Nadine Sieveking (Bielefeld): „Dynamics of migration and development in Ghana and Mali – challenges for German development cooperation ", paper to be presented at the Workshop on "Mobility, transnational connections and sociocultural change in contemporary Africa", Convenors: Tilo Grätz, Dimitri Bondarenko, Peter Skalník, EASA conference 2008, 26-30 August in Ljubljana

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1. Background of the MISA-project

The **background** of this paper is a research project I am actually carrying out at the Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD) at the faculty of sociology of Bielefeld University on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The English title of the project is "**Dynamics of Migration and development cooperation between Sub-Sahara-Africa and Europe" (MISA)**.

For this project I have been doing four weeks of fieldwork in Ghana in March and April this year and six weeks in Mali in July and August. The project is funded for the period of one year and I am supposed to finalise the report by end of December.

So, what I am referring to here to **work in progress**!

Concerning the Context:
The reason why the BMZ has mandated this project is the fact that so far Germany has no programme addressing the link between migration and development. Yet, other European countries already have and implement such policies. The European Union in particular is pushing forward the agenda of harmonising migration politics according to the Hague programme that was decided in 2004 and which strives for consolidating the European Union as an "area of freedom, security and justice". One of the priorities of the programme is a "proper management of migration flows" demanding a greater cooperation with non-member states with respect to readmission and return of migrants.
A major focus of European migration politics is on Africa, as became evident through the agenda of the European-African summits in 2005 and 2006, and in particular through the agreement of a "European-African strategic partnership" 2007 in Lisbon. An important aspect of these policies is the effort to link up migration management with development cooperation.

The idea that there is a link between migration and development is not new – however, the issue is very high on the global political agenda, as expressed by the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006. The basic assumption underlying the globalised discourse on migration and development is that migration can be beneficial for the development of a country (economic and social remittances, knowledge transfer, etc.) but if not "properly managed" also detrimental (brain drain, insecurity, trafficking, etc.). From these assumptions the question arises whether development-related activities can influence migration dynamics and if so how?

This question is what mainly motivated the BMZ to finance the MISA-project. In short: they wanted us to study if and eventually how German development cooperation in Africa could prevent migration by tackling its supposed "root causes" ...

What we proposed to do is an **exploration of the dynamics of migration in the transnational social spaces spanning Sub-Sahara Africa and Europe** and their **interrelatedness with development cooperation on the ground**. We decided to put the focus of the empirical research on the interfaces between local actors and institutions of German and European development cooperation, including case studies based on qualitative research. The results of the field-research in Africa will be placed in a European framework, referring to the experiences of different countries in connecting migration and development policies. The MISA report is meant to inform the German government in designing and implementing development programmes dealing with the challenges of migration …

As **sites for empirical research** the choice fell on Ghana and Mali. **Ghana** was a choice of the BMZ because it is an important partner country of German development cooperation and the country of origin of most of the Sub Saharan African migrants in Germany. Furthermore Ghana is currently attracting a lot of international attention – it stands as a model for democracy, peace and stability in the region, as well as for successful economic development and poverty reduction. **Mali** was proposed because - besides being also a long standing partner country of German development cooperation - it was chosen by the European Commission to be the site of a pilot project translating the idea of a so called Africa-EU Partnership on "Migration, Mobility and Employment" into practice.

Before I say something about to the research design and the concrete sites of fieldwork in Ghana and Mali, it is important to note that the BMZ is not a homogenous or monolithic institution and that quite in contrast to the people within the department which commissioned

the study[1], the country programme directors for Ghana and Mali made very clear that from their point of view development cooperation should be done first of all with the intention to assist the German partner countries, reacting on their needs and demands – therefore the project should focus on the views and perspectives of the Ghanaian and Malian partners!

2. Research design and fieldwork in Ghana and Mali

We designed the empirical research according to a **multi-level approach**, to be conducted **in different regions, characterised by different development and migration dynamics**.

