Introduction

In the twenty-first century, sub-Saharan Africa has come to a crossroads economically, politically and demographically. It is a region of contradictions: rich in resources, its peoples are becoming poorer by the day. Efforts by several countries to restructure their economies and open their markets to share in the global economy have been disappointing. Recurrent internal instability and conflicts have spurred disruptive population displacements. Wars and civil unrest generate migrants and refugees as political destabilisation severely erodes the meagre developmental progress of the post-independence decade (Adepoju, 2001). Sub-Saharan Africa is thus a region of diverse migration circuits – as origin, destination and transit for labour migrants, undocumented migrants and refugees, and of brain circulation for professionals. These migrations take place predominantly within the region.

In this region, completely grounded in poverty, emigration pressure is compounded by demographic dynamics, unstable politics, endemic ethno-religious conflicts, persistent economic decline and environmental deterioration. From an apparently bright future during the era of independence and into the early
1970s, through the deteriorating economic and political conditions of the late 1970s and ‘80s, to the perception in the 1990s of a dismal future (see below), many Africans now see migration as their last hope for improving their living standards (Adepoju, 2006b).

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced all types of migration configurations – from, within and outside the region. Distinctive forms of migration characterise the various sub-regions: labour emigration from western and central Africa to developed countries and the Gulf States; refugee flows within eastern Africa; labour migration from eastern and many southern African countries to South Africa; and clandestine migration in West and East Africa. All these are changing dynamically.

The migration configuration is extremely complex. Traditional patterns of migration are feminising, migration destinations are diversifying, and migration of entrepreneurs is replacing labour migration. In addition, brain circulation within, is slowly supplanting brain drain from, the region. Trafficking in human beings, the changing map of refugee flows and the role of regional economic organisations in fostering free flow of labour, complete the circuit (Adepoju, 2004a).

The countries of sub-Saharan Africa face daunting challenges arising from complex and dynamic migratory trends – including the emigration of skilled and unskilled persons, both male and female – that compromise the possibility of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There are at the same time opportunities with regard to huge migrants’ remittance flows and the diaspora’s role in national development.

This chapter presents a broad overview of perspectives, best practices and lessons learnt with respect to migration and development policy coherence – or the lack of it; migration management through bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements; the role of migrant remittances and incentive regimes in promoting its productive domestic investment; diaspora transnational activities; and co-development programmes and their potential for addressing emigration pressure at the origin. The focus is on specific examples of how sub-Saharan African governments address the issues of migration policy and management (promoting managed migration through bilateral and multilateral agreements and preventing irregular labour migration); migration and development (co-development programmes, promoting the ethical recruitment of highly skilled persons, initiatives to attract back and retain qualified nationals, measures to reduce the cost of remittance transfers); and sub-regional economic integration for intra-regional labour mobility. The paper concludes by stressing the need for mutually beneficial trade regimes, South-South and South-North collaboration in capacity-building of officials, research and improved migration-related data systems.