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Rethinking Migration in the 2030 Agenda: Towards a De-Territorialized Conceptualization of Development

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While the 2030 Development Agenda was being prepared, Europe experienced a massive inflow of refugees. In response, many western European donors pointed to the need to bring about ‘development’ in the regions of origin, in an attempt to halt the inflow of people. As such, development is often conceptualized as a place-bound process that focuses on enabling people to achieve a better quality of life ‘at home’, implying that migration is an indicator of development failure. Moreover, the mobility of some is celebrated, whereas that of lower skilled migrants is framed as problematic. Such interpretation of development was also reflected in the millennium development goals, which hardly referred to migration. During the preparation of the 2030 Agenda, there were insistent demands to include migration in the new development agenda. In this article, we analyse the 2030 Agenda and its framing, and consider the potential strengths, weaknesses, potentials and risks in relation to migration. The article questions the ability of the Agenda to reflect the translocal and de-territorialized characteristics of our global economy, and the complex relationships that link livelihoods and lifestyles across distant places. We argue that the tension between migration and development is not a new phenomenon and that the 2030 Agenda will not be able to deliver fundamental changes to the present place-based notion of development and do justice to a mobile world.

Keywords: migration; development; 2030 Agenda; SDGs; development cooperation; mobility

Introduction

Human migration is part of human history. As the world became increasingly interconnected, migration and other forms of mobilities evolved into one of the defining characteristics of our world. This started happening centuries ago, and not only since the dawn of the ‘age of globalization’. For decades, academics and policy-makers have studied and debated the reasons for and the impact of migration. A wealth of knowledge has been produced, illustrating the complex, dynamic and at times contradictory relation between migration and development. Despite the importance of migration as lived reality among many individuals and households on the one hand, and a development

challenge and/or strategy among many economies on the other hand, it was omitted from the millennium development goals (MDGs). In September 2015, UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to replace the MDGs. The Agenda consists of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). Although not referred to as a distinct domain for concerted development interventions (i.e. as one of the development goals), migration has for the first time been included in the global development framework. Specifically, seven explicit references are made to migrants and migration. Unlike the MDG framework, which fundamentally steered global development interventions for 15 years, the SDGs recognize the potential contribution of well-managed migration to sustainable development.

It would, however, be premature to sit back and rely on the SDG machinery to tackle the complex and mutating challenges and seize the numerous opportunities in the global migration field. For one, the SDG exercise is still a work in progress, and the lack of details about it precludes anything beyond speculation regarding its power to fulfil the overarching commitment to 'leave no-one behind'. Furthermore, as mentioned, migration is not considered a major domain in the SDG development framework, leaving much room to manoeuvre in various directions, from connecting it to all imaginable Goals or letting it slip through the cracks.

In this article, we analyse the place of migration in the 2030 Agenda. We juxtapose the positions and interpretations of migration in the MDG and SDG frameworks. Although we recognize a few positive changes in the transition – for example in the process of producing the SDGs, and more specifically, in bringing migrants and migration somewhat to the fore – we are critical about the conceptualization of migration and development shared in the two development frameworks. We argue that the 2030 Agenda continues to consider migration a binary and linear process. In addition, poverty and development are seen as rather territorialized processes, and development is regarded as a process that only takes place 'at home'. As such, these interpretations of migration and development do not reflect the translocal and de-territorialized characteristics of our global economy, or the complex relationships that link livelihoods and lifestyles across distant places. In this situation, how can we expect this mammoth, very expensive and bureaucratic exercise to engender sustainable and inclusive development?

In the following section, we briefly introduce our main concepts: mobility, de-territorialization and development. After that, we explore the related policy responses that have been implemented, and the global initiatives to institutionalize the 'migration and development' field. We argue that the observed tension between migration and development is not a new phenomenon, but builds upon the discourse developed in the past. In the remaining part of the article, we focus on the 2030 Agenda. We first describe the Agenda, including the diverging motivations of the stakeholders, and highlight four main concerns related to the position of migration in the current development agenda. Finally, we explore whether the 2030 Agenda will be able to deliver

fundamental changes to the present place-bound notion of development and do justice to a mobile world at a time when migration is highly politicized and problematized.

