

Local authorities: The missing link for harnessing the potential of migration for development

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Introduction

While the migration debate is currently conducted and framed at the national and international levels, local authorities² are becoming increasingly responsible for dealing with the effects of migration. This is despite the lack of local or regional policy frameworks to facilitate this. Indeed, the drivers and impact of migration are often most strongly felt at local level, be it in terms of effects on the local labour market, the size and demographics of the local population, or the need for public services provision. This makes much sense given the local-to-local dimension of migration, whereby migration trends show that migrants from the same town or region in countries of origin tend to concentrate in the same geographical areas in the host country. Local authorities are therefore at the forefront in confronting the transformations and opportunities that migration brings about, which involves ensuring migrants' rights and integration to guarantee social cohesion. For this reason, it is also unreasonable to expect national policies to be able to fully address the very specific and unique needs of any given community and this is why it is increasingly important to involve local authorities in the planning and implementation of socio-economic development.

At the same time, there is an increased understanding and acknowledgement of the linkages between migration and development, and growing local, national and international initiatives striving to harness migration potential for development. Given the local dimension of both migration and development, local authorities are therefore best placed to capitalize on the migration and development nexus. In this new context, attention must be given to migration issues at local level and migration management tools must be adjusted accordingly. Policy thinking must be readdressed in order to allow local authorities to take on and carry out this new role successfully.

This article addresses the local dimensions of migration in a bid to show why local authorities have a new-found and crucial role in managing migration and how a migration-for-development agenda can bring added value in such a way that it fosters development. The article argues that local authorities are able to set migration in a new and positive light since they are not burdened, for example, by national policies and interests regarding border control, return and readmission.

Linkages between migration and local development

Since the 1990s, local authorities have increasingly been viewed as players in development policy in the Rio de Janeiro 1992 and Istanbul 1996 United Nations Conferences, the 2000 Millennium Summit and the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, all of which formally recognized their role. At the European Union level, the role of local governments in development has become an important element of the European approach to development since the 2005 revision of the Cotonou Agreement. For instance, according to the 2008 Communication from European Commission on Local Authorities: Actors for Development, the local authorities' knowledge of the local context, as well as their proximity to local societies and local civil society organizations, enables them to strongly foster local development and local governance objectives.

Migrants are objective allies of local authorities as actors of their development. Migrants can and do contribute highly to the development of both communities of origin and destination in many ways through the capitals they possess. These include migrants' human capital (education, training, skills and knowledge), financial and entrepreneurial capital (foreign development investments, trade, remittances, savings, business investments, purchase of real estate and humanitarian support), social capital (networks, norms and values that facilitate cooperation within and among groups, awareness of social innovations) and affective capital (commitment and goodwill derived from their emotional engagement in countries of origin). To this list it is important to add and emphasize the migrants' local capital, which is their willingness to invest/act in certain regions that are overlooked by traditional development

¹ All three authors are officials of the European Commission–United Nations Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI) in Brussels (www.migration4development.org).

² The definition of "local authorities" used in this article encompasses the large variety of subnational levels and branches of government, namely municipalities, communes, districts, counties, provinces, regions, and so on.

actors. In line with the local-to-local dimension of migration, migrants' remittances from one region to another can therefore be a highly valuable resource for promoting local development. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that international remittances have considerable development impacts, sustaining local economic activity.

The good practices identified by the European Commission–United Nations Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI)³ have shown the importance of efficiently linking diaspora and migrants' initiatives with local development processes in order to achieve sustainability and development impact. Successful diaspora and migrant associations' interventions are the result of strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders from civil society, including social partners, the private sector and, very importantly, local authorities. In countries of origin of migration, local consultative processes play an important role in promoting the integration of migration issues into local and regional development policies. When local authorities share a common vision with partners, they can develop a sense of ownership of projects which will lead them to commit time, energy and resources. This process enhances their own role as decision makers in migration-related affairs. The experimentation of (often) small-scale initiatives has had positive consequences and contributed to changing the degree of activism of local administrations. Some creative local authorities have implemented very innovative projects, often in anticipation of national and international debates.

The focus on the local dimension of migration is particularly relevant in countries where an advanced regionalization process is taking place which allows for more decision-making and opportunities at local level. Harnessing the positive impact of migration at local level requires certain levels of decentralization which can allow for stronger democracy through both increased involvement of local communities, including diasporas, and further transparency through improved accountability of local governments in view of their proximity to the population and civil society.

