Irregular Migration and Regional Security Complex in the Sahel-Lake Chad Corridor: A Human Security Discourse

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Abstract

Eurocentric approaches to migration management dominate regional and domestic policymaking on human mobility in Africa. The obstruction of the historical Sahel-Maghreb migration exchange system and protracted human security challenges intensify irregular migration in the Sahel (a semi-arid belt separating North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa). Consequently, the trafficking and smuggling of migrants across the Sahel-Maghreb and the Mediterranean Sea en route to Europe, have compelled European-led migration containment measures. This aggravates humanitarian crisis, impeding mobility, and stimulating regional development challenges in Africa. The thematic analysis of qualitative data (empirical and secondary) by the study examines the causality of irregular migration and regional security in the Sahel-Lake Chad corridor. It deconstructs human security and geopolitics as critical elements for understanding the narratives of Africa's migration crises. Therefore, a holistic regional security-development strategy is suggested toward effective migration governance in the Sahel and harnessing the potentials of human mobility in Africa.

Keywords: Irregular migration, human security, development, containment, Africa, Sahel

Introduction

The current reality of African migration reveals that Eurocentric approaches to migration management dominate regional and domestic policymaking on human mobility in the continent. Migration in Africa spanned centuries across the north and south of the Sahara. The involvement of nomads, artisans, low-skilled workers, highly skilled professionals, undocumented migrants, and refugees, etc., illustrates the diversity of mobility among Africa's population (Adepoju 2000). However, several factors internal or external to states and the continent: political, economic, social, and security, affect African mobility, particularly at this moment. Given the circumstances of the Sahel's heightened securitization, volatility, growing human insecurity, and their implications for mobility, the nexus between irregular migration, regional security, and development in the region are examined toward understanding and explicating the reality of Africa's migration trajectory.

The global securitization of migration, externalization of border control, and growing restrictive or anti-immigrant policies exacerbate a global migration crisis including mixed migration (African Union 2018; International Organization for Migration 2018). The securitization of borders in Africa, particularly the Sahel and the Maghreb, retort principally to European security imperatives against the reality of the historical migration exchange across the Sahara Desert, which dates back over a thousand years. As Bjarnesen (2020) contended, selective and misleading information on African migration prevalent in most political debates advance distorted narratives on African migration to Europe. The negative consequences of these factors include irregular migration¸ "the movement of people outside of the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and recipient country" (IOM2011:2). The migrants' disregard for the regulatory norms, mostly characterized by migrant smuggling and human trafficking, largely result from the rising inequality

within and between countries, as well as states' failure to create effective migration regimes to meet the socio-economic exigencies (IOM 2018).

In dissecting the relationship between migration and development in one of the most securitized sub-regions in Africa, the article's specific objectives include a reflection on the complex drivers of irregular migration; effects of migration securitization on human security; and policy suggestions toward sustainable regional peace, development, and migration governance in the Sahel. Therefore, the subsequent discourse is structured thus: Critical issues in Sub-Saharan African migration; conceptual framework, human security, research method, research finding and discussion; and conclusion.

Critical Issues in Sub-Saharan African Migration: An Overview

The dynamics of Africa's migration, its drivers, trends, and the diversified migratory route have implications for security and development in the continent and beyond. These phenomena have elicited debates across the policy and academic spheres. The history of migration in Africa is long-existing, and key traditional migratory flows are constitutive of the history of settlement and expansion of ethnic groups, states, empires, and other collectivities. Although some of these lack adequate historical evidence, they were significant to the construction of African societies. Except when communities were abandoned, precolonial African migration was largely circular, seasonal, and of short duration (Bakewell and de Haas 2007). Accordingly, most events were traditionally associated with the search for safe and fertile farming or grazing lands (due to climate variation) or socio-political circumstances (internecine warfare, pilgrimages, and slavery). Some of these dynamics influence current African migration, although in different modes.

Colonialism, from the nineteenth century, divided the ethnic/cultural groups under distinct authorities and influenced mobility and traditional territorial organization in Africa. Its spatial

polarization and exploitative infrastructures (construction of ports in the main town(s) and railways to export local commodities) created urban networks and expansion of agricultural exports and mining activities. These influenced new rural-urban migration patterns particularly from the interior to the coast (Mercandalli and Losch 2019). While traditional mobilities were not governed by any law or policy before colonialism, the above-mentioned practice persists in many societies regardless of territorial boundaries. Hence, local, and regional histories and imperatives, rather than colonial borders or disparities, shape the reality of African mobility.