Key concepts: mobility, de-territorialization and development

We are living in an increasingly mobile world, in the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 1998). There are currently 244 million international migrants (UNDESA, 2015; up from 191 million in 2005), representing approx. 3.3 per cent of the world population. If this trend continues, there will be 405 million migrants by 2050. About 35 per cent of migrants move from South to North, 37 per cent move within the Global South and 23 per cent move within the North and 5 per cent move from North to South (IOM, 2015). Internal migration is even more common, with about 740 million internal migrants worldwide (UNDP, 2009). Thus, the total number of migrants is almost 1 billion. In addition, there are almost 20 million refugees worldwide, which is around 3.9 million more than in 2013. They are part of the 65.3 million people who have been forcibly displaced at the global level. The vast majority of them (86 per cent) are hosted in the Global South (UNHCR, 2015). One could go on with figures on student migration, tourism of different kinds, people commuting for work and family, etc. The picture is clear: mobility in all its dimensions, including migration, forms part and parcel of the lives of numerous people and economies in our contemporary globalized world.

Migration is inherently linked to globalization. The worldwide integration of economic, political, cultural and social flows, and processes has resulted in a changing role of geography and distance. Cairncross (1997) went so far as to declare the ‘death of distance’ in our shrinking world. Globalization facilitates the mobility of goods, capital and people, and interpreted in this way, mobility is a driver as well as a symptom and an outcome of globalization. De-territorialization, the delinking of certain processes from a defined territory, is considered an inherent feature of globalization. The use of the concept varies considerably (see also Elden, 2005): whereas some authors use it to refer to a cultural process in which social actions are geographically separated from their territorial context (Appadurai, 1996; Mazzucato et al., 2004), others refer to it as a process related to the construction of regional and national identities (Williams, 2003). Elden (2005) argued that globalization presents us not so much with a radical break from territory, as with a reconfiguration of existing notions of territory. This way, de-territorialization is intrinsically linked to other geographical conceptual tools such as space, place and locality. In this article, we define de-territorialization as a process through which human actions take place as spatially unfixated, not embodied in localities.

The fact that many people migrate in search of a better future establishes a direct link with development and raises questions about the implications of migration for development, and vice versa. Development is generally defined as a process of ‘encompassing improvement’ (Jong, 2006: p.21), either inherent as an implication of economic

and social transformation, or intentional as efforts to reduce poverty and to stimulate progress, for example through government interventions or international cooperation policies (Bakewell, 2007; Jong 2006). We focus on the latter, by discussing the conceptualization of a specific policy framework – the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – in relation to migration. Understood in this way, development, or the development practice, is often interpreted as an intrinsically territorialized phenomenon, aimed at the development of specific localities (communities, neighbourhoods or villages) and the inhabitants of these localities by means of an intervention (Bakewell, 2007: p.28; Zoomers et al. 2016).

Development is closely linked to migration, though views on the direction of this relationship vary substantially. According to some, migration leads to dependence on remittances and to inequality and exploitation; others emphasize the progress – fuelled by remittances and brain gain – as an outcome and praise the triple-win situation offered by migration, with benefits for the migrant, the sending state and the recipient state (De Haas 2010; Gamlen 2014; Page and Plaza 2005). Over time, the thinking about migration and development has tended to change considerably. De Haas (2010) compared the thinking about this relationship with the swinging of a ‘pendulum’: from optimism in the 1950s and 1960s to pessimism in the 1970s and 1980s, and to a more nuanced view, inspired by notions of transnationalism, in the new millennium. His metaphor shows that the impact of migration on development is at least a multifaceted and often a contradictory one, influenced by contexts of exit and reception, including migration, integration and development policies. In addition, the relationship between migration and development is one that has mobilized a diverse set of agents in the international development sector.

