



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
INTERVENTIONS AND MIGRATION CHOICES  
THE FINAL REPORT OF THE MIGCHOICE PROJECT**

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# INTRODUCTION

The MIGCHOICE project set out to ask how and to what extent development interventions affect people's migration aspirations, decisions and movement, focusing in particular on three countries in West Africa – Senegal, Guinea and The Gambia. It forms part of 'Outcome 4' of the *Safety, Support and Solutions in the Central Mediterranean Route Phase II (SSSII)* programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). As we noted in our inception phase report, asking how development interventions influence migration is a wide-ranging question, and one that merits a multi-disciplinary and multi-method approach. Over the period in which the project has run (June 2019–March 2021), we have sought to apply such an approach, focusing in on a series of sites where external development interventions are numerous, and aspirations to migrate are high.

As of mid-2020, UN figures suggest that just under 1.4 million people from these three countries were emigrants, representing around 4.3% of their combined populations. That figure had grown by 10% over the past five years, reflecting the fact that international migration from these countries is ongoing, but also has long antecedents. Our definition of migration in the project has been deliberately broad. Whilst migration through the 'backway' across the Sahara has gained significant European policy attention, West African migration remains at heart primarily intra-continental. Most movement occurs therefore within the sub-region, notably to major urban centres such as Dakar, Conakry and Banjul, as well as to areas where there is demand for labour in mining, commercial agriculture, tourism or trade.

**Table 1: International emigration in Senegal, Guinea and The Gambia**

Country	Total number of emigrants (mid-2020)	Net migration in previous five years	Total population
Senegal	693,800	-100,000	16.9m
Guinea	550,800	-20,000	13.1m
The Gambia	139,200	-15,400	2.4m

Source: UN DESA

Indeed, the data presented in Table 1, whilst broad brush, indicate that if anything migration has slowed over the last five years. This is consistent with accounts from the field outlined later in this report, which often date the surge of emigration in our field sites to the collapse of the Gadaafi regime in Libya a decade ago in 2011, albeit that there are many other factors at play.

In turn, there are numerous development interventions in the region that are designed to address migration, many of which are aimed at young people as 'potential migrants'. The EU, for example, is currently committed to spending up to 10% of its Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (around €8.9bn) on 'addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement' as well as 'supporting migration management and governance'.<sup>1</sup> A key example of this is the EU's 'Emergency Trust Fund for Africa' (EUTF), which aims to offer economic alternatives to migration, with training and job creation in particular seen as offering a choice to young people not to migrate. Thus the EUTF website talks of its 'aim to establish inclusive economic development programmes addressing youths and vulnerable groups' employability through increasing their social and professional skills as well as enhancing effective job creation'.<sup>2</sup> The EUTF is both a manifestation and an instrument of the new European development and geopolitical relationships with African sub regions. It has promoted a re-spatialisation of geopolitical relations based on the migration flows that linked Sub Saharan Africa to Europe (Zardo 2020) and reinforced the link between the EU's migration agenda, development aid to African countries and influence on the latter's migration policies (Oliveira and Zacharenko 2018; Adam *et al.* 2020).

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0298\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0298_EN.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/thematic/greater-economic-and-employment-opportunities>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.acted.org/fr/developper-emploi-avec-tekki-fii>

<sup>4</sup> <https://yep.gm/about>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54388340>



A prominent example is a scheme known as 'Tekki Fi' which roughly translates as '(You can) make it here' in Wolof. This programme seeks to develop employment in Senegal by strengthening enterprise competitiveness and employability in 'areas of departure', specifically targeting 'irregular migration'.<sup>3</sup> The equivalent programme of the same name in The Gambia offers grants, for example of 50,000 Gambian Dalasi (just under USD1,000) for small businesses to acquire equipment, licences and collateral. Their explicit framing is around the negative effects of irregular migration to Europe through the 'backway', and the need for economic alternatives. Backway migration is framed in this and other projects as 'harming the country's social cohesion and economy'.<sup>4</sup>



## WHILST MIGRATION THROUGH THE 'BACKWAY' ACROSS THE SAHARA HAS GAINED SIGNIFICANT EUROPEAN POLICY ATTENTION, WEST AFRICAN MIGRATION REMAINS AT HEART PRIMARILY INTRA-CONTINENTAL.

Over the past year from March 2020, matters have complicated further. The regional and international economy, migration flows, development interventions and indeed this research project itself, have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although Senegal has received plaudits for its handling of the crisis,<sup>5</sup> its economy and that of neighbouring countries has been heavily impacted, especially in the international tourism sector which has been brought to a standstill. Our project did not seek to shed direct light on the impact of the pandemic on migration – apart from anything else, this impact is probably only just beginning to make itself apparent. It has affected economic prospects in both source and destination areas of migrants – increasing the value of migration to those whose livelihoods have been undermined, but also increasing the risks and decreasing the opportunities. Rather, Covid-19 needs to be borne in mind as an ever-present background to our field research and the evidence we collected.



## 1.1

# ADVANCES IN ACADEMIC DEBATE

**In our inception phase report, we provided an extensive literature review of the current extent of research on migration in West Africa, regionally, and in each of our countries of study, whilst also exploring academic work on migration choices and decision-making, and the relationship between development and migration. It is not our intention to repeat this review here, but it is worth noting our conclusion that we know surprisingly little about how people negotiate the fields of knowledge, social relations and public structures that allow them to come to decisions on how best to make their life meaningful, and how mobility specifically features in their life projects. In this sense, we purposely opened up a wide canvas. Decisions to migrate are not taken in isolation, but in the context of a wider set of (frequently constrained) life choices. Young people in West Africa frequently negotiate life to achieve meaningful living in difficult circumstances; they have a desire for knowledge as well as advancement, and a duty of care to their families and communities. Migration is one way to achieve all of these goals.**

Since we completed this literature review, some new studies have appeared, although these have primarily been further reviews rather than empirical research. Within the context of the MIGNEX project (which includes some case studies in West Africa), Siegel (2019) has directly addressed the question of whether development interventions affect migration decisions. Her short review shows mixed evidence, although perhaps unsurprisingly she does cite evidence that finds a clear correlation between (irregular) migration to Europe and European aid spending. She suggests that development aid may not be 'big enough' to have a noticeable effect, although she highlights macro-economic analysis by Clemens and Postel (2018) that shows a clear negative relationship between youth employment and emigration rates. This is of some relevance to our project given the focus of many of the development interventions we have engaged with on youth employment.

As part of the MIDEQ project (which also includes West Africa), new work by Hagen-Zanker (2020) supports the conclusion that development interventions to influence migration decision-making are often ineffective. She argues that one reason for this is the need to take into account more fully how migrants themselves act and operate at the micro-level, and then sets out a new conceptual model to understand this process of decision-making. Interestingly, she highlights how interventions and policies themselves evolve and transform over time in ways that are often not understood by migrants. Together with the influence of the journey itself on migration decisions (Crowley and Jones, 2020), this reinforces the complexity of understanding how the two – migration and development – interact.

A more extensive systematic review of evidence on the 'determinants of migration aspirations' globally has been produced by Aslany *et al.* (2021). This review of 49 studies identifies 966 effects and 32 determinants of migration, focusing on young age and ties to current or former migrants as the most 'certain and steady drivers of migration'. Youth is a key theme in this study too: we purposely focus on the engagement of young people with development interventions and migration, both because of existing evidence of the age profile of migrants, but also because of the dominant discourse of development interventions on youth. Indeed, a discourse that is apparently shared between international and domestic policy actors is one of a 'youth problem' that is perhaps inextricably linked with a parallel 'migration problem', although consistent with the approach outlined in our inception phase report we have sought to avoid any 'deficit' approach in our own starting assumptions.



**INTERVENTIONS AND POLICIES THEMSELVES EVOLVE AND TRANSFORM OVER TIME IN WAYS THAT ARE OFTEN NOT UNDERSTOOD BY MIGRANTS.**



Another substantial piece of work to emerge during the course of our research comes from IOM itself in the form of a major edited volume on *Migration in West and North Africa and Across the Mediterranean*. Within this volume, there are several chapters focused on migration choices in the region. Thus Quartey *et al.* (2020) highlight how infrastructural development, the promotion of cash crops, the development of mining and oil discovery have all contributed to driving migration in the region. Dia (2020) draws on over a decade of research across various sites in Senegal to highlight financial considerations and educational aspirations as key motivating factors behind migration. Meanwhile Tandian (2020) focuses on return to Senegal, suggesting that return migrants often seek to become entrepreneurs, and that migration journeys are considered positively even when returnees come back 'empty handed', although this does not accord, for example, with the conclusions of Sinatti (2011). There is also a section of the volume devoted to migration governance, policy and programming in the region, including highlighting the significance of regional freedom of movement (Scholberger, 2020a) and the importance of diaspora policies within national migration policy frameworks (Fargues, 2020; Scholberger 2020b).