The emergence of nation-states in the post-independent era increases migration flow across Africa either through conflict, or infrastructure, and policies to reducing unemployment, generate remittances or advance regional cooperation. The anti-colonial sentiment and nationalism associated with statehood processes, previously forced the governments of several African (such as Algeria, Egypt, and Côte d'Ivoire) to control emigration (Flahaux and de Haas2016). Thus, out of concerns for 'brain drain' on the one hand, and through protectionism and xenophobia (e.g., Uganda, South Africa, etc.), to restrict foreigners' immigration on the other hand. Similarly, free movement policies or agreements of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) for example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community (EAC), provide incentives for intra-African migration. This includes trade liberalization or free trade agreements, bilateral/multilateral agreements, and visa-free policies among countries to ease the flow of movement of people, goods, and investments (Dinbabo and Badewa 2020).

Moreover, political tensions or military conflicts, rebellion, and violent extremism have pushed migrants across borders and overseas, particularly displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers. Hence, 14 percent of cross-border migration in Africa is conflict-related (Flahaux and De Haas 2016:5). Major hotspots currently include Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Chad, South Sudan,

Ethiopia, Libya, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Among the nearly 18 million displaced persons in Africa, more than 12.5 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) (World Bank 2021: 1). In addition, conflicts have forced many Africans into being refugees in foreign countries. The continent hosted 7.3 million refugees in 2019, representing 25 percent of the global refugee population (28.7 million). Thus, 1 in 4 international migrants in Africa is a refugee, compared with 1 in every 10 international migrants globally. In 2019, most refugees in Africa were found in Eastern Africa (48%), North Africa (46%), and Central Africa (38%) (IOM 2020: 18). These formed a part of Africa's international migrants.

Socio-economic factors including poverty and inequality, unemployment, gender disparities, environmental change, and national/multilateral policies influence Africa's migration outcomes (Adepoju 2000; 2008; Cummings et al. 2015; Kandilige and Hamidou 2019). Socio-economic differentials between cities or countries influence mobilities, as areas with better economic conditions - local or abroad, often attract migrants. Urbanization, favorable economic conditions and policies, industrialization, and employment opportunities in major urban settings arguably serve as pull factors. Contrariwise, rising inequalities, unemployment, poverty, income gaps, and difficulties in accessing opportunities have driven local and international migration in Africa. These phenomena not only act as push factors but enhance the agency of migrants against human security challenges. For instance, mundane social processes, including the search for education, spouse, or a better life may influence migration decision (Mercandalli and Losch 2017), while social capital - social networks, information from previously successful migrants have aided cost maximization and risk reduction among African migrants (Castles 2000).

Environmental change is also a major driver of forced migration in Africa, although linked with other dynamic and interacting socio-political, demographic, and economic factors (Adepoju

2008; Münz 2018; Parrish et al. 2020). The effects such as the vulnerabilities to shock, food insecurity, rising environmental migration, and scarcities of basic human needs induce conflicts among resource dependents. This occurs over ranges of spatial scales—from movements between rural and urban areas to international migration—and ranges of temporal scales, from short-term migration, circular migration, to permanent mobilities in Africa (Parrish et al. 2020). Significantly, this reflects the levels of Africans' agency and resilience from environmental catastrophe.

Against these odds, African migration flow is largely intra-continental, Southern Africa hosts the largest migrant population (6.7 percent), followed by Central Africa (2.2 percent), West Africa (1.9 percent), East Africa (1.8 percent), and North Africa (1.2 percent) (IOM 2020: 16). Intra-regional migration is higher in inland West Africa and Southern Africa, but due to extra-continental trends, lower in the Maghreb and North Africa (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). However, xenophobia and immigration restriction policies contribute to the comparatively low and dwindling intra-African migration (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). For instance, the othering of immigrants, sometimes motivated by the elites' inflammatory statements, including tensions between immigrants and host communities over crimes, job loss, and overstretched safety nets, have spewed recurrent xenophobic attacks and wanton destruction of immigrants' livelihoods in post-Apartheid South Africa (Ademola, Badewa, and Olufeso 2019). In some African societies, anti-immigrant sentiments result from state policies, or protectionist measures (against immigrant businesses). These disincentives undermine regional policies on free movement, trade, and investment and the prospect that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) will succeed in the short term.

