

INTRA-AFRICAN HUMAN CAPITAL MOBILITY, MIGRANT COMMUNITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLUSTERS IN THE NICHE ECONOMY: Can NEPAD make it achievable?

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Introduction

The proposed paper addresses the issue of promoting intra-African trade from the perspective of entrepreneurial migrant communities as a viable strategy for the development of clusters of enterprises in identified economic niches with high potential for exports, but which, for some reasons, remain out of the domain of conventional FDI fluxes. The paper build on some insights from a Central-West African based Model of investments from migrant communities from African countries to other African countries. Most recent debates on African development perspective have underscored the role NEPAD should play in boosting endogenous economic driving forces. Steps made under NEPAD towards this goal remain at the infant stage. In line with this concern, some of the conceptual frameworks proposed so far heavily emphasise a model of development driven by conventional FDIs in relation to which each individual state ought to promote the establishment of institutions that are conducive to economic growth. The question is not as such the viability of a model of this type as a pro-poor continental strategy for sustainable growth. The question is rather the extent to which it can work as a complement to the community-driven initiatives happening in the real African economies. My argument is that such a model falls short in tapping some of the underexploited niches that can, with appropriate incentives in place, promote trade and growth from the human capital perspective. The explanation to this limitation lies in its failure to capture the entrepreneurial dynamics at motion on ground, as evidenced by ways in which some migrant communities within Africa, using their collective skills and know how, have invested their assets and become the driving forces in the economic transformation of clustered industrial activities in the niche economies found across the continent. In some parts of Africa, the migrant economy has flourished in clustered enterprises in such sectors as costal fisheries, furniture making, transport and specialised services. The clusters possess some critical mass needed for considerable production to take off in economic niches such as fisheries, wooden furniture and be exported to other parts of Africa in need of some of the goods produced in those enterprises. The determining institutional and socio-cultural factors associated with the dynamics of these clusters remain mostly undocumented and the debate, regrettably, is not as such advanced as it should be on ways of integrating these intra-African investments in the strategies proposed by forums such as NEPAD.

The paper takes on board this important issue to propose an evidence-based conceptual framework on ways of incorporating and promoting intra-African entrepreneurship through the mobility of migrant communities that possess know-how needed for the industrial valorisation of resources available in most part of Africa. The model proposed in the paper focuses on options for co-operation between specific countries in West and Central Africa, two sub-regions in which this type of migrant economy has been observed from the 1960's to now, in quite a few economic sectors.