Finally, although it is not specific to Africa, it is worth noting the recent contribution of de Haas (2021) which seeks to develop the 'aspirations-capability framework' as an explanation of human mobility. This framework distinguishes 'instrumental' objectives of would-be migrants, that are a 'means to an end', and 'intrinsic' objectives that relate directly to well-being. Taken as a whole, this new and emerging literature broadly supports the approach that we set out in our initial proposal and inception phase report – that there remains a need to understand better the detailed context in which migration decisions are made, and that those decisions, and the surrounding context, are not fixed in time or straightforward but also complex and changing. Accordingly, the research conducted by the MIGCHOICE team has sought to explore rather than simplify complexity, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to work at multiple levels. In the following section, we review the conceptual and methodological approach adopted, and outline how this worked out in practice.

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THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE MIGCHOICE TEAM HAS SOUGHT TO EXPLORE RATHER THAN SIMPLIFY COMPLEXITY, TO ADAPT TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES, AND TO WORK AT MULTIPLE LEVELS.

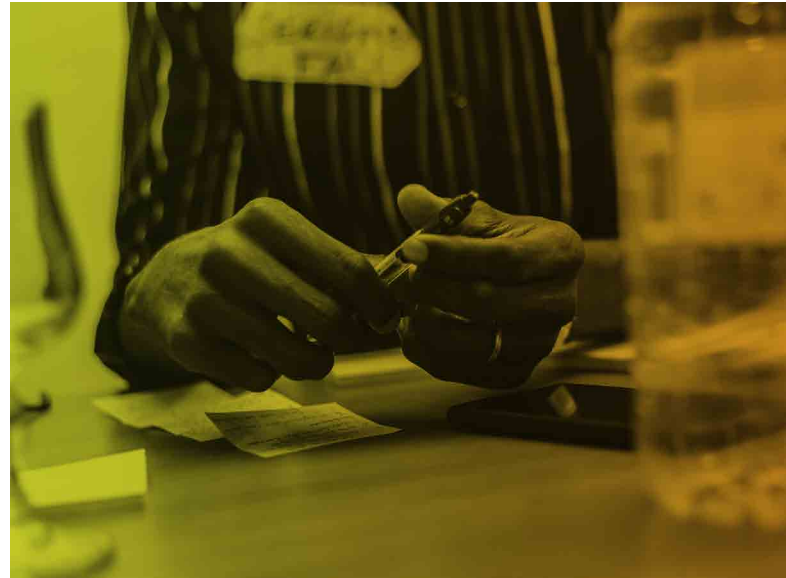
1.2

## CONCEPTUAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Methodologically MIGCHOICE sought to combine long-established grounded as well as gender-aware, critical and innovative approaches to understanding the world. In particular it combined:

- (a) Individual country data collection efforts that are inductive and ethnographic. These were pursued across 15 field sites spread across the three countries (see Annex 1).
- (b) Development of an 'Agent Based Model' (ABM) to capture the complexity and nonlinear nature of migration dynamics. The aim was to allow us to systematically test the effects of multiple interventions on migration aspirations in different contexts.
- (c) A strand of work that included both historical and policy analysis while engaging with the ethnographic and modelling work. The aim was to enable us to ensure 'triple-loop learning' in which we track how policy and evidence interact and ensure a region-wide approach is developed.

In practice, all of these strands have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, albeit to varying degrees. We explore over the following few pages the modifications we have made to the original plan in each area.



### 1.2.1 COUNTRY DATA COLLECTION: THE GAMBIA

In The Gambia, our work started with an analysis of the available literature materials on the history of development and migration in The Gambia, including academic contributions, media contents, government documents and reports produced by international organisations that have worked in the country. This provided a data baseline for historical and anthropological research in five field sites:

- **Bakau**, a large town of around 30,000 inhabitants close to Banjul
- **Gunjur**, a village in the South Kombo district with out 17,000 inhabitants, historically an agricultural and fishing community
- **Mansajang**, an village in Basse Fuladu East District, Upper River Region, at the outskirts of the town of Basse, with 2,600 inhabitants mostly involved in agriculture and livestock rearing
- **Jahaly-Pacharr**, an area incorporating several villages in the Lower Fuladu West District, Central River Region, an important agricultural area
- **Kerewan**, situated in Lower Baddibu District, North Bank Region, with 4,600 inhabitants, and a major target of development interventions linked to horticulture

In the first three months of 2020, over 90 people were interviewed in depth across all of these five field sites before field research was initially curtailed by the onset of Covid-19. At first, local research assistants were able to continue work on the ground until a complete ban on travel in the summer of 2020. Subsequently, a solid network of local contact persons, or community 'antennas', who knew in detail the scope and objectives of the research, enabled work to continue remotely, including updates, new information and feedback from the project team.





## 1.2.2 COUNTRY DATA COLLECTION: GUINEA

In Guinea, our qualitative field data collection was scheduled to be sequential rather than iterative, given significant challenges involved in travel, and an agreed division of tasks between the Guinea and Europe-based researchers. Again, after an initial review of literature and collation of existing material, five field sites were identified:

- **Ratoma**, a municipality on the outskirts of Conakry, which has a population of around one million and many internal migrants
- The **city of Kankan**, the second largest urban area in the country with over 500,000 inhabitants and a flourishing commercial and Islamic centre
- Three localities in **rural Kankan**, Balandou, Tintioulèn and Sabadou Baranama, which are respectively 10km, 22km and 75km from Kankan and are characterized by a range of agro-pastoral activities
- **Sigiri** and **Kintinian**, close to the border with Mali and a significant site of gold mining as well as a centre of trans-Saharan trade
- **Boké**, an area of Bauxite mining, dominated by the Compagnie Bauxite de Guinée since 1973 and including Kamsar, effectively a company town

Field research started with urban young people in Ratoma in January–February 2020 and moved on to urban Kankan in February–May 2020, where we focused in particular on two major interventions – the Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre, and the National School of Agriculture and Livestock (ENAE), and two market gardening cooperatives. Interviews included key informants in these organisations, as well as students, teachers and farmers. Subsequent work was carried out in rural Kankan from June–October 2020, Sigiri and Kintinian from October–December 2020 where we focused respectively on urban youth and gold panners; and finally in Boké in January–February 2021.

Overall, the research in Guinea was much less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic than elsewhere; nonetheless, delays were experienced as a result of election related disruptions and heavy rains disrupting the road network, and our sequential approach was important as some of the sites visited later on had been closed to travel earlier in 2020.

## 1.2.3 COUNTRY DATA COLLECTION: SENEGAL

In Senegal, data collection involved a hybrid approach, with in-person field data collection in most cases, but one site covered exclusively online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our field sites were:

- **Louga**, a city of 112,000 inhabitants, which like Kankan is a major Islamic city. Louga has a long history of emigration, return, and in-migration, and has expanded significantly in recent years.
- **Kolda**, and specifically the village of Diaobé, which is sub-regional crossroads and trading centre for agricultural and forestry products, close to the border with The Gambia.
- The islands of the **Saloum Delta**, in the Fatick region, which is dominated by fishing, but has also been the site of development of the tourist industry.
- **Medina Gounass** and **Thiès**, urban centres close to Dakar, which are host to numerous migrants from elsewhere in the country, and part of a major axis of economic development, mobility and exchange.

Across these four sites, we used a combination of direct observation by researchers of local events and life situations; individual interviews; focus groups; the collection of audio-visual materials; and the collection of written reports, local development plans and other background literature. Whilst data collection at Louga was completed before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, work in Diaobé and Saloum was intermittent through the period May–September 2020, reflecting period changes in travel restrictions for the local team. By contrast, work in Medina Gounass and Thiès was completed entirely through 'nethnography' – notably virtual interviews and written conversations on social networks. The strategic groups targeted in all sites include young people, public policy makers and development actors, members of associations and groups, and local notables.



## 1.2.4 ABM MODELLING

Following extensive consultation with IOM, an approach to ABM modelling was agreed in which a baseline survey would be undertaken, followed by the implementation of an intervention by IOM to around 1,000 young people who would then be re-surveyed at the end of the intervention. The logic of collecting data around a real-world intervention is such that we are able to evaluate the difference a change in people's circumstances makes to their life goals and migration decision-making aspirations and timelines. The intervention was initially agreed to take place in two countries – Senegal and The Gambia – and to involve three stages – soft skills training, coaching, and the delivery of cash grant components, and a baseline survey was prepared in early 2020 for launch in mid-2020 on this basis.

As a result of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the intervention programme was delayed, and in mid-2020 it was converted into a single consolidated package – a Youth Coaching Programme – to allow it to happen in a shorter period of time once restrictions were lifted. As noted elsewhere in this report, young people are a group of theoretical and substantive interest. Plus, the economic impact of the pandemic has placed concerns about employment and mobility high on the international agenda (UNHCR and IOM 2020). It is not yet clear how the crosswinds of uncertainty, economic downturns, vaccination rollouts, border control and interventions and employment opportunities will affect individuals' assessments of the future and aspirations. Indeed, this is what we have sought to explore.