Global initiatives representing diverging agendas

Through the years, starting in 1994 with the UN Population and Development conference¹ in Cairo, but especially since 2000, several attempts to link migration to development have been made. In 2003, the Global Commission on International Migration was established by the then secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. The Commission published a report, a framework for formulating a response to international migration that included Six Principles of Action, in 2005. These principles addressed different dimensions of human mobility, including management, and also included the relationship between migration and development. The second High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (2006) proposed the establishment of a global platform on migration and development. The Global

¹During the conference a Program of Action was drafted, ‘including a chapter on international migration (Chapter X), which ranges across issues such as remittances, temporary migration, transfer of knowledge, skills and technology, etc. and calls for ‘orderly international migration that can have positive impacts on both the communities of origin and the communities of destination’ (GFMD 2015).

Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD), launched in 2007 in Brussels, is a platform established by UN member states to address the links between migration and development in ‘practical and action-oriented ways. It is an informal, non-binding, voluntary and government-led process that marks the culmination of more than a decade of international dialogue on the growing importance of the linkages between migration and development’ (GFMD, 2015). Apart from these supranational initiatives, several donors, such as the UK, the Netherlands, France and Spain, have established migration and development (M&D) policies (Nijenhuis and Broekhuis, 2010; Vammen and Mossin Brønden, 2012).

This emergence of the migration–development nexus on the agenda of international development community resulted in three main focus areas: remittances, skilled migration and diaspora involvement (see also Skeldon, 2008a). Together, these three areas have generated an impressive number of projects and programmes throughout the world, ranging from projects to decrease the tax burden on remittance senders, through the recognition of foreign diplomas and the portability of social protection rights, to training diaspora organizations to contribute in a professional way to development in the region of origin. This has also led to the establishment of co-development programmes aimed at linking immigrants and their organizations to development processes in the relevant region of origin, and to many special groups, platforms and committees working on ways to involve immigrants in development processes in their regions of origin (Grillo and Riccio, 2004).

Despite all these efforts to align M&D agendas, coherent and consistent M&D policies have been absent from most development policies, at both the national and the donor level and within international organizations. The institutional setting of interventions in this field is often limited to a specific entity, namely a special unit for M&D. There has been no mainstreaming of migration in development policy, nor of development in migration policies, resulting in fragmentation of the M&D field. We have identified four reasons for this lack of consistent M&D policies (see also Bakewell, 2007; Lönnback, 2014: p.7; Skeldon, 2008a).

First, and most important, the political economy of international migration plays a dominant role in this. Different countries have different interests. The agenda of migrant-receiving countries is determined by two discourses. On the one hand, economic concerns play a role, in particular demographic processes, including ageing and the increasing demand for skilled personnel (Knoll and Keijzer, 2013). As a result, many western European countries implement migration policies in which the immigration of low-skilled migrants is restricted and the entry of high-skilled migrants is promoted. For this purpose, countries have introduced selective admission as a tool in migration management, and established specific ‘front offices’ that facilitate the rapid entry of ‘knowledge migrants’.² On the other hand, the public debates – and to a certain

²See for example, the front office of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND): <https://ind.nl/EN/individuals/residence-wizard/work/highly-skilled-migrant>.

