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Gender, Migration and Socioeconomic Development in Africa

- Conferences - Annual Gender Symposium -

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In line with its mandate to promote high-level scientific and academic debates on various aspects of socioeconomic development in Africa, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) hereby announces the 2010 edition of its Gender Symposium which will be held from 24 to 26 November, 2010 in Cairo, Egypt. The Gender Symposium is a forum organised annually by CODESRIA to discuss gender issues and their impacts on the development of the continent. The theme of this year's edition is Gender, Migration and Socioeconomic Development in Africa.

For over a decade, the Council has been involved in promoting the gender dimension of all the studies conducted by its research groups. But in recent times, migration has become an important component of the continent's development process. Migrants contribute substantially to the Gross National Product through their monetary transfers, which exceed official development aid in some countries. They also influence the destinies of their countries in various forms. Moreover, in the context of globalisation, migration and development have become interdependent processes, despite the policies of many countries to control migration flows. Nevertheless, migration is still not integrated into the development plans of most countries; hence, the importance of studying migration in relations to development processes, and revealing its various dimensions.

Specifically, understanding the gender dimension in the process of migration and development is both an essential and urgent exercise. Although migration as a phenomenon is as old as the world and studies on it are not new, researchers only began to interrogate it, especially the gender dimension, in a more systemic way in the mid-80s. But now, female migration has increased substantially at the international level, drawing the attention of not only researchers but also international organisations. According to UN statistics, in 2005, 49.6% of international migrants (about 94.5 million) were women; and with few exceptions (Africa and Asia), female migrants are in the majority, compared to their male counterparts. Increased demand for female labour in Northern countries, the rapid and radical socioeconomic transformations in developing countries, and the persistence and/or resurgence of conflicts in some regions of the world, particularly Africa, are factors which have contributed to this expansion.

As a result, studies and debates on the relationship between gender and migration are also increasing. Yet, the numerous and complex relationships between these two terms continue to raise questions and concerns among researchers, scholars, civil society organisations, human rights groups, and even politicians. The dominant perception of the concept of gender and migration has long remained trapped in an approach that sees female migrants as 'invisible', 'passive', 'ignorant' and 'unproductive' victims who do not contribute to the development of the economies of their countries of origin or host countries, regardless of their level of education; and hence subjected to various forms of marginalisation, discrimination and maltreatment, the gravest of which is sexual violation.

This perspective however began to change with increase in the number of scientific studies on the place and role of female Diasporas in origin and host economies. The 2010 CODESRIA Gender Symposium intends to advance these studies, as it will pay particular attention to the new dynamics caused by the change in the status and profile of female emigration. Participants will also have the opportunity to take a critical look at classical theories and approaches on migration, their objective limits, and the progressive incorporation of gender relations and feminism in understanding the complexity of migration as a global phenomenon.

While studies on the relationship between gender (or rather women) and migration have increased, those addressing the links between gender, migration and development are still scarce, and limited in scope, as they focus more on the

'feminisation of migration', understood as the increase in number (quantitative) of female migrants and more observable in the economically advanced countries which are usually the target destinations of the migrants. Another premise for the focus of the symposium this year is that the concept of development should consider the contribution of female migrants to wealth creation for the socioeconomic development of their host and origin countries. It should also include the development of female migrants as social beings, through a dynamic process that results in growth, advancement, empowerment and progress. Some studies in the last few years have demonstrated that, in terms of employment, the situations are still very unequal between male migrants and female migrants of working age. The unemployment rate for female migrants, though declining, is allegedly generally higher than that of their male counterparts, and we seem to be moving towards a situation where migration increases women's autonomy, economic power and social status.

The relationship between gender, migration and development can also be viewed in terms of the empowerment of women. Some works in the field wonder whether female migration is a ticket to women's empowerment, or another avenue for the violation of the basic rights of women. The complexity of contemporary international migrations is such that the answer is not simple. The predominant perception so far, which the symposium aims to transcend, still remains that which fails to recognise that the profile of female migrants has changed, and that female migration has embraced a number of characteristics that vary according to generations, countries of origin and length of stay in host countries. Understanding the gender dimensions of migration also means focusing on power relations established in the different categories of migrants, between migrants from wealthier social strata and those from poorer social strata. Issues of social promotion between generations of migrants, autonomy, parity and emancipation will therefore be at the centre of discussions during the 2010 CODESRIA Gender Symposium. Participants are therefore enjoined to consider the different aspects of the issue of gender, migration and development by trying to answer the following questions: How is the gender-based division in the labour market altered by the arrival of female workers of other nationalities?; How do emigrants affect service structures?; What is the relationship between native women and these newcomers as regards the issue of changing 'female roles?'; and many other issues outlined above.

Below are the various sub-themes that would be covered by papers presented during the symposium:

- ▶ Migration, gender and development: theories and approaches;
- ▶ The feminisation of African migrations;
- ▶ Female migrations, sexospecific roles and gender equality;
- ▶ Women and forced migrations;
- ▶ African female migrants and cash transfers;
- ▶ Female migration and human trafficking;
- ▶ Migration and the reconfiguration of the labour market;
- ▶ Migration and the empowerment of African women;
- ▶ Migration, gender, culture and religion;
- ▶ Female migration and human rights;
- ▶ Women, migration and social protection;
- ▶ Gender, migration and social integration;
- ▶ Migration, gender and citizenship;
- ▶ Female Diasporas and relationship with origin and host countries;
- ▶ The impact of male emigration on women;
- ▶ Female migrants and the public spaces of origin and host countries;
- ▶ Organisational networks of female migrants.

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