In the end, a combination of continued restrictions on movement, funding cuts to IOM, and contractual difficulties around the intervention itself meant that we were forced to limit the intervention and baseline survey to one country – The Gambia – and young people did not begin to be enrolled until November. In turn, this meant that the baseline data collection could not start until early January, when a sufficient number of participants had been enrolled.

The baseline survey was finally completed in the month of January 2021, enabling the Coaching Programme to run over 10 weeks, from 1 February–9 April 2021. The programme was advertised in December 2020 for 400 places for young entrepreneurs in the Gambia (aged 18–35 years old) willing to create a job and succeed in business. As part of the programme, participants receive 1-on-1 and small group coaching as well as training in key skills such as financial literacy and business management. Following this, and the supported development of a business plan, participants will receive a cash grant (worth £1,300).

The stated goals of the programme are to (1) improve the economic self-sufficiency of young entrepreneurs/early start-ups in the Gambia, while (2) developing a better understanding of how interventions in the form of professional coaching and financing affect migration decision-making aspirations and timelines. To generate valid measures of the impact of an intervention, our research design collects data on a control group as well as for the coaching programme participants. The control group and the participants were randomly assigned from the pool of eligible applicants and so the two groups are comparable on all dimensions and characteristics except whether or not they receive coaching and the cash grant. This allows us to isolate the effect of the intervention.

We collected data on programme participants and their control group counterparts before the programme began in our baseline survey, and we will collect data again in an endline survey in May 2021. The endline survey will assess the programme's primary outcomes: entrepreneurship competencies and plans and changes to migration decisions. We then use the estimated effects of the intervention to programme an Agent-Based Model (ABM) or computer simulation.

### Sampling and randomisation

The Youth Coaching Programme had an overall capacity of 400 participants. This number of seats was distributed proportionate to the number of applicants across three regions: Greater Banjul Area (GBA, 325 seats), Lower River Region (LRR, 25 seats) and the Upper River Region (URR, 59 seats). The research design aimed for a comparison group per region of at least same size as the number of seats allocated to that region. That is, we aimed for at least 800 applicants in our sample overall, allocated proportionally across regions.

The Gambia team provided researchers with a list of 1,508 individuals scored by IOM judges between 20% to 100%. In consultation with the Gambia team, the researchers determined that a score threshold of 47% and above would provide the sample size required while maintaining the integrity of the recruitment process. This resulted in a sample of 850 names from which to draw a minimum of 800 respondents. Of these 850, the survey team was able to contact 829 for interviews.

We used blocked randomisation to randomly allocate the 829 respondents to 'treatment' (participation in coaching program) and the comparison (or 'control') group. Blocked randomisation involves randomly allocating respondents to treatment or control group *within* more homogeneous units (blocks). This randomisation strategy allows for some variation in programme recruitment and implementation across the different training sites, without biasing our estimates of the program's average effects.

Some of the applicants randomly assigned to participate in the coaching programme declined to participate or were unreachable after several attempts by the Gambia team. These individuals were removed from the sample rather than added to the control group as they had already been assigned to treatment and contacted. The final allocation is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Allocation of respondents to control and treatment groups by region**

	Greater Banjul Area	Lower River Region	Upper River Region	Total
<b>Comparison</b> (Control group)	339	30	48	417
<b>Participants</b> (Treatment Group)	307	23	50	380
<b>Total</b>	646	53	98	797

## 1.2.5 HISTORICAL AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Underpinning all of the above work, we have conducted archival and documentary work not only across each of the countries, but at regional level and also internationally amongst key institutions engaged with migration and development in the region. Data was defined as historical between the point of independence and the year 2005, as this was a watershed year for the region in terms of considerations around migration policy and interventions. Documents from 2005 were considered contemporary, however well noting the vast changes that have occurred in empirical 'reality'. In addition we have conducted 65 key informant interviews with government officials and programming agencies across our three countries in addition to interviewing representatives from the ECOWAS, national and international organisations.

Local researchers in each country were largely free to give character to their own studies within the scope of the overall purpose of the work package, which has ensured contextual positioning. Data analysis of the research material is based on a genealogical and discourse theoretical approach that was conducted partially concurrently to data collection to define emerging themes.



**THE LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND INDEPENDENCE AS WELL AS THE LEGACIES OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT POLICIES HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT FOR THE LIVES OF ALL PEOPLE IN SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA BECAUSE OF THE IMPACT OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF WHAT THIS DID TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNANCE.**

*Dr Christina Oelgemoller, MIGCHOICE Co-Principal Investigator and International Relations Lecturer (University of Loughborough)*



## 1.2.6 SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

Overall, this was not a conventional research project, but one which sought to innovate methodologically and bring different kinds of evidence and thinking together. In practice, circumstances have forced us to be more innovative than expected, notably with the use of a range of online platforms and techniques both to reach respondents in the field and international organisations, and to engage with each other as a project team. Whilst it is disappointing that the most complex element of our project – the creation of an ABM based around a 'live' development intervention – has been delayed beyond the project end date, we are reassured that the potential of this work has been recognised by follow-up funding from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council which should enable it to be completed over the next 12 months.

Meanwhile, we have been able to compile material for ten detailed 'Community Research Updates', which represent baseline material for analysis and writing across all work packages, as well as three 'Policy Briefs' and a number of academic papers that are in the process of writing (see Annex 4). The latter are in the process of being made available via the project website.<sup>6</sup> This website is due to remain live for a minimum of two years, and will be actively updated over the next 12 months as the ABM work is completed and further academic work emerges.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government/departments/international-development/research/projects/2019/migchoice/index.aspx>

# 2 DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS AND MIGRATION: COUNTRY ANALYSIS



2.1

## DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS AND MIGRATION ON THE GROUND

As noted above in the context of the EUTF, development interventions are 'big business' in contemporary West Africa, involving significant spending of public money, and touching most or all of the sites and regions that are the focus of our research. Across our sites, interviewees spoke of both opportunities and frustrations associated with these interventions. Yet a first point to make is how insignificant, as well as significant these interventions can sometimes be. Many have been affected by an EUTF or similar intervention, but commentary around migration rarely referenced such interventions first, or indeed at all. Complexity is clear: the interweaving of personal, family, cultural and economic factors that constitute the frame of reference for many young people in the region, and a sense that participation in development interventions is, if anything, unobtainable for many people, or insufficiently embedded in this wider fabric of relationships, to make a huge difference. We explore some of these themes below in relation to each of our countries before broadening out to evidence from the region as a whole, and a preliminary review our baseline survey of scheme participants in The Gambia.



## 2.2

# WORK-PACKAGE 2: THE GAMBIA



In The Gambia, one of our key observations is that strategies of geographical mobility manifest principally as a way to maximise the benefits of any inflow of external resources, as well as a response to micro and macro crises. Two cases serve as exemplars of the former: the development of rice schemes in Jahaly-Pacharr; and the successful expansion of the tourist industry in Bakau; whilst an example of response to crisis is provided by the redistribution of roles and responsibilities in a family unit following major life events, the longstanding decline of agricultural income and the political repression under Jammeh.

In Jahaly-Pacharr, schemes for the development of commercial rice production have existed since the 1970s, and over a long period of time they have contributed to the expansion of settlements, of which Brikama Ba is the largest, and the business centre of the area. In particular, an intervention by the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) between 1981–83 led to rapid growth, although this turned to decline in the 1990s as the scheme was abandoned, and a decline in productivity in the 2000s as a Taiwanese-backed scheme moved the project from artificial to tidal irrigation. During the initial phase of the IFAD rice scheme, when rice production rapidly climbed, the production surplus could not be absorbed by the commercial chain. It is in this period that Brikama Ba's residents, more than any other community in the Jahaly-Pacharr area, deployed inherited traditions regulating the relationship with immigrant labour to encourage the permanent settlement of labourers mostly from other Gambian regions and Casamance. These community forms of promoting and governing immigration allowed local residents to maximise the benefits of the rice scheme and are still nowadays represented as coinciding with the 1980s local pathway to development. The decline of the project in the 1990s inaugurated the first emigration wave from Brikama Ba. Mobility, both immigration and emigration, is interlaced with the local appropriation of external resources.

In Bakau, as in Brikama Ba, migration has become instrumental to the appropriation of external development interventions for local development purposes. Bakau is the first area of coastal Gambia where the tourism took off in the 1960s, and the presence of European tourists has shaped a repertoire of informal hospitality practices that help local residents to secure income. In this sense, it is the presence of tourists, rather than possibilities of employment in themselves, that have played a crucial role in shaping both the expectations of young people and their individual trajectories of social and economic success. Migration in turn is also associated with that presence. In 'good' times, tourism has provided opportunities to migrate through network connections and marriage; but downturns linked to the confiscation of hotels during the Jammeh regime, political instability and most recently Covid-19 have intensified competition to benefit from tourism and migration in the context of a declining 'resource'.