Africa's inter-continental migration is mostly to Europe and North America. It is a mixed flow involving several categories of immigrants exploiting the old migration routes and different

means that characterize the diversity of Africa's migrant surge (Okome 2017). Amidst the development dichotomy and othering of African immigrants, states' anti-immigrant measures include preferential policies for skilled and wealthy immigrants, strict and restrictive border control (securitization) aimed toward containing the inflow of low-skilled migrants and asylum seekers (Flahaux and de Haas 2016; de Haas et al. 2018; Landau 2019). The above factors enhance irregular migration, the exploitation of alternative (and often more dangerous) entry routes across the Maghreb, the Sahara, and through the Mediterranean, as legal migration pathways diminish (Cummings et al. 2015; Dinbabo, Badewa, and Yeboah 2021).

The security tensions arising from conflicts and the militarization of migrants' routes by local and foreign-backed mercenaries, especially in Libya, Niger, and Algeria, intensify migrants' vulnerability to smugglers and human traffickers. The resultant deaths, exploitation, and abuses of migrants' human rights worsen the migration 'crisis' (Adepoju 2008; Kandilige and Hamidou 2019). These vexing circumstances necessitate the review of migration governance and development strategies in Africa toward harnessing the benefits and mitigating its negative effects (Abebe 2017; Dinbabo and Badewa 2020; McKenzie and Yang 2015). International cooperation toward effective management of migration complexities (Abebe 2017; IOM 2018), harmonization of policy frameworks (national and multilateral), and critical stakeholders' engagement (Dinbabo and Badewa, 2020) are very crucial.

Conceptual Framework: Human Security

The concept of 'human security' (Figure 1) is proposed to illustrate the irregular migration-regional security nexus and their implications for development in the Sahel-Lake Chad. Derived from Amartya Sen's work (Sen, 2000), and popularized by the United Nations Development

Programme's Human Development Reports (HDR), the concept was aimed to humanize security in the global development agenda, referencing 'individual' instead of the state (Gasper 2013). Accordingly, the primary responsibility of the state is the protection and promotion of the core values of humanity. Hence, the legitimacy of the state's sovereignty rests not only on territorial control but upon fulfilling specific human rights standards and citizens' welfare (Gomez, Gasper, and Mine, 2015).

The human security approach conceives individual security beyond the physical safety of lives and broadly as the ability to secure and access basic human needs that enable people to live dignity and achieve self-actualization (well-being). It contextualizes the critical understanding of security for the appropriate policy to safeguard three freedoms- 'freedom from fear', 'freedom from wants', and 'freedoms to live in dignity (Gasper 2013), reputed as the fundamental elements of well-being, growth, and development. Toward these freedoms, seven categories of security (Figure1), viz: economic, political, environmental, health, food, community, and personal security (Gasper 2013; Hoogensen 2004) are critical to human development.
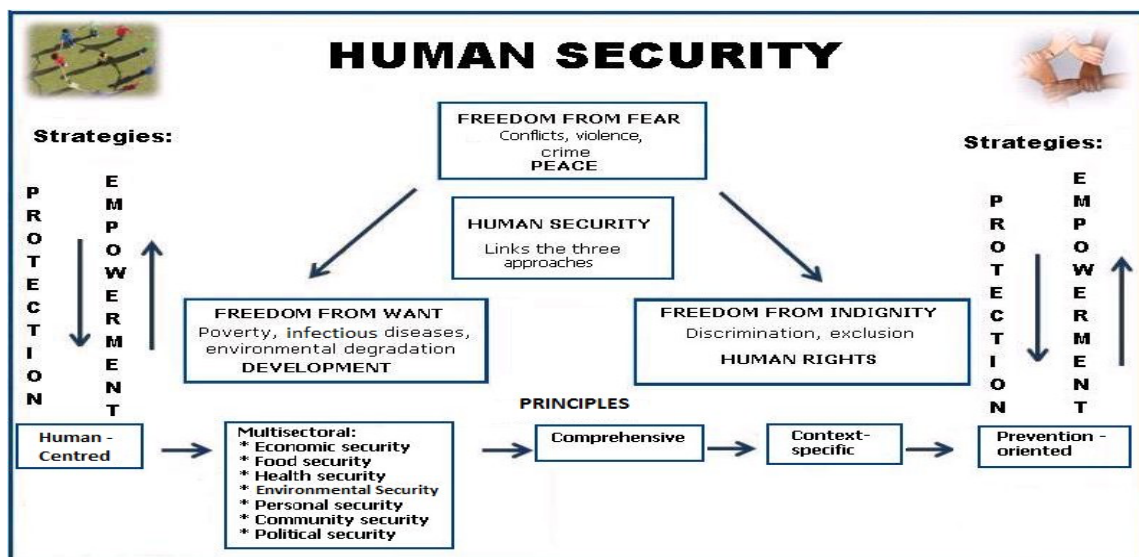