Overall, the JMDI has shown that local players have

tested policy experiments connecting migration and development effectively. However, this was the result of the willingness and foresight of individuals rather than the elaboration of specific policy mandates or the set-up of internal structures to address these issues. Therefore, there is a need to move from individual and isolated approaches towards more structured forms of intervention. This is a key step to fully take advantage of the involvement of local authorities in the field of migration and development.

The way forward to efficiently connect migration and local development

For the local migration and development agenda to work, the following elements, as well as policy options, appear to be necessary.

- *Linking migration with local governance*

For the local development impact of migration to flourish, good local governance is required and should encourage the creation of new opportunities for an inclusive dialogue among local stakeholders (including formal opportunities such as local elections or consultations and forums). A multi-stakeholder participative approach whereby migrants' associations and all other civil society and public institutions are involved needs to be put in place. This kind of cooperation will ensure that the actions carried out respond to the real needs of the citizens, as well as to political interests and strategies, ranging from the idea of a "project" to a much more complex and rich vision of "public policy", since local authorities have real experience managing local life, local development and local economies. Migrants and their associations can provide invaluable information, contacts, expertise and knowledge on their regions of origin and this can be tapped into to reinforce local development policies and actions and harness migrants' remittances.

- *Linking development with migrants' integration and social cohesion*

Without ensuring migrants' rights, migrant integration and social cohesion in host communities, the contribution made by migrants to development will never reach its full potential. Indeed, all of these areas of migration are inextricably linked. Migrants belong to the most fragile social groups in many countries and are at higher risk of social exclusion. Migrants can also be at risk of ethnic or cultural discrimination and important programmes have to be set up by local authorities in order to fight negative attitudes towards people with a migrant background and to foster migrants' integration into

³ The JMDI is a programme funded by the European Commission and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) aimed at supporting civil society initiatives in the field of migration and development (dedicated website: www.migration4development.org).

their new societies.⁴ It appears that local authorities are well equipped to deal with these challenges. Some cities actively promote a positive outlook on migrants. Indeed, London and New York have a history of immigration, and the resulting multiculturalism has created attractive branding opportunities to promote these cities as being diverse, inclusive and successful.

Actions that can be implemented in this field range from pre-departure information for migrants on their rights, to language courses aimed at facilitating migrant integration in their country of destination, anti-discrimination policies targeting local communities, orientation and training for migrants in order to foster their ability to integrate into local labour markets, and housing policies that can offer adequate housing solutions for immigrants and prevent their segregation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Dialogue with migrants' association can have a multiplier effect on the local governance potential of these measures, facilitating participation, ownership and accountability. The role local authorities can play (and are frequently playing) in favour of migrant rights and integration is enormous, and policies aimed at migrant rights and integration in local societies can simultaneously prevent dangerous social divisions and harness migrant potential for growth in their community of destination and for development in their community of origin.

- *Linking migrants' capitals with local development*

Local authorities have diverse policy options to build on migrants' capacities to ensure that they can make the most of their knowledge, skills and migrant networks. Initiatives can include such things as language training, financial literacy training, and training on migrants' rights and responsibilities in the new society. Policies that harness the professional skills of migrants to aid in local development actions back home through return migration or returning briefly to train others in the skills acquired is another example. Local host authorities are particularly important in this regard since they can provide vocational training and labour market integration for migrants and engage in dialogue and cooperation with migrants and migrant associations in order to tap into their knowledge and contact networks which can be used in development cooperation efforts

in the community of origin.

Local authorities must also know how to capitalize on migrant remittances, which can include policies that give incentives to: use specific remittance channels where taxes are used in local community development projects; reduce transfer costs; and link remittances to productive investments through development projects that promote entrepreneurship among receivers. Of course, many people do not have access to money transfer agencies; therefore, policies that ensure access to formal remittance-sending agencies can increase formal channelling of remittances and this can translate into more remittances and more resources for publicly funded local development projects. Other examples include co-funding by local authorities, which gives an incentive to send remittances by offering to match every dollar sent with another dollar, or providing financial literacy training to migrants to ensure that they can make the right financial choices for themselves and their families.