Underpinning all of this, local perspectives on migration frequently read the decision to migrate in relation to micro (or macro factors) that restrain the possibility of a 'decent' life for the individual and his/her own social network. Family crises like the sudden death of parents or family breadwinners are put on the top list of migration drivers by many, whilst the cyclical crises of the agricultural economy in sites like Kerewan and Gunjur are also powerful factors – albeit that the pattern is slightly different in Gunjur where the presence of a real estate market provides residents (and elders in particular) the opportunity to 'cash out' agricultural lands.

Taken together, these results question the possibility of even having a national perspective on migration, both for scholars and for policy makers. Even in a small country like The Gambia, the phenomenon of migration has a national consistence only if we look at it through the lens of statistics, which give us a picture of periods of increase or decrease, or from the perspective of a limited number of factors that are eminently Gambian, like Jammeh's repressive regime. The field of action and the scope of both research and policymaking needs instead to develop beyond and below the level of the nation (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). It has to account for transnational connections, such as the consolidation after 2011 of a continental infrastructure of mobility centred on the Libyan human trafficking hub. It has to consider local contexts structured by specific demographic, social, economic and political processes.

In particular, a national focus does not help to see the imbrication of migration within local histories of social and economic reproduction, and of development itself. The individualistic approach of much research and policy making in the field of migration is a further problem. Projects like Tekki Fi, and their slogans – 'You can make it here' – pursue the double objective of raising the awareness of young Gambians of the risks of the 'backway' and of enhancing their individual talents, abilities, skills and other personal assets. But they forget that what we call 'the individual' is a social and historical construction at variance with contexts. The Gambian youth openly criticise inherited visions of how they are expected to contribute to local development, as made clear by many of our interlocutors, but they also plan and assemble their life trajectories, including migration ones, in relation to their position within specific social, economic and affective networks that directly or indirectly participate in the negotiation of aspirations, imagination and action.

This does not mean that individuals are the passive executors of corporate agendas. Travelling the backway, as much as 'making it at home', stands somewhere in between evaluation of the vulnerabilities that both individuals and networks face, and an assumption of risks ahead. In the process, what we consider as 'individuals' see themselves as positionalities in the making, knots whose maturation coincides with their potential contribution to the reproduction and expansion of the networks of mutual support that are the stuff of Gambian society.

## WORK-PACKAGE 3: GUINEA



Of the three countries in this study, Guinea appears to have experienced the lowest levels of net emigration over the last five years, but nonetheless, a clear conclusion of our work is that the lives of people in all of the sites studied are highly mobile. Mobility to the cities and, above all, to the capital, is mainly due to the lack of infrastructure and services in rural areas. This explains the itineraries of young people who attend primary school in their village, junior and senior high school in a small town and university in the capital. Such mobility is facilitated by the presence of extended family members in cities who can take in schoolchildren or apprentices from rural areas; but it can also be an individual choice, for example to escape family conflicts or forced marriage, or to pursue a personal aspiration, such as becoming an artist or football player. Often, these trips to the capital are seen as stages in a mobile journey that could continue abroad and/or involve return to the region of birth. Outside the capital, interviews with gold panners in Siguiri show that their mobility is often more limited in time as they accumulate funds to be reinvested in agricultural activities back in their village. All these movements generate a feeling of 'knowing how to circulate', of having migratory skills and the ability to adapt to new environments, which can encourage the continuation of a mobile journey.

The idea of return is also present in many international migration projects, where migrants insist that they would like to contribute to Guinea's development. Respondents talked about how their objective is not to flee the country, but rather to look elsewhere for what they think they cannot find 'here'. This involves 'becoming someone' outside, but with the idea of coming back and bringing back sooner or later what they found, what they got, what they became 'over there'. Return is not always possible: migration, especially international but also internal migration, raises hopes of success among those around them, which translates into strong pressure on migrants. This explains the stigmatisation of certain return migrants who are accused of being 'cursed' because they have been repatriated and return without resources, but also the situation of young people from rural areas who have travelled to gold mining sites and mining towns. If the expected success is not there, if they do not manage to find gold or employment with the mining companies, the return to the village becomes difficult, even if it is desired. These young people then find themselves either 'stuck' in the mining towns, where they do precarious work while waiting interminably for a job (the case of Kamsar) or, if they are gold panners, they think of moving to other sites or to neighbouring countries, hoping to find their chance.

It should be noted that mobility is often part of the family history or migration culture of an entire community. In Conakry, many of the young people we met have never left the capital, but mobility is very much in their imaginations, whether they dream of going to visit their native village, going to a neighbouring country for training, or to Europe. Stories of family mobility in the past, combined with news of the departures of their friends and acquaintances in the present, multiplied and embellished on social networks such as Facebook, create a general aspiration for mobility. The willingness to want to leave rather than to stay should also be seen, in Ratoma, as the result of a context where young people face social, political and economic difficulties. They also experience a feeling of abandonment, segregation and stigmatisation in their neighbourhood, where state services and infrastructure, in terms of roads, schools and health centres, are often absent.

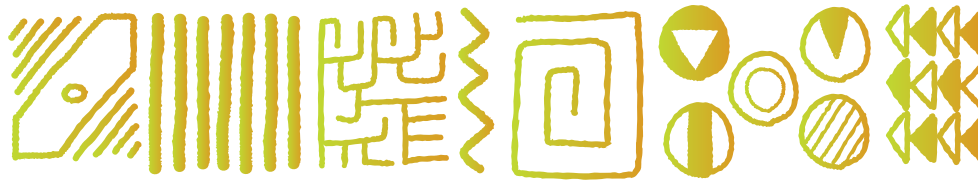
In a context where at least 60% of higher education graduates are unemployed five years after completing their studies, a solid vocational training, favouring integration into the labour market, is potentially a bulwark against irregular migration. However, this is not always the case, as informal apprenticeships represent precarious work, with often exploitative conditions extended over long periods of time. By contrast, we found more formal vocational training schools such as Don Bosco and ENAE more successful in providing trainees with stable conditions, albeit that some such schools struggle with equipment and qualified staff.

Meanwhile, in rural Kankan, actors who are active in agricultural groups are not in general candidates for migration: most are older women in their fifties and over, whereas candidates for migration are often young men. Market gardening, especially when supported by development projects, succeeds in giving a 'boost' to farmers, contributing to reducing household poverty and alleviating the hardships of older women. But it rarely touches young people's migration plans, which are often determined by the desire to take care of their ageing mothers, in the context of polygamous marriages where the husband is unable to provide for them. It also appears that older women do not use their income to finance their children's migration projects, which are seen as excessively expensive.

The very strong gerontocracy of rural Malinke society in Upper Guinea, where the elders have a lot of power over the younger generation, prevents young people from benefiting sufficiently from the spin-offs of agricultural activities, which are managed by the heads of household. Unlike the youth involved in peri-urban market gardening in Kankan, young farmers in rural areas, even if they are married and fathers, are forced to devote more working time to the family field, run by the father or elder brother, to the detriment of the individual fields of the nuclear family. Such a traditional family organisation encloses and keeps the younger children and their wives in the great paternal concession, in a relationship of subordination and dependence. It is in search of autonomy and purchasing power that young people envisage a migratory project, abroad or especially in mining areas as gold panners.

Finally, the focus of this report is on the relationship between development interventions and migration. Yet across our five sites in Guinea, the extent to which our respondents considered the two to be related varied considerably. In Ratoma, we found that migration – or more specifically spatial mobility – is important, not only as a lived experience, but also as a general aspiration of young people who have been confronted for years with economic difficulties and poor access to state services, which leads to a feeling of exclusion. Yet development interventions seemed less well known amongst the young people we interviewed. In Kankan, by contrast, many more respondents highlighted development interventions as relevant to their experience; here the issue is more that they do not fundamentally alter the strong structural forces at play, and which have a much more decisive impact on life aspirations.

## WORK-PACKAGE 4: SENEGAL



Senegal is in many respects the archetypical country of migration in West Africa, one with a long tradition of migration to Europe and beyond, and where transnational mobility and return shape the landscapes of affected regions in a variety of ways. The country is also a focus of numerous development interventions targeting the migration 'problem', representing the home of the 'co-development' concept that in many respects underpins more recent interventions such as *Tekki Fi* and the EUTF. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, development has been conceptualised for a long time as a potential 'alternative' to migration, and the academic literature on migration and development is perhaps at its most developed.