A first important step in planning the empirical research was to engage a **local research assistant**, which worked out very well in Ghana but unfortunately not so in Mali. The next steps were directed towards the German development agencies in order to map out where we were to go and whom we were to talk to in order to study the interfaces with local partners and get their perspectives. Apart from these interfaces we targeted some groups that we considered particularly relevant in order to understand potential migrants and return migrants perspectives. All in all we intended to include the following actors and agencies in the research, mainly through interviews and focus group discussions, the time for participant observation being very restricted:

a) Ghanaian and Malian government institutions
b) German and other bilateral or multilateral development organisations (the EC in particular)
c) formally constituted civil society organisations acting as partners of German development cooperation, academic institutions
d) informal groups and individuals, representing different experiences and expectations concerning migration, related to different social and geographical spaces

We decided to work with a **broad concept of migration**, **not only focusing on international migration but also addressing the dynamics and trends of internal migration**. This was a necessary decision, because:

Internal migration is an aspect that is intimately interrelated and directly affecting local development – mobility is an essential part of the dynamics of development, but to measure its range and directions is very difficult.

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[1] Department 113 deals with issues concerning the Confederation and Federal States, Export-Credit-Warranties, Migration, Reintegration, and CIM (Center for International Migration).

With respect to the "root causes" of migration, which constitute a very complex interplay of various (changing) factors, it is impossible to separate internal and external migration – the routes and destinations of migrants depend on their resources and on already established networks which might be very different for people who might all explain their migration motives by referring to exactly the same "root causes".

This observation can also be related to the phenomenon of "stepwise migration" – which is well covered in the literature on migration, particularly with respect to Ghana, referring mainly to migration from rural areas to urban centres, which then might become transit zones for migration further on to other countries.

Another important aspect is the assumption that the "opportunities for internal migration might be one of the most important explanations for why international migration does not occur" (Malmberg 1997, 24). Furthermore research on the destination and redistribution of remittances from transnational migrants indicate an intricate interrelatedness of internal and international migration networks, which shows that the "effects" of international migration (which eventually contribute to growing inequalities on the local and national level) cannot be studied apart from internal migration.

In Ghana the dominant pattern of internal migration reflect the dynamics of uneven development, with deep roots in Ghana's colonial history: internal migrants mainly come from the North, where there is a high prevalence of poverty, to the South, where most of the natural, economic and social resources as well as the political power are concentrated; and from rural areas where factors such as land scarcity, lack of agricultural investment resources, and rising unfavourable environmental and climatic conditions 'push' people to urban areas to prospect for urban livelihoods.

In Mali the situation is much more complex: There are different overlapping pattern of seasonal migration and more or less permanent mobility reflecting the coexistence of farmers and nomads, there are areas where since colonial times the government has invested in large irrigation schemes (the famous 'Office de Niger') and where people from different parts of the country have either been forced to settle or came voluntarily, eventually to start migrating again … Another aspect which complicates the situation is the fact that there are almost no reliable demographic data for Mali.

Finally there are long lasting traditions of migration and strong movement within the sub-region, (such as from Mali most to Congo, Angola, Gabun, Ivory Coast) which are now intermingling with more recent migration trends that made Mali (and other neighbouring countries) into a transit-zone for migrants heading towards Europe, the US or Canada …

3. Relating migration and development

3.1. Restrictions on the conceptual level

Although with respect to the broad concept of migration, encompassing internal and external migration, the field of research seems very large, during fieldwork we were persistently confronted with some stereotyped discourses reflecting restrictions on the conceptual level, which make it difficult to understand the social and cultural meaning of processes related to 'migration', let alone the social and cultural meaning of processes related to 'development'.

A major restriction is the strong **normative bias characterising migration discourses** within the public sphere, where migration is mainly conceived of as a problem, a rupture with and challenge to an imagined social normality (or the ideal "area of freedom, security and justie"). Generally, a negative balance is drawn for the nation-states affected by migration, particularly emigration countries.

Another restriction is the dominance of a **territorially bounded development** concept which tends to disregard the aspect of mobility as an integral part of development processes. Mainstream development discourses promote efforts to change the situation of people located in certain places in order to attain better living conditions, but they don't take into account that thereby the people themselves and the way they belong to or relate to this place are also changing. Development tends to be measured in terms of growth attributed to certain geographic spaces – most often without any reflections on development in terms of a transformation of social spaces.

