

Co-development – a myth or a workable policy approach?

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“Co-development” has become an important buzzword in discussing and presenting migration policy in Europe. Quite often, however, those using the buzzword have taken advantage of the lack of a specific definition of the concept and have failed to implement policies that truly have a positive impact on development in countries on both sides of migration circuits. A fundamental question is therefore whether co-development principles can find real application in policy. Some recent examples of policy initiatives and innovative practice may provide clear indications for a workable policy approach.

1. Co-development: the maturation of a catch phrase

Co-development as a term emerged from the cooperation domain and not from the migration domain. It was not until the 1980's that the French began to use the term in association with the growing assisted return programmes. However, these programmes were meant essentially to facilitate removals, both by increasing compliance and by providing a sort of ethical excuse for the policy. Looking at these programmes, in fact, it is evident that the primary beneficiary of assisted return was the deporting country and not the receiving country.

In the 1990's, European policy discussion maintained a sharp distinction between development policy and migration policy. The “root causes” of migration, especially poverty and poor human development opportunities, were underlined as a target for development aid. Repression, conflict and lack of respect for human rights also attracted growing attention as push factors for migration, especially since the 1990's saw increased migratory pressure from conflict zones. This “root causes” vision of the link between migration and development was enshrined in the EU's 1999 Tampere Conclusions. The “co-“ in Tampere's “co-development” was never transformed into policy, since later Councils and directives had the explicit objective was to prevent immigration through security and conditional aid.¹

The European migration debate, historically dominated by Northern European countries whose labour migration policies ended in 1973, began in the late 1990's to take into account the fact of mass labour migration. This was particularly evident in Southern European countries, where governments resigned themselves to regulating migration rather than preventing it. A flurry of legislative activity followed, with draft European directives on all aspects of migration.

¹ CeSPI, “More development for less migration” or “Better migration for more development”? Shifting priorities in the European debate, MigraCtion Europa (Periodical analysis bulletin on migration policies in Europe), Special Issue, December 2003, <http://www.cespi.it/bollMigracion/MigSpecial3.PDF>.

At the same time, the vaguely worded Tampere conclusions led to a chorus of objections and counterproposals from civil society, development agencies and researchers. The discussion that ensued allowed for the development of a more detailed and articulated institutional vision of co-development, one which the European Commission attempted to express in a Communication first in late 2002 (COM/2002/0703 final), and again with a September 2005 Communication still under discussion (COM/2005/390 final). The latter finally concedes that the important element in migration-for-development, given the inevitability of human movement, is how to maximise the positive impact of migration on development in the home country.²

The policy environment has therefore matured and has begun to assimilate the link between co-development and migration: that the movement of individuals may be supported so as to improve its impact on the home country, and that such development impact may have effects on the receiving country beyond merely reducing migratory pressure.

However, what are the actual examples of migration co-development schemes? What principles underlie the current innovations in this area?

Co-development has been a concern of CeSPI in recent years, and the Rome-based policy research institute has brought together scholars in the migration field with experts in development policy. This ongoing work has both observed and assisted the evolving Italian approach to co-development, and allows for the identification of some concrete indications.³

2. Transnational integration: fostering mobility and circular migration

Many migrants do not intend to emigrate definitively. Migratory projects may foresee a period of work abroad alternating with a return, according to the availability of work abroad and the feasibility of return. This kind of trans-nationalism, when manifest in circular migration, is a positive phenomenon for co-development because migrants can count on moving back (and forth) when the time is right or when the appropriate resources are available. Education acquired in the host country can be applied in the home country; social and financial capital accumulated during work in the host country can be leveraged into business activity in the home country.

This kind of movement is not acknowledged in current policy. Migration law in most receiving countries rarely takes into account the plans and projects of the migrants themselves. In fact, admission and stay policy is generally developed to meet domestic needs and to address national concerns and issues. For example, short-term visas – from seasonal work to longer but limited admission – are meant to protect the domestic labour market from excess supply in the event of downturns. The policy is meant to facilitate the departure of the migrant, with no consideration of what might happen in the home country upon return.⁴

² F. Pastore, *Transnazionalismo e co-sviluppo: ‘aria fritta’ o concetti utili? riflessioni a partire dall’esperienza di ricerca del CeSPI*, discussion paper produced in the framework of IOM’s project *Development & Migration Circuits*, February 2006, <http://www.cespi.it/SCM/discussion%20paper.pdf>.