extent, also policies – are dominated by discussions on integration, social cohesion, national security and the pressure on public services. In several discussions, the costs of immigration are stressed (see e.g. Dustmann and Frattini, 2013), whereas the net contributions that migrants make to their host societies are hardly ever mentioned. Internal migration is often not mentioned at all (Hickey, 2016). Migrant-sending countries have a different position in this debate. An analysis of the integration of migration into the national development policies of sending countries, through a review of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) (Black and Sward, 2009), shows that attitudes towards migration differ considerably. International migration is regarded with mixed feelings: although some countries mainly consider it a problem, quite a few PRSPs refer to the positive contribution of remittances. Internal migration is generally perceived as a negative phenomenon. These different attitudes towards migration influence the agendas of sending countries. While benefiting from the inflow of remittances, some sending countries also express their concern about the brain drain: the loss of skilled people due to outmigration (Lucci and Martins, 2013; Skeldon, 2008a). In addition to remittances and brain drain, other issues on the agendas of sending countries are the protection of migrant rights, to prevent abuse and exploitation, and the reduction of the costs of remittance sending. Other countries in the Global South aim at more flexible migration policies that would enable the circular movement of people.

Second, migration management is generally considered to be the responsibility of individual states. The matter is closely bound up with the sovereignty of states, and as such it is very difficult to come to an agreement, as shown by recent discussions in the EU on the redistribution of the refugee inflow. The emphasis is on the ability of countries to make autonomous decisions on immigration, and on the sovereignty of states in migration management. A multilateral agenda for the governance of international migration is lacking (McGregor et al. 2014).

Third, different views on the relationship between migration and development have resulted in differing approaches to M&D policies. Some countries emphasize the role of return, and others the role of diaspora organizations in development in the destination country (see also Vammen and Mossin Brønden, 2012). Overall, rather technical interventions dominate these approaches in an attempt to accommodate the demands of migrants and their associations in an instrumental way, such as reducing the transaction costs of remittances and professionalization trajectories for diaspora organizations.

Finally, the fact that migration was not included in the MDGs, the most important global agreement to stimulate development in the Global South, is considered a huge failure and a major shortcoming of governments and the international development community, an issue that is further elaborated in the following section.

Migration in the MDGs and the SDGs

The UN ‘Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration’ (UN 2001) mentions migration only as one of the causes of the worsening

global malaria problem, and migrants as ‘victims of discrimination, racism and intolerance’ (Clemens, 2014). Although a review of 15 years of MDGs shows that the mobilizing power of these eight relatively simple aims, captured in colourful icons, has been huge (Wouters et al. 2014), criticism of the MDGs appears to dominate discussions in academic and practitioners’ circles. These criticisms can be condensed into four main strands: (1) the conceptualization of development, with a rather reductionist view of development and above all an apolitical perspective on development, in which human rights, uneven access to resources and unequal ‘terms of trade’ are reduced to ‘absentee’ powers (see Koehler, 2015); (2) the responsibilities for development, isolating the causes of poverty within the domestic policies of governments in the Global South; (3) the contextualization of development with limited room for diversity and (4) methodological issues, leading to indicator-based management (see also Koehler, 2015; Nelson, 2007; Pogge, 2004; Saith, 2006; Vandemoortele, 2011; Wouters et al. 2014).

Apart from these general criticisms, the MDGs represent an approach to development that includes a rather selective and value-laden view on human mobility. For example, whereas migration policies have a dominant position in domestic policy discussions, and hence have created a huge community of migration experts, policy-makers and researchers, the MDGs obstinately focus on human development without any form of human mobility; that is, without saying that ‘... it is virtually impossible to envisage progress towards achieving the existing MDGs without some kind of migration’ (Skeldon, 2008b: p.2). In addition, it is argued that the root causes of migration – embedded in unequal migration opportunities resulting from a neoliberal paradigm – have been systematically downplayed (Thieme and Ghimire, 2014). The human rights of migrants, also in relation to labour, and social costs have been disregarded, and the economic and social benefits derived from migration have been ignored. Various authors have pointed at the missing link with migration in the MDGs, in particular when the 2030 Agenda was shaped (see Bakewell, 2007; Clemens, 2014; DIE, 2013; Knoll and Keijzer, 2013; McCloskey, 2015; Skeldon, 2008b).