Figure 1: Human security conceptual approach. Source: (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIHR), 2010:4)

The broad human security approach is a normative procedure to address issues that undermine human life and well-being, such as poverty, disease, and the negative effects of environmental change. Its second preoccupation reflects on the effects of armed conflicts and the challenges of repressive regimes and state failure, leading to victimization and displacement of civilians, especially children and women. The third aspect, from policy conception and policy-based research, illustrates a gamut of 'non-traditional' security matters. Its objective is to gather resources and measures to tackle security concerns such as terrorism, drugs, diseases (such as HIV/AIDS), trafficking in humans and illegal substances, criminality, and the proliferation of small arms, which undermine human development (Newman 2010:79). The significance of the concept thus includes its policy relevance and sustainable approach to human-centered development to combat the root causes of insecurity.

Research Method

The study adopted a qualitative method. Empirical and secondary data were aggregated from semi-structured interviews with key informants, relevant institutional reports (governmental and non-governmental), and literature on the topic. The primary data was collected during regional fieldwork to four of the Sahel-Lake Chad countries – Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria – between December 2017 and March 2018. Twenty key informants (8 from Nigeria and 7 from Chad), were interviewed from among the local population, security, and development officials. These include officials in the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the IOM, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UNDP, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Others include two (2) from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Niger Republic, and three (3)

displaced persons (of Nigerian origin in Chad). The informants were represented in the study as Respondents 1-20. The official reports and institutional policy documents were also accessed. Informants were purposively sampled due to their firsthand experiences, (institutional) practical engagement in the terrain, and accessibility. This helped to contextualize the complex security-development milieu under which irregular migration exists in the region.

The secondary sources - literature, and 'netnography' (data from conventional and social media, blogs, and videos) were utilized. The literature was instrumental in gathering diverse views on geopolitics, environmental change, and conflict dynamics critical to the region's human insecurity. Four verified online media reports and documentaries that interviewed irregular migrants and returnees of different nationalities across the Sahel (mostly from Nigeria, Cameroon, Coted'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Ghana) were aggregated, transcribed, and analyzed. These were represented in the study as (MRD 1-5i.e. Media Reports and Documentaries). Netnography on the Sahel's migration concerns was explored for proper insights into the complexities of the phenomena from the affected and third-party (reporters) viewpoints. The netnography pays close attention to the context, i.e. meaning, rather than precision of communication (Bowler 2010; Kozinets, Dolbec, and Earley 2014), it is cost-saving, exploratory, and aggregates cause and effect.

Furthermore, a thematic analysis was used to categorize information derived across sources into themes and to illustrate salient opinions and synthesize conclusions. Sets of codes were employed to reduce sizeable numbers of oral and written accounts into manageable data for proper representation of occurrences, logical composition, and synthesis. The ATLAS.ti (version 8.0.43) software was used for manual categorization, sorting, and thematic review. Findings, interpretations, and conclusions were drawn from the themes. The challenges posed by language

barriers, access to classified information, and difficulty of reaching knowledgeable informants in the interior were overcome through snowballing techniques.

Research Findings and Discussion

The study found that irregular migration is indicative of the smuggling and trafficking in humans and illicit commodities pervading the Sahel-Lake Chad corridor, particularly the vast desert areas of Chad, Niger, and Libya. Mixed migration involving migrants and refugees using the same routes and transportation also intensifies amidst the daily movement or oscillation of people in search of livelihoods along the Sahel. As stated by a Nigerien NGO officer,

> Irregular migrants in the region, are neither the poorest nor the weakest, but youths (mostly men), capable of bearing the financing cost, physical pain, and long-term risks. They are relatively well-educated; with fewer exceptions, many of them acquire the equivalent of a General Certificate Examinations (GCE) A level and above…. (Respondent 18).

Mixed migration involving "young male migrants, refugees particularly highly vulnerable women, unaccompanied girls, and children exposed them to the risk of trafficking, abuse, and exploitation" (Respondent 10). In 2016, 181,000 migrants, mostly youths—jobless graduates, environmental and conflict refugees, among others—traveled in thousands from West, East and Central Africa (including perhaps other parts of the world) across the Sahel to North Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea en route to Europe (Comolli 2019:2). Consequently, the IOM (2018:3) estimated an annual profit of $150 million as the proceeds of irregular migration on the West Africa-Europe route across the Sahel.