The actual discussions of the link between migration and development are marked by these conceptual shortcomings. Therefore there is no reflection on the way **migration forms part of development *qua social transformation***. With the citation and re-citation of numbers not only the phenomenon of migration but also the meaning of development is taken for granted - there is a lack of considering questions such as: Whose development? Which kind of development? As well as: Whose migration and which kind of migration?

3.2. Social meaning of migration practices – gendered dimensions

Looking at the social structure of migration practices and analysing emic discourses of the actors involved, the relevance of the above mentioned questions becomes evident. This is particularly salient when it comes to the gendered dimensions of migration. Men and women don't move in the same way, they don't follow the same pattern, their resources and networks are diverse, and even more importantly: their practices are conceptualised and legitimised in different ways.

In Ghana as well as in Mali one can observe a **feminisation of migration** – that is: an increase of so called independent or 'un-accompanied' female migration, meaning that the women or girls migrating do not follow or accompany a male relative or husband.

In the case of Mali the situation in many villages in the region of Mopti (on the plains of Dogonland) and Ségou (on the borders of the Office de Niger) has become quite pathetic since lack of rainfalls, degradation of the natural environment and lack of fertile land on the one side, and the rising food prices on the other (the Malian government tries to control the situation by subsidising fuel) has resulted in food shortages and a "generalised poverty" (pauvreté géneralisée). This is a reason not only for the young men ("les braves valides") to leave their villages but also for the young unmarried women and girls or even the married women, leaving behind only children and elderly people.

In both regions there is a pattern of socially accepted female labour migration to participate in the cultivation and harvesting of rice at the sites of large irrigation schemes. This kind of rural-rural migration is temporary, and the work to be done in the rice fields as well as its remuneration is conceived as beneficial in terms of economic or nutritional values (when paid in naturalia) but also social values (rice as the basic foodstuff for important family ceremonies).

But apart from this established migration pattern there is a new kind of female rural-urban migration, mainly to Bamako but also to some other urban centres (particularly in regions with a relatively strong international migration dynamics, as in Kayes or in Gao and Kidal), where young women and girls work as housemaids. This kind of migration is often practiced within the framework of the different periods of the agricultural calendar – the girls try to come back during the rainy season.

Nevertheless the migration to the city is not really accepted as it challenges local moral values and power structures attached to gendered pattern of mobility, it is legitimised as being on "the search for the dowry" ("à la recherche du trousseau"). The women among the parents generation, who are supposed to equip their daughters for their marriage, cannot come up to their obligations anymore – nowadays the prices of items that have to be included in the dowry are much higher than at the time of their own marriage, almost none of them can be produced locally – textiles, kitchen utensils, electronic devices, etc. are all imported goods. Confronted with a situation where people often even lack food to cover the whole year until the end of the harvesting season and have to send their children away, parents cannot retain the unmarried girls: "malgré nous on les laisse partir".

The women who say this know that they cannot be a model for their daughters anymore. They know about some of the problems that the girls (most of them have never attended school) encounter in the city but they don't know how to handle them: insecurity of working

relations, informal payment arrangements, bodily and sexual abuse, undesired pregnancies, clandestine abortions, relations or even marriages with a man "whose origin is not known", etc. In many cases the aim to complete the dowry is not attained …

However, there are also other reasons to leave the village: A girl who has never been to the city is considered by her age-mates as a "savage", she will have to keep quiet when her friends and her fiancée talk about their migration experiences. In the case of the girls in Dogonland there is another reason to migrate: to learn Bamana – a knowledge which is considered "useless" by the elder generation but whose value in social as well as economic terms (vernacular, used in translocal trading activities) is well appreciated by the youth.