The political and economic context in which the elaboration on the SDGs took place differs from that of the MDGs. The year 2000 marked a period of relatively wealth, with clear-cut labels for the South and the North, and a well-defined and stable aid architecture (Tiwari, 2015). The context of the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda stands in stark contrast: the world is going through a long period of financial crisis, with security dominating aid discussions, a much more diverse arena of stakeholders that includes emerging actors such as China, India and South Africa, and a different role for NGOs. In short, the clarity of the previous period has given way to a less neatly organized world, a different geo-political order and different agendas. This also implies a more complex context in which to ‘leave no-one behind’, the credo of the SDGs.

Regarding the role of migration, the major difference from the MDGs is that the SDGs pay attention to migration more explicitly. The political declaration of the

Summit Outcome Document, entitled ‘Transforming our world – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, recognizes the ‘positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth’, while observing the ‘multi-dimensional reality’ of migration.

Paragraph 35 of the Summit Outcome Document notes the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development, and mentions ‘full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status’; paragraph 14 recognizes that forced displacement is a threat to development progress; paragraph 23 identifies migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons as vulnerable people; paragraph 25 establishes that migrants should have access to lifelong learning; paragraph 27 contains a commitment to eradicate human trafficking and paragraph 74.g establishes that the follow-up process will include disaggregated data based on migration status. Targets that explicitly refer to migration are listed under the goals on economic growth, employment and decent work (SDG 8), inequality (SDG 10) and means of implementation (SDG 17):

- 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment; Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies;
- 10.c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent; and
- 17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries [...] to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by [inter alia ...] migratory status

In addition, three targets demand an end to exploitation and human trafficking under the goals on gender equality (SDG 5); economic growth, employment and decent work (SDG 8) and peaceful societies, access to justice and accountable institutions (SDG 16).

The presentation of the 2030 Agenda took place at a time when Europe was experiencing an inflow of refugees, a phenomenon labelled in the media as ‘the migration crisis’. Migration has become more problematized and politicized than ever. Donor countries (especially those in Western Europe) and supranational organizations such as the UN and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are eager to identify the ‘root causes of migration’. As a result, the link between migration and development is underlined in many recent policy initiatives. This also provides a push in searching for and defining or redefining all possible connections between the SDGs and migration. The IOM (2016) produced a brief analysis outlining the place of migration and migrants in relevant SDGs. The UN published a similar document, with suggestions for implementation actions and measurement indicators (2016). These mapping exercises are useful as they help create spaces for migration-related issues, which were not given an obvious place in the original SDG presentation. Nonetheless, one

cannot help but be sceptical about the real reason for making so many migration–SDG links. Should these migration-/migrant-related development goals be pursued for the benefit of those people ‘there’ – or out of fear that they will otherwise come ‘here’? This ‘conspiracy theory’ is not far-fetched when we remember how many western European donors have pointed to the need to bring about ‘development’ in the regions of origin in order to bring the inflow of people to a halt since the ‘encroachment of the migration crisis’ on Europe (Gotev, 2015).

A quick scan of the SDGs suggests that the 2030 Agenda reflects the interests of the main stakeholders – migrants, sending states and receiving countries – since remittances as well as migrant rights and migration management issues are mentioned. However, the Agenda hardly elaborates on the way these issues should be tackled, for example which instruments should be used to protect the rights of migrant workers. Moreover, the ‘who’ question is hardly addressed, and thus the implementation of the Agenda remains rather open. In our opinion, it is still too early to applaud as a number of fundamental issues require further attention.

The 2030 Agenda: a sedentary interpretation of M&D

Apart from the ‘How should we do this?’ and the ‘Who should be involved?’ questions, our main concern is the conceptualization of both migration and development in the 2030 Agenda, which reflects a continued interpretation of migration as a binary and linear process and a rather territorialized notion of poverty and development, and in which development is still ‘at home’. In this section, we further elaborate on this by discussing four main concerns: the interpretation of migration/mobility, the position of the development cooperation sector, the current problematization of migration and the sedentary conceptualization of development.