As in The Gambia and Guinea, one of the main axes around which development interventions focus is that of vocational training of young people. These can bring significant rewards to individuals, although the large number of individuals who drop out of training, and their limited reach to individuals without existing qualifications and connections, represent significant constraints to this. Yet overall, the notion that vocational training is an 'alternative to migration' was not borne out by our research. For example, a common narrative amongst providers of vocational training was to distinguish 'clean' or 'pure' economic sectors for which training can be provided, and 'dirty' or 'dangerous' sectors, such as motorcycle taxis and other parts of the informal economy which represent part of the problem. Yet young people are overwhelmingly in the latter sectors. As a result, young people often express frustration with an inequality of opportunities to benefit from training; and even when they do receive training, whether general or technical, they continue to perceive opportunities as rarer and less desirable in Senegal than in other countries, especially in Europe, as the orientation of training towards 'clean' sectors reinforces that difference. Vocational training then is not an alternative to migration, but on the contrary encourages mobility.

Another challenge for development interventions in this space is that they are often conceived of and deployed in the context of 'crises' and 'emergency' interventions rather than representing a long-term investment. Partly as a result, the technical-bureaucratic languages of intervention do not take into account local models of social, moral and economic success. At the same time, such programmes have little traction on underlying factors and structures that shape migration decisions. For example, difficulties of access to financial resources is perceived as a major block to the economic development of young people, and despite the presence of state services such as ANPEJ, participation in vocational training does little to unblock such access. Similarly, difficulty of access to land (or in the case of the Saloum Delta, to fishing resources) is a cross-cutting characteristic of rural contexts in Senegal, as it is in The Gambia.

This is one explanation, but not the only one, of why agricultural and fishing interventions also frequently fail to offer hope to young people that there is an alternative to migration. Senegal's rural world is dominated by the agricultural sector, and post-independence governments have sought to improve the living conditions of rural people through valley management, supervision and financing of production, with companies established to promote commercial production of groundnut, cotton, rice and other products. Yet young people repeatedly report that they do not feel such hydro-agricultural projects bring them any added value, as there are high capital demands up front, and requirements to sell to monopoly buyers that limit margins to levels that sometimes do not even cover basic needs. The Missirah fishing centre, offered by the state of Japan to Senegal as a sign of friendship in 1989, was cited in the Saloum Delta as suffering from exactly the same problem.

As a result, the experience of young people – whether in rural or urban Senegal – is one of a real blockage, in which economic vulnerability is a key cause of social immobility, an immobility to bridge the gap between expectations and resources. In this context, the aspiration to migrate offers the possibility of imagining a much better economic situation, even if it is also acknowledged as encompassing huge levels of vulnerability. Migration represents an extraordinary horizon of access to a liquidity that forges and reinforces social bonds. Money is not only a means to survive; rather, 'being someone' involves circulating as much money as possible around you. The exit from uncertainty is not a simple calculation of the marginal gains from migration; it is a process of personal, social and family affirmation that is part of a young person becoming an independent adult, with a new set of pressures, responsibilities and hopes.

Having said all of that, a further point of note is that things are changing. Whilst most young people interviewed in our study openly declared that they aspired to migrate, few were able to do so or had taken the necessary steps to organise it. In turn, the closure and externalisation of European borders has made migration to Europe at least an increasingly individual affair, as the social, family and religious networks on which earlier legal migration trajectories were based have weakened. As a result, migration has been irregularised, and partially spatially compressed; and the decision to migrate has become more a permanent, non-linear and increasingly individual effort to find a successful path out of uncertainty and social immobility.

## WORK-PACKAGE 5: CONTEXTUAL AND POLICY ANALYSIS



In the preceding sections, we have focused on local scale development interventions and their relationship with migration. These very real experiences and practices succeed or fail in part because they are situated within a significant but often intangible policy architecture. People in villages and cities often perceive no link between their experience and the broader national and international policy architecture that seeks to govern migration, development and social order more broadly. However, these policies and their historical trajectories set limits within which things happen and within or against which people act. As such, our research has sought to tease out these connections.

A first and perhaps obvious point based not only on the above empirical work, but also on a preliminary discourse analysis of available documentation, is that a relationship is being forged in public policy between youth, employment and migration, which manifests in the kinds of interventions focussed on skills training and entrepreneurship that we have been discussing. Thus there is a contextual and policy space that works at the intersection between the governance of youth; training for labour market access and participation; and migration. The intersection between youth and employment policy is not new in any of our countries. Nor is migration as a phenomenon new. But the intersection of youth and employment related policy and programming with migration related interventions has intensified as donors have re-conceptualised all three areas in an attempt to forge a more direct intersection.

Our interviews with stakeholders in the region suggest this happens in a policy space which is more or less quietly contested. The international community, notably through IOM, has engaged with West African governments over the drafting and enacting of national migration policies which require conformity and coherence with a range of international, continental and regional instruments. These policies apparently need to cover – much like the Global Compact on Migration – a seeming totality of migration related issues that are to be governed. It is not clear that the national migration policies are focussed and relevant to the country that may or may not validation them.

These documents are contested by a range of actors for a wide variety of reasons. The most vocal is maybe that the policies are imposed and do not really relate to the context of the country, as they rest on a blueprint that ensures European policy objectives are implemented. Another critique is that these manifest as projects, rather than sustainable programmes that rest on solid policy. Projects are sometimes seen as the 'one-off' interventions, in which resources do not always reach 'beneficiaries'. And whilst the projects are framed by 'migration and development', this is seen as too abstract to function as a strategic guide to a country's policy decisions.

The critique about strategy is two-fold. On the one hand there are those who do not want to be identified as 'beneficiary owners', which they see as condescending and making a mockery of the fact that donor governments and international organizations provide both funding and a

blueprint for what migration policy should be. The imposition of this kind of relationality is problematic because there are questions around a 'level playing field of negotiations'. Europe's positionality and perspective on migration is very different from that of West African countries – but the power dynamics are asymmetrical and do not enable African countries to engage in genuine negotiation. On the other hand, our research also finds that many government actors are informed by a perspective on 'migration and development' that can be boiled down to the issue of remittances; as such they do not see a problem with having policy imposed, so long as Europe funds activities of interest to them.

There is also another perspective, somewhat contradictory to the first, and it is in this context that the connection between youth, employment and migration is most clearly thought of, if not explicitly articulated. This perspective notes that what is needed – and what the ECOWAS treaty along with its protocols provide for – is labour migration. What young people need, as one of our interviewees powerfully stated in a sentiment echoed by many, is *hope*; and hope comes from having a job. The obvious logic is that if skills are gained, then a job can be found. If a job cannot be found in the current country of residence, then it might be found in a neighbouring country. The principle of freedom of movement, codified by the ECOWAS countries well before it was adopted by what is now the European Union, enables this. What lags behind are country level policies to turn the willingness of young people to be mobile and their energy of hope into something more productive.



**WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NEED, AS ONE OF OUR INTERVIEWEES POWERFULLY STATED IN A SENTIMENT ECHOED BY MANY, IS *HOPE*; AND HOPE COMES FROM HAVING A JOB.**

However, this begs the question as to why national migration policies with their claims to regulate everything are needed. The three countries focused on in this study already have regulatory instruments eg, for inter-continental and international diaspora engagement. What is needed, it is argued, is the development of more honest labour migration policies, alongside regulatory mechanisms to define standards of vocational training and degrees so that mobility is facilitated regionally. Such activities are in train at ECOWAS level and to a certain extent at country level. Yet, this logic is less attractive to donors, whose programmes remain underpinned by the populist idea of training and employment as alternatives to migration, rather than something that might be linked to mobility.

Turning to donor-funded programmes themselves, whilst they are recognised by some of our interviews to be valuable in their own right, it is also clear – somewhat ironically – that many of the interventions on training and employability conducted for example as part of the EUTF were not designed specifically for this particular programme but were a continuation of donor programmes in countries where they were already implanted, which were simply re-labelled, to fit ‘migration’ and ‘emergency’. One of the consequences of this is that there appears in practice to be limited adherence to EU rhetoric around migration amongst national aid agency staff; this is because they think that providing opportunities to young people is always a good thing, regardless of purpose. The intersection of these activities with migration introduces a ‘deficit narrative’, that is neither good for those who are labelled migrants, but may well not be; nor for the already often precarious success of the programmes in their original framing. Indeed, some expressed the view that the migration deterrence objective is just a phase or ‘fad’ in order to respond to European concerns in 2014/15, but that this objective will come and go and they will keep adapting to development aid trends. Some credence to this is provided by evidence that programming is now moving back to issues of resilience, notably in face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of course, not all of the interventions in this space are conceived and delivered by those who were already operating youth and vocational training projects. For some, the EUTF windfall has provided both national and international agencies with opportunities to engage in new fields of activities, albeit in areas in which they do not necessarily have the expertise. And whether delivered by newcomers or established actors, there is a real problem – identified in our country-based work as well – that interventions supported from an emergency fund cannot intervene sustainably in people’s life choices. This point was raised precisely by those administering the funds: no sustainable solution can easily be reached with emergency funding as the timescales are too short, and the structures of intervention separated from those that have a longer-term existence.