In reaction to this new migration trends, sanctions for women and girls leaving the village without authorisation of the male head of the family have been introduced officially by the (male dominated) family and village councils in Dogonland.[2] These authorities argue that it is important to keep the girls in the village because it is the only way to attract the young men – if they leave nobody among the young generation will come back and the village may implode …

So far the way German development cooperation addresses these phenomena don't go beyond the established ways to support women's groups engaged in horticulture or other income generating activities, empower them through education and political participation, etc. I don't want to say that these approaches (with all their shortcomings when it comes to practice), which have been used to work with the generation of the mothers, are not good – but I think it is important to underline that with respect to migration young women and girls are always seen as particularly vulnerable, if not as victims, but not as agents of change and promoters of socio-cultural innovations.

Insecurity is also an important issue concerning **male migration** – particularly with respect to forms of irregular international migration (not only with respect to restrictive immigration politics in Europe but also with respect to the quantitatively much more important migration within the sub-region: example of massive expulsions from Ivory-Coast). However, the discourses by which the dangers as well as the challenges and opportunities of migration are conceptualised are very different in the case of men.

In Ghana the formula which is used almost as a synonym for migration is "searching for greener pastures". Although the trend of a feminisation of migration can also be felt

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[2] Leaving the village without the authorisation of the parents is sanctioned by a fine of 40.000,- to 50.000,- CFA, no participation at the marriage nor at the baptism of the first child. For married women the fine is much higher: 250.00,- CFA.

(particularly in the Northern regions, quite similar to the situation in Mali), public discourses on migration are dominated by the image of a male migrant, who has challenged his fate and tested his faith – confronted with the difficulties and insecurities of (often irregular) migration to Europe, the US or Canada, the motto is: "try your luck".

Religious discourses in Ghana, particularly the pentecoastal 'prosperity gospel' strongly promote the idea of the faithful believer who, with the help of god, has "been-to" somewhere overseas and "made it". The image of the economically successful and potent migrant creates strong social pressure on large parts of the Ghanaian society (probably most strongly on those parts with a middle income and access to higher education). This social pressure can be considered as a major incentive for international migration.

There are also economic reasons, which were mentioned as important 'push-factors' particularly by those parts of the population who have a certain level of education and who are seen as the motor for Ghana's successful development: self employed entrepreneurs who are asserting themselves in a highly competitive environment. In view of a general lack of formal employment, self-employment is the most viable option – provided that there is some capital to start off. In a context of prevailing poverty (although in a lesser degree as compared to the situation in Mali), however, this capital is generally lacking. Migrating and seeking opportunities for wage labour are seen as a socially acceptable strategy to deal with this problem. Creating perspectives for self employment (a strategy strongly supported by German development cooperation in order to develop the Private Sector and create alternatives to unemployment) therefore also functions as a motor for labour migration.

Looking at the very costly investments most migrants have to make before they (eventually) finally come into a situation where they can get the money needed for their business, it seems more rational to invest this money directly in the respective business. However, this option is not viable in most of the cases because of the manifold social obligations – accumulated capital must be redistributed within the family, whereas to stay at a distance creates room for manoeuvre …

4. Conclusion – challenges and oportunities

The examples from Mali and Ghana are not meant to represent a systematic comparison – they were chosen to illustrate the interaction of diverse elements of social, cultural and economic practices, as well as the interrelatedness of geographical and social spaces, which characterise the complex relations between migration and development.

The findings from the empirical research in Ghana and Mali show that territorialised and geographically bounded notions of development have to be questioned because they cannot account for the importance of translocal and transnational movements and relations for the livelihood and coping strategies of local populations. Furthermore territorialy bounded development notions are neither adequate to consider appropriately the potential of the diaspora nor the difficulties of return.

Moreover, the idea that development in a certain place can "fix the population" in that place refers back to a normative migration discourse, which cannot but fail to understand the social meaning of migration, the prestige related to migration and the morally ambivalent position of migrants as agents of change, which is particularly evident when considering the gendered dimensions of migration practices.

Nevertheless the actual discussion about the link between migration and development constitutes an opportunity to recognise the significance of mobility and migration – without qualifying it per se as negative or positive. Analysing the interrelatedness of migration and development can thus be a way to better understand the sometimes contradictory or paradoxical logics of social transformation.