The region's ungoverned spaces, violent conflicts, insecurity, and rising socio-economic challenges enhanced migrant flow. Economic inequality, an intrinsic aspect of the neo-liberal world order since the post-Second World War (1939-45), is at the heart of migration, forcing migrants from the Global South to the North (Lebovich 2018). For instance, nearly 4,000 migrants traveled across Agadez, Niger in 2016. Half of the 2,800 migrant deaths recorded on the Central Mediterranean route in 2015 were West Africans (Comolli 2019; IOM 2018). In this regard, "the central Mediterranean route exploited for migration flow remain dangerous, while the desert route across the Sahel through Niger is as fatal as the sea" (Respondent 5).

The seeming security threats of irregular migration to governments and communities in North Africa have forced the arrest and detention of undocumented migrants in the Maghreb. An informant maintained that

> …most sub-Saharan African migrants arrested were left with no means to return to countries of origin. Many became vulnerable to inhuman treatments including exploitation, human rights abuses, and slavery, and some died in detention or killed for different reasons (Respondent 14).

The experiences of irregular migrants along the Sahel-Sahara Desert-to North Africa, and the inhuman treatment in North Africa (particularly Libya), towards the journey to Europe, and their encounter with smugglers while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, are considered below. Added to these is a discussion of the European interventions against irregular migration in the region and the challenges of reverse flow.

Irregular Migrants' Experiences: Crossing the Sahara Desert to North Africa

To embark on the journey from their source countries, migrants are often ripped off, sacrificing their life savings in aspirations to migrate. As reported, "migrants paid trafficking agents as much as 3000 euros" (MRD-1). A Nigerian returnee in the (MRD-2) revealed that "many trafficked youths from Edo state, Nigeria travel through Benin and the least they parted with was 500,000 (Nigerian) Naira (approximately US $1500) …. and some, indeed, paid nearly 1 million Naira". Thus, the trafficked youths are often motivated by the prospects of job availability in destination countries or by the successes of trafficked migrants who made it to Europe. A returned migrant of Cote d'Ivoire nationality narrated thus,

> Irregular migrants believe that jobs are waiting for them in these countries. That
> was why they decided to pay to travel by road and try their luck, instead of going
> by legal means…After paying the trafficking agents, depending on the country of
> origin, going by road, takes about three weeks to reach Libya, particularly from
> Cote d'Ivoire or Ghana (MRD-3).

Meanwhile, another returned migrant of Nigerian origin maintained that "Many (irregular migrants) were motivated by those who have traveled by road successfully and living a good life in Italy or other parts of Europe…. They failed to realize that many did not succeed….and nothing was heard of them" (MRD-2).

The migrants' experiences illustrate anguish, human rights abuses, victimization, and exploitation amidst future uncertainties. A female Cameroonian returnee submits that the two weeks journey across the desert was not usually palatable. Dust and sand often blew into their faces, and not less than 22 migrants were packed into a desert pick-up van (mostly Hilux) that

should seat fewer people. She lamented that "if you lean back and fall off, no one would stop for you to re-enter the van. You were either there thirsty, die of hunger, or kidnapped in the Sahara Desert" (MRD-4). A Nigerien NGO representative buttressed this point and confirmed that "vehicle breakdown sometimes happens, in many cases, people in such vehicles are kidnapped. Their (migrants) dream of reaching Europe ends as kidnappers often harvest the victims' organs" (Respondent 4). Organ harvesting, "is an enduring business in the Sahara because of migrants' vulnerability in the desert" (Respondent 6). Kidnappers in the desert use their migrant victims to extort huge ransom from their families back home, while subjecting them to torture. Most women were subjected to rape, enslavement, and death was meted out to those who had no one to pay their ransom. This is illustrated by testimonies of two female migrants of Burkina Faso and Nigerian nationalities,

> (1.) Kidnappers force victims to call family members back home to send money, that if not, they would kill them. I experienced this and my family sent ransom twice before I was freed. (2.) Kidnappers torture the captives, …they threatened my family that if $3500 was not paid, I would be killed. …the victims' hands and legs could be chained and hung upside down to force their families to pay. They sometimes request more after receiving the first ransom without releasing the victims (MRD-2).