A final observation is that there are some contradictions between the objectives pursued by international agencies, and the means by which they are realised. A case in point is the underlying emphasis on promoting the idea that migration is not a solution and that it is possible to ‘make it at home’. Yet because a significant tranche of investment has come in the form of assistance to return migrants, the visible favouring of returnees in accessing programmes creates the ambiguous message to non-migrants that there are always some benefits to be drawn from migrating.





## 2.6

# WORK-PACKAGE 6: AGENT-BASED MODEL (ABM)



To date, it has not been possible to build the Agent-Based Model that was envisaged in the original project proposal due to the delays outlined above. Nonetheless, the completion of the baseline survey does allow us to draw some preliminary observations, noting that the survey is focused on one country – The Gambia – and took place at a certain point in time, which as noted already, was far from 'normal' in political or economic terms.

### 2.6.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

As should be clear, our sample is not nationally representative, nor is it intended to be so. It is a purposive sample that fits the parameters of the youth coaching programme and represents a group – young, entrepreneurial, and motivated individuals – of particular interest in the academic literature and policy debates, as noted above. It is a theoretically and substantively interesting sample.

Our sample skews male, with 39.1% female and 60.9% male. The median age is 27 years old, with the youngest 18 and oldest 48 years old (which is older than the programme criteria). In terms of educational background, the majority have completed either secondary school (73.5%) or university education (22%). And as reported above, the majority come from the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) (57.5%) and West Coast Region (23.6% – which for the purposes of the coaching programme is merged with GBA), with the rest coming from the Lower River (6.65%) and Upper River Regions (12.3%).

We can confirm that the randomisation has worked to produce balanced treatment and control groups. There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of gender, age, or education. We also checked the judges' scores given to the individuals' applications, which ranged from 47% to 100% with a mean of 61%.<sup>7</sup> There was no significant difference in respondents' score between the control and treatment groups,  $t(789) = 0.21, p = .83$ .

<sup>7</sup> A multivariate post-randomisation test showed that there are no significant differences in scores by gender or region, but older applicants scored higher – approximately 1% for every four years of age holding everything else constant – and those with only Primary School scored 7% lower (at  $p < .1$ ), which only accounts for 15 of the total 797 sample.

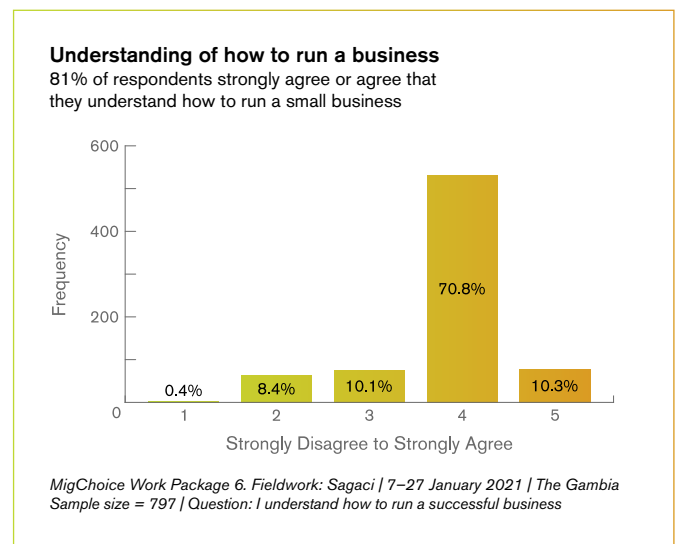
<sup>8</sup> We found no significant differences between treatment and control respondents for any key outcome measures in the baseline survey.

### 2.6.2 KEY OUTCOME MEASURES

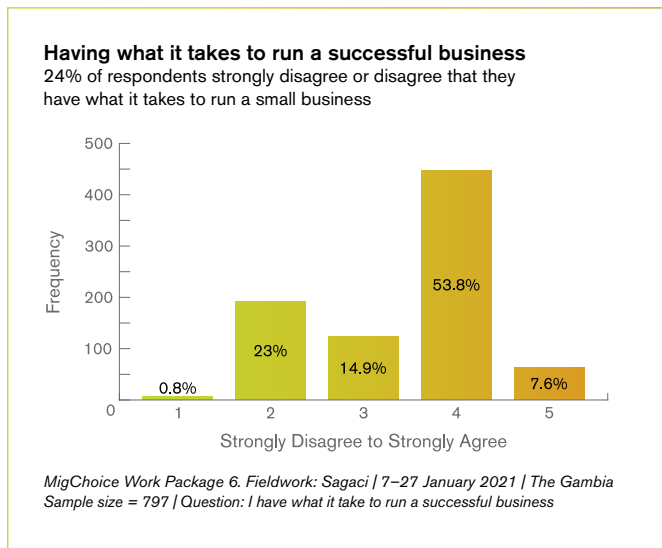
Having already established balance across treatment and control groups for key demographic and socio-economic indicators, we now proceed to the key variables we will use to assess the program's effectiveness.<sup>8</sup> In particular, we are interested in how the Youth Coaching Programme shapes participants' levels of entrepreneurial self-sufficiency as well as their migratory intentions.

Beginning with entrepreneurial self-sufficiency, the baseline survey reveals a sample that feels personally self-sufficient but vulnerable to external factors and weak support networks. Most respondents (81%) already feel that they have the necessary knowledge to start a business (Figure 1). Furthermore, a majority (62%) of the sample believes they have what it takes to become a successful business owner, relative to the 24% who do not agree with that statement (Figure 2). However, when the questions refer to the respondent's social context or environment, the situation looks starkly different. A clear majority – 73% – does not believe that it has the support needed to be successful (Figure 3). Similarly, 70% believe that circumstances outside their control will prevent them from being successful (Figure 4).

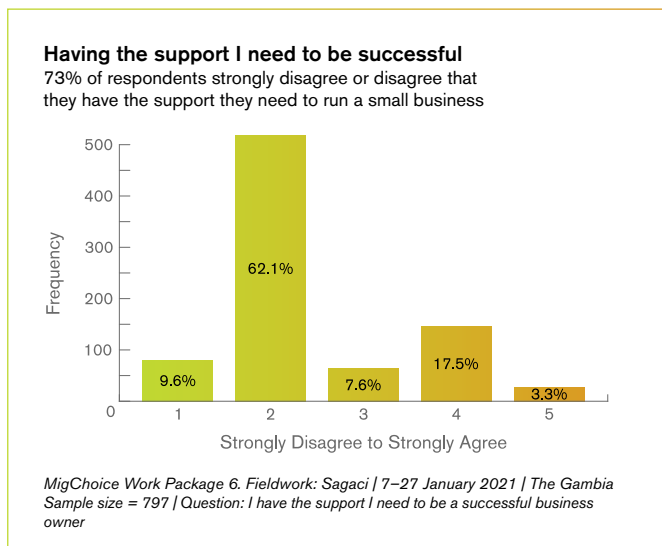
Figure 1



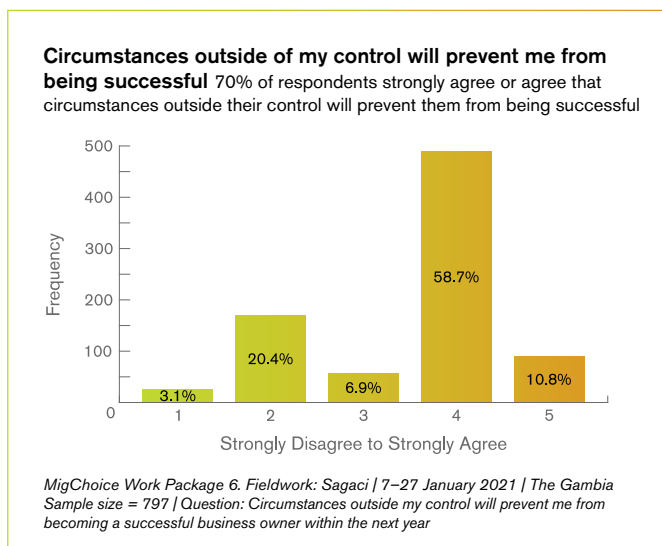
**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

