International migration and national development: An introduction to policies in sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

This book focuses on achieving a better understanding of the implications of international migration for national development. It is written from the perspective of the sending countries in the South and with an emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. Its purpose is two-fold: to explore current perceptions in the countries of origin of the links between international migration and national development, and also to examine current trends in policy making, aimed at minimising the negative effects of migration, while optimising the development impact. What are the dominant view and policy initiatives in the different countries of sub-Saharan Africa? How do these relate to migration policies in other regions of the world? And how can migration help as a strategy for poverty alleviation?1

1 This research project focuses in particular on international labour migration - the movement of non-nationals or foreigners across national borders for purposes other than travel or short-
For a long time, policy makers paid little attention to migration. In development cooperation attention was paid mainly to the encouragement of local development and, where attention was paid to migration, it was generally viewed as an opposite pole to development: outmigration was regarded as an expression of poverty, and development projects were intended to contribute to the reduction of outmigration. Moreover, international migration was considered as brain drain, to the detriment of development in the South.

This situation has recently changed (Farrant et al., 2006; GCIM, 2005; IOM, 2001; United Nations, 2006; World Bank, 2006). There are various reasons why international migration is now high on the agenda. On the one hand, it is a consequence of increasing problems within the multicultural societies in the receiving areas, combined with a fear of ‘invasion’. For instance, on 1 September 2006 the website of the Dutch Algemeen Persbureau (APB, General Press Agency), carried the report:

There seems to be no end to the explosion of migrants from Africa. In the past two days over 800 migrants have arrived in the Canary Isles. 9,000 have already been intercepted in 2006. In August their number was higher than in the whole of 2005. There is an increasing impression that migrants are streaming in from all sides and that there is a growing need to check migration flows.

Whereas the emphasis was initially placed on restrictive (and anti-migrant) policies, there now appears to be a shift towards selective policies (including experimenting with circular migration). Because of the increasing ageing of the population in the receiving countries, there is a growing realisation that a call on migrant labour will have to be made in the not too distant future.

Another, more positive, reason why more attention has recently been paid to migration is the growing conviction that international migration cannot be seen in isolation from development, and that, with the right policies, migration can make an important contribution to development (Zoomers 2006).

With regard to the question of whether international migration can or cannot contribute to sustainable development and to combating poverty, there are at present two opposing views (de Haas, 2003, 2005; Tamas & Palme, 2006). According to the optimists, international migration offers good possibilities. They point in the first place to the remittances which are seen as a new or additional source of finance for development. According to estimates of the World Bank (2006), these remittances amounted to no less than 167,000 million