Abstract

Migration is a human phenomenon that has intensified during the past several decades, reflecting the dynamics of societies and upholding the fact of its being an eternal human phenomenon. Remittances are a form of showing the attachment the migrant has with the country of origin, and one of the most visible and beneficial aspects of how international migration is reshaping the countries of origin. The hypothesis investigated by this study is that diaspora remittances to Francophone Africa south of the Sahara contribute to finance basic social services and infrastructures. A descriptive approach, based on literature review and secondary data shows how the contribution of diaspora remittances is filling the gap in the provision of social services that official sources cannot fill.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a human phenomenon that has intensified during the past couple of decades, reflecting the dynamics of societies and upholding the fact of its being an eternal human phenomenon. Perhaps, the most important causes of migration are the inequalities in the living conditions of people in various societies, the conflicts, and the need to survive. While large numbers of people have been displaced as a result of conflicts, an even larger number have moved to search for better living conditions. Natural phenomena such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and droughts force people to emigrate. When people in rural, less developed areas and

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societies learn to appreciate and consume goods they cannot produce, they emigrate to where they can procure such goods through selling their labor or carrying out other types of activities. Economic downturns may also encourage workers to migrate abroad and thereby begin to transfer funds to families left behind.

All those who have migrated and settled in various countries all over the world are those we are referring to, in this paper, as the diaspora. The term diaspora is of recent usage in the social sciences (Bruneau 1995; Hovanessian 1998). Before 1980 very little work considered this notion. It was generally associated with the Jews. It is used here to mean the migratory phenomenon characterized by the dispersion of populations from a country in many receiving countries. Remittances are a form of showing the attachment migrants have with their respective countries of origin.

Remittances are one of the most visible, as well as beneficial, aspects of how international migration is reshaping the countries of origin. In a variety of settings, remittances are quietly transforming these societies and regions and are the most manifest example of self-help available to poor households in the global arena. Their role is particularly important in augmenting private consumption and alleviating transient poverty in receiving countries. Remittances emanating from migration are contributing in a growing way to globalizing the world. A typical example is in the area of information and communications technology. In most parts of rural Africa today, mobile telephone sets are becoming more and more popular, as migrants, especially in Europe and North America, want to keep in touch with relatives and friends back in the countries of origin. These telephone sets are generally supplied and maintained by the migrants in the diaspora. Internet services are becoming popular especially in the urban areas, as people try to stay in touch with sons, daughters, relatives, friends, and others, all being paid for by remittances.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) report (2001) has indicated that migrant remittances are increasingly becoming a more constant source of income to most developing countries, with a doubling of annual remittances between 1988 and 1999. Sander (2003) also reported that remittances have proven to be the most stable flow compared to official development assistance (ODA) and to private capital flows. In effect, the brain drain resulting from migration is not necessarily negative as has been perceived in some circles, since it provides incentive for individuals and households to make great efforts to obtain a good education. Expatriate nationals therefore serve as important links for financial remittances as well as for trade and technology transmission.

In 2004, remittances totaled some US$126 billion. Salimano (2003) notes that remittance flows have concentrated in a group of developing