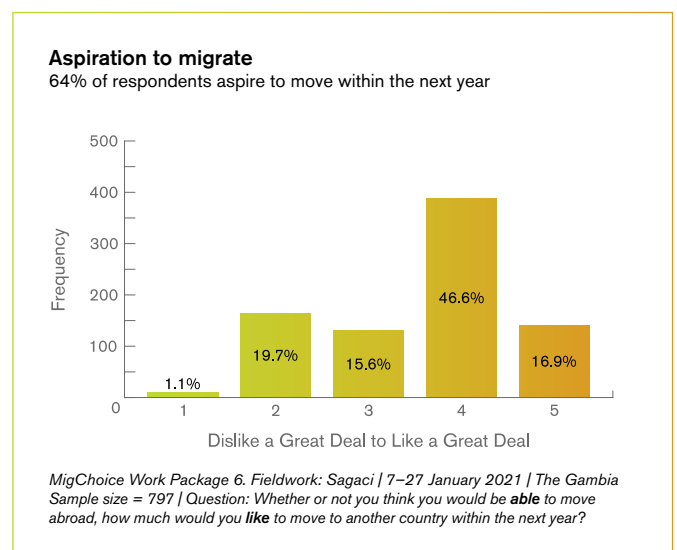


**Figure 4**

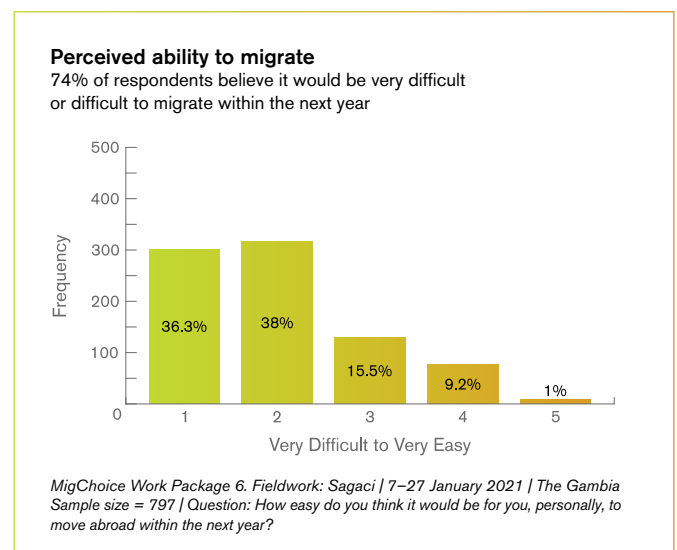


Turning next to our migration indicators, our baseline survey is broadly suggestive of involuntary immobility (Carling 2002). While a majority of our sample aspires to move abroad (64%), most respondents (74%) do not feel that they are able to do so (Figures 5 and 6). Unauthorized migration is perceived as especially difficult. Indeed, 93% believe it would be difficult to migrate 'the backway' to Europe (Figure 7). Semi-legal strategies, such as working under the table on a tourist visa, are largely considered to be easier strategies (Schwartz *et al.* 2020). Among our sample, only 68% believe that such a strategy would be difficult (Figure 8).

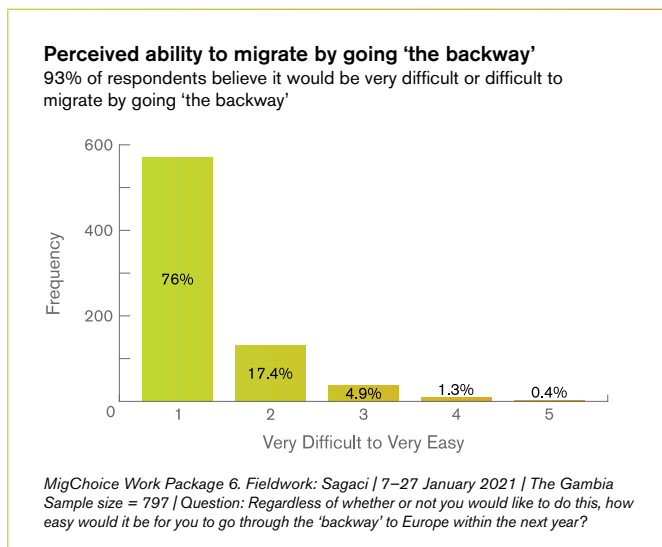
**Figure 5**



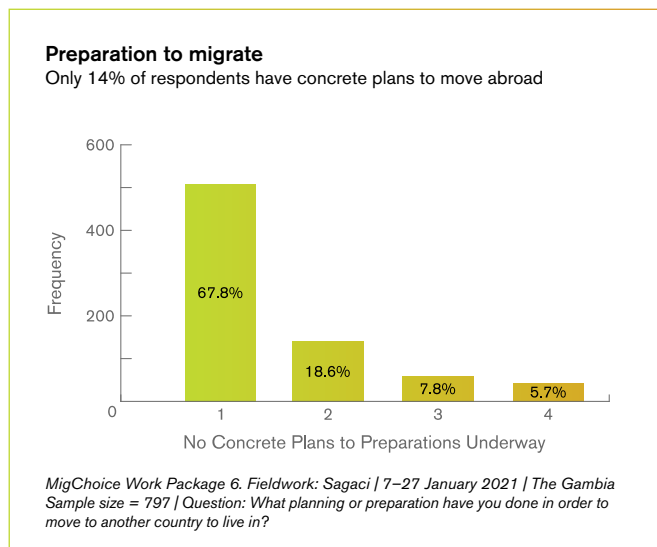
**Figure 6**



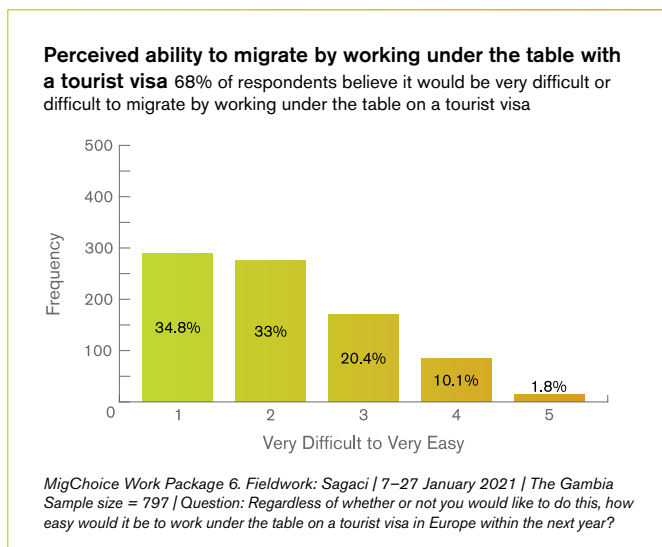
**Figure 7**



**Figure 9**



**Figure 8**



The next steps in this work package are to model the effect of losing employment, household savings, trust in government, confidence in future economic recovery and effective and successful rollout, as well as individuals' risk aversion, migrant networks, on their migration aspirations and ability. Then, when the endline data are available following the conclusion of the coaching programme, we will evaluate the programme effects – in the aggregate and for different types of individuals – and use these values to programme the ABM.

In terms of migration plans, the vast majority of our respondents (81%) would prefer to move outside of Africa rather than moving to another African country; the US, the UK, and Germany were considered the top destinations. It is also worth noting that most migrants are thinking of moving abroad within two years, as opposed to the more distant future. Despite this, very few (only 14%) of the sample had made any concrete plans to move abroad at the time of the baseline survey (Figure 9).

## 2.7

# INTEGRATING DIFFERENT FORMS OF EVIDENCE

As noted in section 1.2, the methodology on which this study has been based was a mixed one, with data collection taking place at the local, national and international level, and incorporating both qualitative and quantitative evidence. By examining a range of sites across three countries, we were able to identify key themes that spread across countries and are common for both rural and urban areas, as well as picking out individual themes and how they are articulated differently (or not) at local and national level. Common themes are picked out in more detail below, but include an almost universal contrast between policy narratives of 'youth' as a problem group requiring intervention, compared to young peoples' own narratives of a search for opportunity, yet a feeling of exclusion from most or all public policy initiatives.

Our ethnographic observations also tally with preliminary findings coming from the baseline survey for the ABM – although it needs to be noted that this survey is representative only of those considered 'eligible' for the IOM Youth Coaching Programme, a sample that is skewed both towards young men (reflecting the fact that more young men are mobile), and to more educated individuals (in line with IOMs project design). A strong picture emerges from this survey of young people who are confident in their ability to pursue opportunity, yet who perceive significant barriers to realizing their potential. This is not inconsistent with views of regional policy actors, who are note the need for labour market opportunities and for policy around remittances. This stands in contrast to policy practices implemented by international donors.



Finally, we noted in the introduction that we have not sought specifically to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the relationship between development interventions and migration. Nonetheless, some insights have emerged – such as the intensification of competition for resources in The Gambia, and a shift that already seems apparent in international policy away from development intervention as migration deterrence, and back towards the promotion of resilience. We were also able to include some Covid-related questions in the baseline survey for the ABM, although this data has not yet been fully analysed. More broadly, in interrogating our ethnographic data we have been sensitive to whether Covid-19 has significantly affected responses; our sense is that it has not, as although Covid-19 is seen as layering a new level of uncertainty, this builds on a pre-existing situation that was already highly uncertain.



