

Root causes of migration

Talk given by Ton Dietz at the Oxford Forum for International Development, 6 February 2021

Intercontinental migration is only a small part of much larger migration movements within countries and to neighbouring countries. I will focus on Africa here.

Part of migration is calamity driven but most of it is driven by a combination of aspirations, perceptions and capabilities; with improving development these increase as well. Long-distance migration is NOT in the first place driven by poverty, but by development. All data show that people from most African countries with a higher position in the human development index participate much more in intercontinental migration than people from most African countries with a low human development index.

So if policymakers say that development assistance will diminish migration, that is a fabrication, if not a lie. It is the other way around: development creates migration. And it is development one should support, not anti-migration policies.

My other message to populist politicians is: do not spend development money to strengthen border controls within Africa, as it goes counter to a strong trend of African unification and collaboration. Europe should not be seen as blocking that process and continue its divisive colonial policies.

What should European governments do instead? A lot of migration within Africa itself IS related to calamities, so try to prevent those calamities and if they happen: assist African governments and the global agencies to cope with them.

Second: support job creation in Africa itself and do so with education, training and employment creation for 21st century jobs.

And a third point: make much better use of the African diaspora in Europe and their remittances. And within academia: assist brain circulation by enabling African scholars in Europe to support Africa's students by online teaching and supervision.