The Exploitation of Migrants in Libya in Preparation for the Journey to Europe

The study found that migrants who successfully arrived in Libya face were confronted with numerous uncertainties. Just like the stranded ones in the middle of the desert, some migrants who eventually 'made it' to Libya fall prey to kidnappers. Many have similar or worse experiences than

when in the desert (Respondent 11). The views from six returned migrants from Libya, who recounted their experiences at a rehabilitation center in Lagos, Nigeria, captured in (MRD-2) are as follows:

> **Returned Migrant-1**: We lived in a poor encampment for days, often with inadequate or no food. If we go outside, they will kidnap us, and if kidnapped in Libya, you could be auctioned as a slave. We saw people it happened to, who became somebody else's properties.
>
> **Returned Migrant-2**: We were sold as labor at cheaper prices. My condition worsened when I got pregnant, and they never cared about it.
>
> **Returned Migrant-3**: I was sold for $2300 (United States); I was a laborer for more than 6 months on a plantation.
>
> **Returned Migrant-4**: I was sold twice. I received the worst beating of my life.…most of the people here, if you check their bodies, they were beaten, mutilated, and their buttocks stabbed with sharp objects.
>
> **Returned Migrant-5**: Some men were forced to copulate with other men, including their brothers; some who refused were shot. My cousin was a victim…he lost his life as a result.
>
> **Returned Migrant-6**: They took us (migrants) to work by force, they beat and maltreated us…, they do not like 'Blacks'.

The above reveals the level of exploitation experienced by irregular migrants in Libya in preparation for the trip to Europe, particularly exploitation by trafficking agents, who often demand high fees in return for getting them to Europe. The agents force them to work in Libya for

months to afford the fare in the perilous boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The MRD-2 also reveals that "several repatriated migrants stayed in Libya for up to two years, doing menial jobs or farm labor, including women forced into prostitution, in most cases, by trafficking agents". A key informant reported that "many of the trafficked young migrant girls were often held hostage, sexually abused or raped, or forced into prostitution in Libya, by their traffickers. Some were impregnated upon repatriation…. while others contracted sexually transmitted infections (STIs)" (Respondent 8). Indeed, "men were also not excluded from sexual abuse" (narrated by Returned Migrant-5in MRD-2).

The Perilous Crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Italy

The traffickers' task end with payment to smugglers for onward sailing of migrants across the sea, to Europe thus, opens a new page of migrants' vulnerability. The victims, as revealed in the MRD3 and 4, painted a grim picture of the dubious nature of the smugglers and their scant regard for their (migrants') lives, when they are stacked in rickety and unseaworthy boats or dinghies and sent across the Mediterranean Sea. This is further illustrated below,

> If you could raise money for the smugglers, they put you in a dinghy on a 200-mile journey to Italy. Smugglers know how impossible it is to reach Italy in such a boat because it was not designed for such a journey. Most migrants do not reach the destinations but a few... Worse still, the agents are too greedy to acquire a better boat for the Italy trip, because nobody would get it back from Italy to them in Libya for reuse. Therefore, to save costs, they acquire cheap boats, lives of the migrants mean nothing to them...but their business (MRD-4).

The Associated Press reported in December 2016 that "migrant smuggling... remains a major source of income among locals in Libya's coastal cities, generating up to 275 to 325 million euros ($292 million to $346 million), an estimated annual revenue" (Jordans 2016). A humanitarian aid worker claimed that "smugglers earned an estimated 8,750 British Pounds on each boat… by conveying migrants up to three times a week, smugglers as a group could profit around 26,250 British Pounds" (MRD-4). They do not join the migrants on the cruise because they know it is perilous. She also observed that "a migrant, usually a fisherman of Senegalese or Gambian origin, is often charged to sail the boat. All he is equipped with is a compass, even if he knows not where they are heading" (MRD-4). To stem this tide (migrant smuggling), several securitization measures were enforced by the European authorities both in the maritime borders and across the Sahel, leading to a reverse migration flow.

European Interventions and the Challenges of Reverse Flow

Advanced policies and forceful mechanisms to thwart transit mobilities from the Sahel-Maghreb corridors and across the Mediterranean Sea, en route to Europe were drawn up by the European authorities. These include border control agreements, development projects, and financial assistance to the Sahel and Maghreb states(Boserup and Martinez 2018; Comolli 2019; Lebovich 2018). The main purpose was to militarize the region and secure the European borders against 'illegal migrants' entry into Europe. These range from the European Union (EU) commitment of €338million to training border forces in Niger, supporting ruthless migration containment actions in Libya, and funding joint task operations with the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) agencies since 2014 (Comolli 2019). These commitments are part of a

total €1 billion 2012-2014 EU Development Cooperation Assistance for Niger and other security development strategies for the Sahel (Comolli 2019).