**IN MIGCHOICE, WE AIMED TO COMBINE A RANGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE METHODOLOGIES AND TO BRING RESEARCHERS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND DISCIPLINES TOGETHER IN DIALOGUE. IT HAS GIVEN US IMPORTANT NEW INSIGHTS.**

*Professor Richard Black, MIGCHOICE Principal Investigator and Pro Vice Chancellor (College of Social Sciences), University of Birmingham*



# 3 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In the sections above, we have provided an overview of the relationship between development interventions and people's migration aspirations, decisions and movements, drawing on a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence at local, national, regional and international levels. We have paid particular attention to interventions aimed at young people, especially in the fields of vocational training and employment. This reflects the policy focus of many interventions, especially those associated with the EUTF, but also growing narratives in national and international policy circles that tend to associate a 'migration problem' with a 'youth problem'. We have sought to show how this characterisation of two related problems is dissonant with how things are often seen 'on the ground'. In all of our fields sites, across all three countries both young people and migration are more often viewed as an opportunity – a source of 'hope' in an otherwise highly unequal, uncertain and challenging landscape.

A number of more specific themes emerge from our work, and from the analysis above, that are relevant to policy and programming and which we have tried to capture, in part, in our Policy Brief series. First, in relation to education, it is an inability to continue with education, rather than a lack of education *per se*, that is more commonly associated with narratives about a need to migrate. In Guinea in particular, mobility within and beyond the country is often associated with the desire to move to the next educational level; in turn, vocational training often represents the abandonment of a more 'academic' trajectory but does not necessarily affect the desire to be mobile (or the perception that this is necessary).

It is vocational training, rather than education more generally, that is generally perceived in European development interventions as a critical measure to 'stem' migration, but there are many reasons why this policy objective is unlikely to succeed. First, the interventions themselves are unevenly accessible to young people, and have mixed results. Second, there is a particular problem with follow-up from these (and indeed other) interventions that are often short-term in nature, and in the context of migration-related programmes are often framed as 'emergency' measures. This links to a broader point, that vocational training does not target the sources of the problems that lead to migration, as they are perceived by many young people. These problems are much larger – including huge inequalities (geographical, socio-political, intergenerational) in access to resources such as land or fishing rights. These inequalities are unlikely to be significantly impacted by external programmes.

A further entrenched set of inequalities relate to gender, and here, development interventions often fail to grapple with the gendered structures that work to shape both migration itself, and its outcomes. Thus although typically development interventions seek to balance participation of men and women, there remains a widespread stereotype of the 'migrant' as a young man, who is sometimes seen as 'entrepreneurial', sometimes as performing a cultural expectation of 'passage to manhood' in which mobility plays a central role. As a result, development interventions sometimes work with an implicit concept of 'eligible youth' that serves to exclude not only many women, but also men – for example those who have no, or a different education, or are identified as being on an 'errant path' by virtue of the sector of the economy in which they have engaged.

In the context of these inequalities, one of our more significant conclusions is the observation migration and development interventions are linked through efforts to gain access to resources. Both offer opportunities to capture benefits in the context of a highly uncertain political and economic climate; this in turn is often a collective rather than an individual endeavour, which jars with the individualistic conception of migration and development that underpins many interventions.





The notion that migration is a collective phenomenon, embedded in complex settings, and which reflects, sometimes addresses, but also can re-trench societal inequalities is a challenging one for policy and programming around migration. This is because such policies and programmes often target individuals, a targeting that becomes even more problematic, and somewhat contradictory, when the individuals are returnees. Yet focusing programmes on communities would have no enhanced benefits unless it is possible to take into account existing entrenched inequalities. This points perhaps to the need for a whole-of-government or indeed whole-of-society approach, rather than specific initiatives whether focused at individual 'potential migrants', returnees or communities.

This links to a broader point that the focus of our study – on the *choices* that people make around migration – itself in some respects fundamentally mis-states the nature of the challenges faced by young people. In short, young people do not perceive that they have choices. Rather, they face uncertainty, in which immobility rather than mobility is seen as the norm. This is reflected in our baseline survey for the ABM, which powerfully demonstrates this perception of an inability to migrate. But a lack of choice is not the same as a lack of agency; and many young people remain ready to seize whatever opportunities they can.

All of the above has significant implications for policy and programming in the region that assumes choice and decision-making, and seeks to influence those choices and decisions. In particular, it again points to the need for a longer term engagement that addresses entrenched inequalities. This could be in individual 'project' form, as with the Don Bosco training centres in Guinea; but it is more likely to be in the form of more integrated programming across sectors and regions. This would involve focussing on the opportunities that both young people and migration pose for the region rather than labelling them as 'problems', and seeking to make employment, entrepreneurship and vocational training programmes work in their own terms, rather than re-framing them for the purpose of migration management.

One such longer-term engagement could focus around the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). What seems to be agreed by a number of policy and programming experts that are positioned in the region and who are aware of the GCM is that the Compact ought to be used as a strategic guiding document which can lead to regional collaboration in specific areas such as the recognition of certificates and degrees or the portability of social security provision. Such an approach might be better than the current one focused on youth training and youth employment in a number of ways. In particular, youth training and employment programmes often end up being isolated interventions that are perceived as exclusive (and hence excluding) by many young people, and do not fundamentally change the economic circumstances of uncertainty that motivate young peoples' view of the future. Such programmes are also not necessarily the core area of expertise of migration-focused organisations. Yet a strengthened focus on the GCM would require political will, which in turn will depend on an understanding of the benefits to be derived from such action, and the building of a constituency both inside and outside of government that is committed to action.

Amongst other things, a focus for such a discussion could be the relationship between internal, intra-regional and inter-continental migration, and the value of developing a consistent approach to all three. As noted at the opening of this report, intra-regional migration is numerically more significant than inter-continental migration, yet European migration policy often focuses disproportionately on the latter. A dialogue led from the region, and involving those for whom mobility – of any kind – is a way to tackle extreme risk and uncertainty, might deliver a more balanced policy focus that recognises some of the benefits of mobility, rather than simply seeking to deter and criminalise migration to Europe. This would entail a more honest engagement by European governments over specific areas of regulation such as labour mobility, rather than existing interventions that seem unlikely to deter people with hope in their hearts and energy to spare, who want to move.

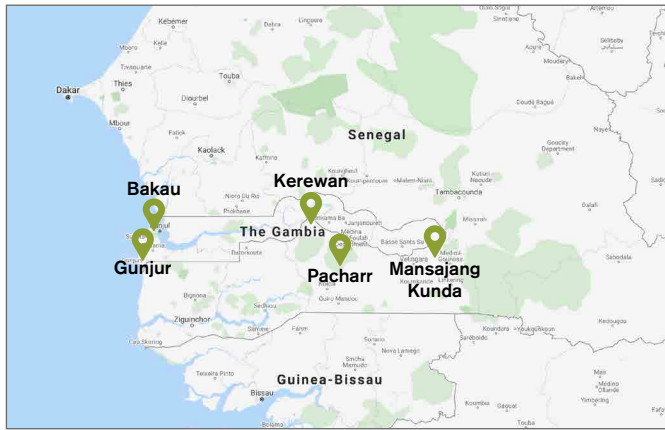
# 4 ANNEXES



## 4.1

# ANNEX 1 – MAPS

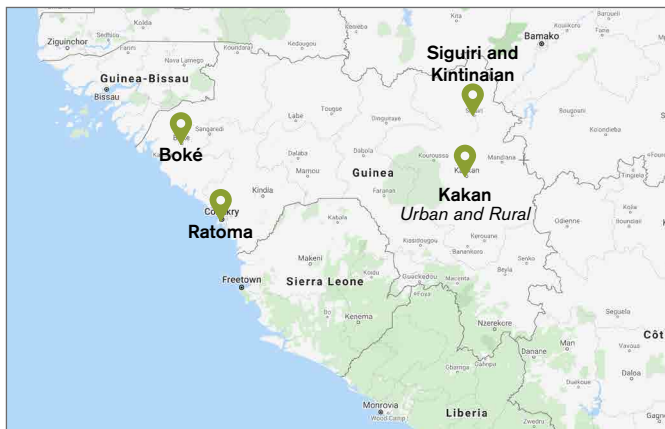
The Gambia



Senegal



Guinea



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## ANNEX 3 – LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ABM</b>	Agent-Based Computational Model
<b>ANPEJ</b>	Agence Nationale pour la Promotion de l'Emploi des Jeunes (Senegal)
<b>ENAE</b>	National School of Agriculture and Livestock (Guinea)
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EDF</b>	European Development Fund
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUTF</b>	European Union Trust Fund
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>GBR</b>	Greater Banjul Area (The Gambia)
<b>GCM</b>	Global Compact for a Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agriculture and Development
<b>LRR</b>	Lower River Region (The Gambia)
<b>MIDEQ</b>	Migration for Development and Equity
<b>MIGNEX</b>	Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>SSSII</b>	Safety, Support and Solutions in the Central Mediterranean Route Phase II
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>URR</b>	Upper River Region (The Gambia)
<b>WP</b>	Work Package





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