards the integration of mobility into development plans, "mainstreaming" is perhaps a

current word of choice, so that governments are better prepared to plan for the likely population movements that will ensue.

MDG 8, to develop a global partnership for development, perhaps provides a framework for the incorporation of migration into action through the idea of mobility partnerships. This idea is central to the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) of the European Union (EU) in which the partnership is to "identify novel approaches to improve the management of legal movements of people". As the EU moves, perhaps uncertainly, towards the evolution of a common approach to migration, the mobility partnership is a form of bilateral agreement between countries of origin of migration and the EU. The mobility partnership introduces an idea that will be further developed below: the importance of regional as well as global approaches to development and migration.

The post-2015 agenda, migration and an architecture for policy

The time span for the 2015 agenda, if similar to the MDGs, will be in the region of 15-20 years, taking us up to and beyond 2030. The world today is very different from the world into which the MDGs were conceived, and the world 20 years from now can be legitimately assumed to be different again. This basic fact argues for an approach to development quite distinct for the MDGs, with new migration flows created and new contexts in which to place the development and migration debate. However, as stated earlier in this paper, it would seem unreasonable not to expect some continuity with the existing MDGs, at least with respect to poverty reduction, albeit in a more urban context, and a continued focus on education and health issues, albeit through broader approaches. Nevertheless, in a post 9/11 world and a post-2008 financial crisis world, some real shifts in approach seem required. The development issues have become more multi-faceted and complex but perhaps even more importantly, the world has become more multi-centred with the emergence of new poles of global power and influence. One forecast for the global economy in 2050 is given in Figure 1, where only four of the largest economies are in the current "developed" world. Four, China, India Indonesia and Japan, are in Asia, two, Brazil and Mexico, are in Latin America, plus Russia. Other new players such as Turkey, Nigeria and Vietnam are also seen as emerging large economies. If this forecast comes anywhere close to being accurate, the global system of migration is also going to look very different from the one that exists at present.

Even if there has been some retreat from the heady days of the optimism of globalization and globalism, many of the most critical dimensions of development in its broadest sense cannot be resolved at the national or even regional level: climate change; arms control; financial regulation; terrorism and international crime; pollution; and migration, to name perhaps the most salient. Nevertheless, it might be too optimistic to envisage a second "compact among nations" to deal with these issues in the short term. A commitment to a continuation to debate these issues to try to move towards a consensus may be the best that can be hoped for at this stage. However, with the science now indicating that we may be moving towards a 4-6 degree increase in average annual temperatures before the end of this century, the time for debate in the context of the lead time required for the introduction of any technological solution is fast running out.

Given the difficulty of achieving agreements on the above development issues, including migration, at the global level, a shift towards approaches at the regional level may provide an interim strategy. Within regions, a greater commonality of interest is likely to exist so that a "regional compact among states" becomes realistic. Prescriptions for development are quite different for rapidly growing, mainly youthful and low-consumption populations compared with those for slow-growing, ageing and high-consumption populations. The rights and responsibilities are distinct for both groups of populations. The abandonment of global approaches to development is not being proposed here but the creation of a hierarchical architecture in which strong regions of common interest representing the nations within them interact across regions through development and (to be migration-specific) mobility partnerships but within some kind of looser global partnership. Such an architecture would more accurately reflect the decentralization of power that appears to be evolving and would create strong regional stakeholder interests. The management of development and attempts to manage migration come through regional strategies or interregional partnerships.

A regional approach to the incorporation of migration into development would parallel the emergence of regional trade agreements (RTAs), which have risen to over 300 today. Agreements are most easily achieved within groups of countries that form regions and between those regions and third countries or between regions themselves. Similarly, agreements on migration and mobility may also be most achieved, even if not always easily, in the same way. Regional approaches to both trade and migration may be a precursor to broader global agreements over the long term.

Conclusion: towards strategies for the incorporation of migration into the post-2015 agenda

The High-level Dialogue (HLD) on International Migration at the United Nations will be one of the highest-profile processes where recommendations on migration can be communicated to those involved with the post-2015 development agenda. Hence, it would seem desirable that representatives involved in the planning of that agenda participate in the HLD. The key message is that development needs to be a much stronger part of the current and future migration debate and that this needs to be transferred into the GFMD, or whatever the HLD will recommend to succeed the GFMD. Development drives migration and even though migration can help to promote or accelerate change, it is not the critical element in driving development.

Hence, migration is at the same time a major consequence of and an integral part of the whole development process and needs to be conceptualized as such. Both the HLD and the GFMD need to ensure that the debate moves on from the remittances/brain drain-skilled migration/diaspora discussions in an effort to incorporate migration as a component of development programmes. Whether this should be achieved through a type of migration impact statement or some other form of assessment of the likely mobility consequences of specific development plans and policies needs to be reviewed.

The development and migration debate needs to move on to look at likely future scenarios of global development and how migration may evolve accordingly. The current debate seems locked around a series of limited even if important themes. While the future development agenda has not yet crystallized and, given changing development realities and the difficulty of achieving global consensus, it seems apposite to consider a fresh approach that might involve regional strategies operating in a much looser global normative framework. In moving towards any programmes that seek to plan for the migration that is likely to result from the implementation of specific development plans or even to manage specific migration programmes more directly, a regional rather than a global approach seems appropriate. A hierarchical system that links local, national, regional and interregional mobility systems may provide a framework through which greater agreement among states can be attained rather than through a top-down, normative global approach. On this and other themes the HLD seems an appropriate forum, the results of whose deliberations can feed into the broader development debate on the post-2015 agenda.

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Figure1 Global economy 2009 and 2050 based on GDP at PPP rankings PwC (2011).

MER 2009 Rank	Country	GDP at MER (constant 2009 US\$bn)	MER 2050 Rank	Country	Projected GDP at MER (constant 2009 US\$bn)
1	US	14256	1	China	51180
2	Japan	5068	2	US	37876
3	China	4909	3	India	31313
4	Germany	3347	4	Brazil	9235
5	France	2649	5	Japan	7664
6	UK	2175	6	Russia	6112
7	Italy	2113	7	Mexico	5800
8	Brazil	1572	8	Germany	5707
9	Spain	1460	9	UK	5628
10	Canada	1336	10	Indonesia	5358
11	India	1296	11	France	5344
12	Russia	1231	12	Turkey	4659
13	Australia	925	13	Italy	3798
14	Mexico	875	14	Nigeria	3795
15	South Korea	833	15	Canada	3322
16	Turkey	617	16	Spain	3195
17	Indonesia	540	17	South Korea	2914
18	Saudi Arabia	369	18	Vietnam	2892
19	Argentina	309	19	Saudi Arabia	2708
20	South Africa	286	20	Australia	2486

Source: *The World in 2050. The Accelerating Shift of Global Economic Power: Challenges and Opportunities*, London, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012.

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