Enhancing migrant communities' capacities is also essential to ensure that communities participate in public and political life and can voice their concerns in host countries. Policy ideas include facilitating transfer of know-how between communities on all sectors. This can increase knowledge exchanges through emigrants assisting new migrants throughout the whole migration process, and lobbying for migrants' rights and concerns in host communities. It can also include facilitating the building of transnational exchange patterns by supporting and strengthening migration platforms and networks, or by providing capacity-building to other local actors, thus showing them how to tap into their diaspora's resources.

- *Linking local authorities with the migration discourse at national and international levels*

While local authorities clearly have a lot of potential to generate the above outcomes, they are often hampered by being cut off from national and international debates on migration, or because they lack the competencies or resources required to implement such policies. National authorities must make space and provide support for local authorities to enter into and influence the international debate on migration and development. In this respect, some form of local authority participation in the State-led Global Forum on Migration and Development should be envisaged.

National authorities have a crucial role to play in facilitating the role of local authorities. First, local authorities in countries of origin must have sufficient competencies (and resources to implement the relevant policies) to ensure that all local stakeholders are involved in local economic development processes, and are able to design and implement development initiatives

⁴ For instance, after the xenophobic riots of 2008 in South Africa, the city council of Johannesburg established the Migrant Advisory Committee, which, besides representatives of city authorities and top civil servants in the relevant department, is composed of representatives of institutions with expertise in the field of migration. The main task of the Committee is to gather information in order to implement effective strategies for the integration of migrants, create a migrant desk to aid migrants and to implement awareness-raising campaigns in favour of migrant integration.

suitable for the community and not based solely on national priorities. This involves implementing effective and de facto decentralization processes that allow local authorities to step up to this role. Awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of these initiatives and training on how to effectively harness local migrants' capacities and capitals for development are also important aspects. Thus, national authorities must not only facilitate such decentralization of competencies but they must also support local authorities in their efforts to harness migration for development. This can include training on migration management, policy implementation, the securing of funding and technical assistance to design and kick-start the implementation of such initiatives. It can also include providing space for local authorities to share knowledge on and discuss good practices to enrich and further develop such practices, as well as to ensure that mistakes are learned from and that local authorities embarking on such initiatives for the first time have a support network both at the local and national levels.

Further support can be provided through monitoring and mapping activities and organizations that deal with such issues at national level and act as a central focal point or umbrella for knowledge sharing. National authorities can also support capacity-building for local authorities to maximize the link between migration and development and engage with local authorities to ensure they are conscious of national-level activities and work together to align policies to both national and local interests. Indeed, through increased interactions and exchange of information, service delivery could be improved at local level.

- *Increasing policy coherence at national and local levels*

Both local and national authorities also need to improve horizontal and vertical policy coherence by mainstreaming migration not only into development policy actions but also across the policy board where many policies can affect migration and development efforts. Support from national and international institutions for local authorities to implement policies for mainstreaming migration into local development planning appears to be an important requirement given that this is a relatively recent, and sometimes new, field of activity for local authorities, which could lack the necessary knowledge to implement effective programmes. Furthermore, vertical (between local, national and international levels) and horizontal (between the different departments dealing with the various fields covered by migration and development) cooperation should also be ensured, since so far this seems to be one of the most important obstacles to the implementation of effective local programmes of migration and development.

- *Linking migration and decentralized cooperation*

In line with the local-to-local logic of migration, the use of decentralized cooperation as a tool to channel migrant capacities and capitals from communities of destination to communities of origin appears to be extremely important, as this can foster the efficiency of migration and development activities through an enhanced connection with migrant communities and the use of local authorities' knowledge and capacities. For local authorities in receiving countries, these kinds of initiatives, highlighting and fostering the role migrants play both in their society of origin and destination, can promote the positive image of migrant communities, enhance migrant integration and actively engage them in partnerships and dialogue with other parts of local civil society – with extremely positive effects on local governance processes. Nevertheless, in order to link decentralized cooperation, migration and development and social inclusion, the active involvement of local migrant communities and local migrant civil society organizations is essential. Unfortunately, this appears to occur rarely and local authorities are not always able to actively involve local migrants in the decentralized cooperation initiatives they set up. Nonetheless, the extremely positive effects of initiatives, where the link between local authority cooperation and migrant involvement has been established, show clearly that this is the way to foster successful migration and development and decentralized cooperation initiatives, as well as to increase the potential for social cohesion.

The following diagram provides an illustration of the aforementioned elements and policy options for effectively harnessing migration for development at the local level.