³ For an overview of Italian co-development policies and projects, with a particular focus on the Mediterranean, see F. Piperno and A. Stocchiero, *Migrants and Local Authorities for the EuroMediterranean Transnational Integration*, CeSPI Working Papers 23/2006, <http://www.cespi.it/WP/WP23-2%20Euomed%20migrants.pdf>. See also, A. Stocchiero, *Policies and Practices on Migration and Development in Italy: Lessons to be learnt and Suggestions for the EU’s Aeneas Programme*, Position Paper CeSPI, February 2005, <http://www.cespi.it/migration2/Migr&Dev%20positionpaper%20CeSPI.pdf>.

⁴ On the socio-economic reinsertion of former migrants in the country of origin, following forced repatriation, see the results of an empirical research conducted by CeSPI in Albania, Morocco and Nigeria in L. Coslovi and F. Piperno, *Forced return and then? Analysis of the impact of the expulsion of different categories of Migrants. A comparative study of Albania, Morocco and Nigeria*, Final research report produced for the ALNIMA project (2002/HLWG/26), February 2005, <http://www.cespi.it/PASTORE/Rapporto%20ALNIMA-ENG.pdf>.

Sending country governments appear no more sophisticated in their understanding of migrant needs. Negotiation of bilateral agreements places emphasis on increasing access to host country labour markets – essentially opening the pressure valve for domestic unemployment in countries of origin – without considering the characteristics or skills of migrants or their potential return. The immediate interest is in sending the unemployed abroad so that they can send remittances home.

One among few exceptions is the resentment of southern African countries towards the UK for drawing away domestically trained nursing staff.⁵ Yet this concern is limited to protecting a dwindling native labour force in a strategic sector, and has not led to a major policy shift towards supporting the return or circularity of these nurses. Nor has this concern about workers in the health sector led sending countries to develop concrete policy measures aimed at reducing the departure of other qualified workers.

Fostering circular migration will require freeing migrants from the obligation to remain indefinitely in the host countries, while ensuring that they can attempt to return to their home countries without losing residence rights in the host country. In other words, any measures which provide security of status favour circular migration. Dual citizenship is perhaps the strongest form of assurance of this right, and the expansion of dual citizenship can be taken as a positive sign in this direction.⁶

One might even cite the EU directive for long-term residents⁷ as a means for increasing circular migration. Of course, the trend in European host countries towards granting stability to long-term residents has been sustained by an interest in migrant rights rather than by concern about fostering circular migration. Nonetheless, the effect could be the same.

Even procedural changes may affect mobility. Delays in providing visas and permits discourage movement. Students may have to worry about losing their residence rights in the host country if they return home to seek work after graduation.

Some rigid labour laws may unwittingly restrict circular migration. Trade unions in Italy, for example, have struggled with the interest of some migrant members to save their holidays for extended trips to their home countries; likewise, some employers are hostile towards such lengthy absences, even when the holiday has been earned.

Restrictive citizenship, residence and procedural policies force a physical permanence in the host country. The physical permanence not only prevents return but convinces migrants to narrow the migratory project into settlement. Migrants are forced to abandon plans for return; resources are no longer saved or remitted but invested in settlement (mortgages and education of children in the host country, for example). A transnational approach, with mobility an expectation, sees investment in both countries – for example, home purchases in both countries – and the creation of schools which follow the home country curriculum, to exploit advantages of being in-between.

Flexibility in residence – “back and forth” rights – allows migrants to plan and change their strategies for movement according to changes in conditions in both countries and to changes in the priorities of individuals and families.

⁵ For an in-depth analysis, see OECD, *Trends in International Migration. 2003 Edition*, Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Economiques, Paris, 2004, Part III.

⁶ Along similar lines, P. Weil, *A flexible framework for a plural Europe*, Discussion paper prepared for the British Presidency of the European Union, October 2005, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Weil-final.pdf>.

⁷ [Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003](#) concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents. *Official Journal L 016*, 23/01/2004, pp. 44-53.