Migration as a binary and linear process

The SDGs continue to view migration as a binary, and also linear, process in which migrants tend to move as a one-way flow from the Global South to richer countries, on a permanent basis. According to King (2012), ‘binary models equated society with the boundaries of a particular nation state and confine policy and academic discourse on immigrants’ economic, social and political life only to the boundaries of the state to which they migrated’. Many authors have argued against such a linear perception of international migration, in particular since such a definitive separation from home does not match the reality of international migrants’ lives today. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), for example, questioned such models since the current dynamics of international migration – with highly diverse migratory flows, increasing circularity and patterns of belonging that are not limited to only one nation state – cannot be explained by such models.

In addition, the focus of the SDGs is very much on international migration, a consequence of the national framing in the policy discourse, which leaves other forms of migration in a vacuum. An example of such a form is internal migration, which accounts for almost 75 per cent of migrants worldwide. Thus, not only is international mobility hard to grasp, but also other forms of mobility that do not fit into linear models of mobility are not recognized, and thus not addressed, by the SDGs. An example is multi-local household arrangements, a livelihood strategy whereby people take advantage of opportunities available to them in different spatial settings (often rural–urban) as members of the household operate along a rural–urban continuum tied together by remittances and migration and extended family networks (Bah et al., 2003; Crush and Pendleton, 2009).

Our main concern, however, is that the 2030 Agenda promotes the free movement of capital as a solution, while deepening the sedentary perspective that has conventionally framed migration and development. Trade liberalization is a recurrent theme in the SDGs: Goal 12 for the rationalization of fossil fuel, Goal 14 for the prohibition of fisheries subsidies and Goal 17 for partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society, give robust support to global business and free trade, calling for ‘meaningful trade liberalization under the WTO’. International trade (in free trade format) is described twice as an ‘engine for inclusive economic growth’ in the ‘means of implementation’ section of the SDGs. In contrast to this positive perspective, the mobility of people is generally framed in a problematic imagery. Human migration and mobility are considered processes to be managed – Goal 10: ‘facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies’. Migration is, like in the MDG era, presented as a problem, a threat to prosperity and public order (in the destinations, especially in the North) that needs to be fixed by appropriate policies, which are or can be translated into repressive variants in the form of tight border controls, or (seemingly) more liberal ones that address the ‘root causes’ of migration – usually defined as poverty and violence in origin countries – so that people do not have to migrate. This perspective ignores the fact that global migration has become (in fact, always has been, but to a lesser extent) a normal part of social relations (Castles, 2008).

Migration in development cooperation practice

The classic notion of migration as a problem is also traceable in the practice of international development cooperation involved in the design of the SDGs and future co-implementers of the 2030 Agenda. Several examples from the development sector show that stakeholders – donors, recipient countries and NGOs – have problems giving input, a face, to the migration–development nexus. This becomes very evident in situations where ‘traditional’ development interventions are confronted with emigration and/or immigration. Nyberg Sörenson (2016), in her analysis of

Danish migration and development policies, and using examples from Central America, described how the Danish mission in Central America was very hesitant to address out-migration, a major issue in the Central American context, and concluded that ‘... reluctance to incorporate migration concerns in “classic” development activities represents a missed opportunity’.

Many development NGOs find it difficult to design interventions in the field of the migration–development nexus. Surprisingly few development NGOs are present among the main committees and platforms that are part of the aforementioned GFMD community. According to some sources, they are often reluctant to participate because of their sedentary perspective on development: ‘... development organizations cherish a mental image of happy peasants, tilling fields or resting of an evening in a flourishing village with schools, water and the like’ (Clemens, 2012). From this perspective, migration is considered a failure. Bakewell (2007: p.35) added to this that:

It will be a brave chief executive of a European development NGO who suggests that facilitating higher levels of migration from developing countries into Europe may be a more effective way of reducing poverty than the launching of another development program in Africa.