In the absence of a strong government in Libya, the EU invest heavily in military measures to obstruct migrants' transit through the Niger-Libya route and the Libya-Mediterranean coast. These include intensified militarization, the establishment of detention camps for irregular migrants in Libya, and funding of the Libyan Coast Guard (Boserup and Martinez 2018). An investigative media report (MRD-5) corroborated this:

> The Libya coast guards, funded by EU countries, often intercept 'illegal migrants' boats. The coast guards are not nice to them (migrants) during and after arrest, they beat them up and force them off the boat, and then burn the boat to stop smugglers from reusing it.

The returned and detained migrants are reportedly subjected to inhuman treatments in Libyan detention camps (Boserup and Martinez 2018). Some arrested migrants, after escaping to Italy or rescued by European coast guards, are often detained for further deportation, while only a few were offered asylum (Boserup and Martinez 2018).

> It does not matter how far their boats have gone, the sea guards after intercepting, force the migrants back to Libya and put them in prison or detention camp. They are often starved of food and drinking water there in detention. More than 400 detainees share one toilet, most of them are sexually abused or forced into homosexualism or slavery (MRD-5).

Despite the reduction in the volume of irregular migration, this trend has multifarious effects on the region, including unemployment, the upsurge in banditry, the proliferation of dangerous routes, and reverse flows of migration. Reverse migration flows, i.e.: north-south flows, manifest in four ways. First, growing insecurity in Libya produces migrant-refugee repulse as thousands of the 700,000 - 1,000,000 migrants were forced to seek refuge in Niger (Comolli 2019). Secondly, the awful state of Libyan detention camps – malnutrition, poor sanitation, over-congestion, and the danger of being sold to traffickers – has inspired migrant evacuation through the UNHCR-initiated Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) to Niger. According to the IOM (2018), the 1,297 vulnerable refugees repatriated from Libya by June 2019, included 711 evacuated by the UNHCR to the ETM in Niger, the 295 transported to Italy, and 291others relocated to Canada and Europe (Comolli 2019). Thirdly, alternative routes, especially to Spain (an EU country that received 65,000 immigrants in 2018) via Algeria and Morocco have been exploited (Comolli 2019). This pattern may increase as criminal groups adapt to changing trends and relocate to less controlled routes (Respondent 15). The fourth manifestation is the expulsion of sub-Saharan African migrants, including visa holders and UNHCR-recognized refugees, from Algeria by its authorities, particularly since 2017 (Comolli 2019).

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Republics of Niger and Algeria led to the return of Nigerien migrants (expelled from Algeria in bus and truck convoys), the figure rose from 9,290 to 14,446 between 2016 and 2017 (Hinnant 2018: 2). For fourteen months, till June 2018, nearly 13,000 migrants, including pregnant women and children were abandoned without food and water at Point-Zero (Algeria-Niger border). 11,276 survived the severe temperatures under which they were forced to march (mostly at gunpoint) via Assamaka and Arliten route to Agadez, Niger (Comolli 2019). Due to EU pressures on North African states against the migrant flow via the

Mediterranean Sea or the Spanish barrier fences, statistics of returnees crossing on foot to Niger increased (Hinnant 2018; Comolli 2019). The IOM (2018) estimated an increase from 135 in May 2017 to 2,888 in April 2018 (Hinnant 2018; Comolli 2019). The forceful ejections reversed the north-bound mobility of African migrants and thus, complicates the region's migration and human security crises.

Human Security and Regional Migration Crisis in the Sahel

Like most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel's migration crisis is mostly linked to human security challenges pervading the region. Considered as the remote factors for the migration crisis, the human security challenges include factors such as misgovernance, social injustice, environmental change, border porosity, armed violence, resource conflicts, and external interventions. Indeed, the Libyan crisis and 'migration containment' following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, are regarded as the immediate factors precipitating the Sahel migration crisis. Both factors, stifling regional development with implications beyond the Sahel, are further explained.