3. Investment in the network and not the individual

Another bromide in the policy discussion is the “migrant as co-development agent”. That is, that development aid should shift part of its focus from aid-driven development projects to those of emigrants. In this vision, migrants take on the responsibility for development in their countries. This may be through remittances from a Diaspora, or it may be through productive return (assisted or unassisted), or even through investment. The onus is shifted from the host country to the migrant.

An obvious shortcoming of this approach is that the immigrant himself or herself has not asked to be a development agent, and it isn't fair to expect development to be driven by individuals who have emigrated for themselves and their families, and not for the benefit of their hometown or home country. To expect their remittances to substitute for development aid risks being just a facile excuse for reducing aid commitments. A Diaspora may be the starting point for co-development processes, but it cannot be the only actor.

Rather than assigning a role to – and placing a burden on – individuals, emphasis can be placed on improving the conditions of an entire community. Capacity building is important. IOM's MIDA project (<http://www.iom.int/mida/>), for example, starts by simply providing a network for skilled expatriates, regardless of their migratory projects, and links them with local institutions. The community as a whole becomes increasingly aware of development needs and priorities and of the interests of different actors in the home country. These contexts become the source for the emergence of development actors within a community. After all, not all migrants are ideal candidates to become development agents: running projects or launching import-export businesses require medium to high qualifications. Resources to the community – especially training and recognition of skills – help identify those few agents who can make a difference.

At the same time, the community of migrants as a whole can be supported in its transformation into a base for co-development. For example, migrant banking initiatives are important: efficient use of economic resources in the host country can lead to reinforcement of formal remittance channels but also to increased use of credit mechanisms in the home country.⁸

Of course, it's not enough to create a network. Institutions in the home country must be reinforced, especially for the placement of high-skilled returnees in strategic sectors such as public administration, universities and hospitals. This may require broader institutional reform. One example of networks and institutional reform going hand in hand can be found in Albania, where an international student association arrange short apprenticeships in public administration and private businesses for Albanian students abroad. There is a reciprocal impact, as students are exposed to job opportunities in their home countries and institutions measure themselves according to additional standards.

4. Refocusing attention from the transnational to the translocal

The Italian example is particularly interesting because of the increasing autonomy of local authorities in development. While local authorities are – as always – excluded from determining admission and stay policies, they are the public body which deals with migrants. Migratory chains often link specific areas in sending countries to specific towns in host countries. Co-development links can therefore be made between specific and circumscribed groups moving back and forth between limited areas. Recent CeSPI work on projects linking towns in Lombardy to towns in specific regions of Senegal provide an example of how local communities can be organised,

⁸ S. Ceschi and J.L. Rhi-Sausi, *Banche italiane e clientela immigrata. Rimesse, risparmio e credito: le iniziative in atto e le prospettive di crescita*, Bancaria Editrice, Roma, 2004.

supported and mobilised to channel resources and support productive return and investment⁹. Weak and fragmented migrant associations can be reinforced; even small migrant communities can pool significant resources when seed money, training and validation are provided. Local bodies also appreciate the opportunity to expand economic ties with the source towns of resident migrants.

The possibility of links with local institutions and bodies in the home country increases the chance of success for initiatives. Weak institutions in the home country may be easier to involve when ties are closer, and improved trust in local authorities in the home country leads to greater interest in productive ties.

5. Some final remarks

Nation states develop their migration policies and their development policies without serious consideration of their mutual impact, nor is it realistic to expect host country migration policy to worry about the impact of choices on sending countries. Sending countries have little experience in fostering return migration and may see migrants as more useful when just sending remittances.

Even when mobility is guaranteed, weak institutions and negative experiences with corruption and misadministration can sour potential development agents from investment or return.

The multitude of stakeholders on both sides can make local-to-local development difficult to organise.

It can be difficult to start to think outside of national boundaries, since most policy is made for people who stay put or who migrate once, and definitively. The transnational context represented by today's migrants – part of the process of globalization of businesses, institutions, culture and civil society – is another opportunity for development. This is what is meant when free movement of people is promoted as just as important as free movement of capital.

⁹ See studies produced in the framework of the EU-funded project “Rafforzamento del capitale sociale nell’ambito del fenomeno migratorio senegalese”, collected at page <http://www.cespi.it/coopi-cespi.htm>.