We question the transformative power of the SDGs in this field, since the classic interpretation of ‘migration as a problem’ appears to be firmly rooted in the development practice, and is also fuelled by new funding opportunities that continue to see migration as a problem.

Addressing the root causes of migration

Migration is increasingly being problematized and the migration–development nexus is increasingly being used as a tool to ‘address the root causes of migration’, as some programmes recently formulated by the UK and Dutch governments euphemistically frame their ambitions (DFID, 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016a). A recent Dutch policy document on inclusive business positions migration as a result of development by presenting entrepreneurship and the creation of jobs to African youth as an instrument to tackle the ‘fundamental causes of migration’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

For this purpose, the migration–development nexus is being transformed into a trade relation, being commodified, using bilateral agreements to steer migration flows and, in particular, reduce migration. This peculiar and highly uneven trade relationship is illustrated by the Valletta Summit in November 2015, when EU leaders and African heads of state met to discuss migration issues. Presented as an effort to link the migration and development agendas, the Summit emphasized forced return and a decrease in migration. As a response, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was created, with the aim of bringing development to the major

sending countries in order to curb migration. Tools for doing so are economic programmes, focusing on employment, resilience projects including food security, migration management, and governance and security. In relation to this, the Dutch minister for Foreign Affairs wrote the following on his website (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016b):

The majority of migrants travelling to Europe via Libya are from West Africa, [...] Ghana, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire are among the most common countries of origin. These are the places from where large numbers of people are travelling to Europe, often at great risk to their own lives. So it's now time to reach agreements with the governments of those countries on managing these migration flows. For Europe, West Africa feels a long way away, but it's actually closer than we think.

The Trust Fund is effectuated through bilateral agreements with sending countries, and foresees the involvement of migration officers from sending countries to verify the nationality of migrants residing irregularly in Europe. Several authors (Herrero Cangas and Knoll, 2016; The Guardian, 2015) have responded critically, as the Fund targets migrant-sending countries that are not always the poorest countries, a principle that conflicts with the aid criteria of the Development Assistance Committee. In addition, ownership of the Fund by African countries seems to be limited, and by presenting the Fund as an emergency fund, false expectations could be created, as though a sudden capital input could indeed stop migration, which sharply contrasts with the result of 40 years of international development cooperation in Africa.

The bilateral agreements used in the Trust Fund are a form of conditionality, an instrument that is increasingly being used by donors to enforce migration policies upon recipient countries in the framework of development cooperation. Trauner and Deimel (2013: p.28), in their analysis of the impact of EU migration policies on Mali, concluded that: 'in general, the EU has focused on using development aid and cooperation agreements for migration control purposes'. In addition, in 2012 the Netherlands cut the budget for development cooperation with Ghana by €10 million because the Ghanaian government refused to collaborate in the identification and deportation of irregular migrants. One could argue – as a ICMPD/ECDPM study (2013) rightly observed – that such measures will hurt the population more than the government and could even trigger emigration.

A sedentary perspective of development

The overall tenor around human migration and mobilities deepens the sedentary perspective of development from the MDG era. Development is conceived as a rather territorialized phenomenon, to be measured by a set of indicators chosen for the 17 Goals that reflect the changes in one single place (a village, town, city or country). In this framing, migration and other forms of human mobilities (including education mobility) are considered to be a result of a lack of development in specific places – a

conventional but deep-seated view in the M&D discourse. The recent euphoria around the potential development impact of skilled mobilities (which of course also deserves critical reflection), for example, is not mentioned in the SDGs.

With the sedentary bias not corrected, the SDGs continue to ignore the translocal character of development, in which development is interpreted in a much more holistic way, recognizing the different forms of mobilities, movements and flows (of people but also other non-human elements, such as capital, goods, knowledge, identities, etc.) and the way in which these dynamics produce connectedness between different scales (Zoomers and Van Westen, 2011). Conceptualized with a territorial, bounded, sedentary and problems-up-for-technical-fix tradition, the 169 goals are not likely to be able to capture the complex, spatially and temporally interdependent processes and relations that shape global and local development. Considering the power of the SDGs, like their predecessors the MDGs, in steering global development policies and the related financing, this blind spot of this new massive set of global development directives is no banal business.

As the MDG era came to an end, Walden Bello argued that ‘the embrace of the MDGs by governments and international bodies was, to a significant degree, a defensive response and a strategy of obfuscating the structural sources of these manifestations of social injustice’ (2015: p.155). He further argued that we could not afford to invest for another 15 years in targets that ‘dance around the structural causes of poverty; the neo-liberal economic medicine disastrously imposed on countries in the South’ (2015: p.188). Indeed, considering the conceptualization and implementation of the SDGs, it is questionable whether the many goals will be able to get to the heart of key M&D issues and challenge the structural injustices in the current global politico-economic system and ensure that sustainable development is people-centred and protects our future generations. That is to say, migration policy cannot be assessed or reshaped for the promotion of a more sustainable and equitable world without an analysis of the ‘wider issues of global power, wealth and inequality’ (Mossin Brønden, 2012).

Concluding remarks

These days, as we are constantly bombarded with the phrase ‘the migration crisis’, the urgency of thinking extra seriously and critically about the meanings of and relations between migration, development/underdevelopment is greater than ever. In this article, we began investigating the place given to migration and other forms of human mobilities in the SDG paradigm. An analysis of the Goals (and sub-goals) revealed that despite the rising importance of migration and mobilities as part and parcel of practically all societies, they have not been made the focus of a specific Goal, but are mentioned in a few Goals. This scattered appearance of the keywords here and there shows that migration and human mobilities are still considered somewhat marginal, not the core issues in development goal setting. When migration is mentioned in the text more distinctly, it is presented as a problem to be managed and

controlled. The sedentary bias is apparent: development should be promoted in places where migration takes place. By improving the situation *there*, people do not have to move and pose challenges *here*. This territorialized perspective on development fails to recognize the dynamic, relational and translocal nature of development. Interventions grounded in such a conceptualization of development remain focused, perhaps hoping against hope, on the improved access to local, place-based assets and capabilities, for example land, education and health. Furthermore, it provides a stark contrast to the neoliberal, mobility bias running through the SDGs: whereas people (especially those from poor and violent contexts) should not move, trade should be liberalized and flow freely across borders. The carry-over, or even deepening of the neoliberal development mantra from the MDGs to the SDGs era calls for scepticism. Of course it remains to be seen how the SDGs will bring about sustainable and inclusive development, but can we global citizens, and the dispossessed people and degraded ecosystems in particular, afford to wait another 15 years for the trickle-down benefits generated by the neoliberal world market economy?

It would be exaggerating to say that the SDGs are just an enlargement of the MDGs. Many appreciate, for instance, the different or new way in which the SDGs were formulated. Unlike the MDGs, which were created through a top-down process, the SDGs were created through ‘inclusive participatory’ processes, with face-to-face consultations in more than 100 countries and the input from millions of individuals and groups on websites etc. But is this ‘inclusive’ agenda-setting process a guarantee of comprehensive goal setting, transparency and accountability? In the M&D arena, stakeholders ranging from government officials, other policy bodies and diverse actors and institutions in civil society have been active in making their voices heard. At the moment, however, shortly after the SDGs were approved, donors are mainly busy drafting development policies that will curb migration. As such, the aforementioned ‘swinging pendulum’, used by De Haas (2010) to describe the changing views on the relationship between migration and development, is still a valid metaphor, although framed in a different way. To a critical observer, the current emphasis on migration management to reduce mobility, in a period in which terrorism and security dominate the front pages, might also represent a tool to block the immigration of the ‘Other’, in terms of religion, race, ethnicity, beliefs and culture. In such world, a ‘global partnership for development’ as envisioned by the MDGs in 2015 seems to be further away than ever.

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