The first remote factor is the Sahel's population, estimated at 150 million people (75 percent below age 35) and projected to reach 300 million by 2045 (UN-OCHA 2017). Four of five within the Sahelian population rely on (subsistence) agriculture and are vulnerable to climate-induced threats; one in four resides in conflict-affected areas, and one in six of the entire Sahel population is food insecure (UN-OCHA 2017:4). Hence, drought and deforestation heighten the socio-economic crisis in the Sahel, including clashes between farmers and herders, and insurgency. Additionally, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and armed banditry in the Sahel result from the prevalence of poverty, underdevelopment, and ungoverned spaces. Worsened by dysfunctional infrastructure, the above factors further produce environmental refugees and criminality across the

region. According to the UN-OCHA (2016:12), "an estimated $3.8 billion of yearly profit is generated by arms, drug and human trafficking in the Sahel region, and 60 percent of the victims of trafficking are children." The displacement of 1.4 million children by violent conflicts in the Lake Chad region (EU 2018) further heightens human insecurity, and 'migration' seems the only option among despondent youths. A repatriated migrant (MRD-1) maintained:

> …Some of us have no parents, we are just struggling on our own, homeless and
>
> without access to quality education. We fled because of the Boko Haram attacks…
>
> we cannot access our farms; our homes were destroyed, and our parents were killed
>
> or kidnapped by Boko Haram (MRD-1).

The Libyan crisis thwarting the historical Sahel-Maghreb migration course, is a major trigger of the region's migration crisis, for its consequences on regional development and security. Cross-border migration between the Sahel and the Maghreb, since the pre-colonial era, largely include informal, circular, or seasonal flow (Bakewell and de Haas 2007). The post-colonial migration between the regions increased as oil and gas exploration in the vast deserts of Libya and Algeria was exploited with a labor force predominantly from the Sahel (Boserup and Martinez 2018). Populations of desert communities in Algeria and Libya ballooned between 1960 and 1970 due to the influx of informal labor migrants from sub-Sahara Africa.

Considerable investment in mineral exploration by several states and multinational corporations brought massive development in the desert. For instance, uranium mining occasioned the growth of the Nigerien town of Arlit, from 8,000 to above 100,000 population in less than a decade. Consequently, an estimated 1.5 million migrants permanently lived or worked in Libya, 400,00 in Algeria, 300,000 in Mauritania, tens of thousands in both Morocco and Tunisia,

including almost 100,000 others traversing Agadez, Niger annually on a seasonal mode of labor migration (Boserup and Martinez 2018; Kandilige and Hamidou 2019). While most sub-Saharan labor migrants remained in the Maghreb, a small but substantial number migrated further to Europe in the early 2000s. This constituted a relatively small proportion of African migrants to Europe, compared to North Africans, particularly Algerians and Moroccans. Yet, most migration from the Sahel to Europe took place legally until the aftermath of the destabilization of Libya.

Libya's drift into state failure deprived the sub-Saharan labor migrants of their 'greatest' livelihood and job opportunity in the continent. The ensuing development and security threats exacerbate trafficking in the region and migrant smuggling across the Mediterranean Sea (Mercandalli and Losch 2019; Dinbabo, Badewa, and Yeboah 2021). Apart from the shock effects of the 2015 refugee crisis on Europe, migration from sub-Saharan Africa became a major concern for European policymakers for several reasons. Sub-Saharan African population growth, including Sahel's, threatens the economies of both African states and Europe, from the migration point of view. The continent's population was estimated to rise from 900 million to 2.8 billion between 2013 and 2060 (World Bank 2015: 1). Although 70 percent of African migration remains intra-continental, the African working population, expected to increase rapidly from 480 million to 1.3 billion between 2013 and 2050, may increase the pressure on Europe (Comolli 2019; EU 2018). The failure of Europe to secure its borders with the Maghreb while the Libyan crisis escalated led in part to the rise of right-wing anti-migration populist parties in Europe. Hence, the political, developmental, and financial support to the Sahel and Maghreb states, the legal and military mechanisms (in collaboration with African states, AU and UN agencies) were conceived in responses to the above trigger and the remote factors pervading the region long before the Libyan catastrophe (Landau 2019; Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

European responses can be interpreted from different perspectives, considering their effects on the African migration crisis. Europe's 2011 "Sahel Strategy" broadened into the "EU Comprehensive Approach" combats more than the proliferation of radical jihadist groups in North Africa such as Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM's) influence in the Sahel. Its preventive measures against radicalism and emphasis on collaboration among Sahel and Maghreb states to check drug trafficking and (irregular) migration toward Europe (Rouppert 2011; Boserup and Martinez 2018) have repercussions in the region. The EU's integrative security and development approaches to curb migration and counter-terrorist threats in the Sahel thus seemed costly and unsustainable. The strategies were largely dependent on local governments' cooperation, their predisposition to the emerging geopolitics, and the external influences on the region. For instance, the European measures including the EU Capacity and Assistance Programme (EUCAP), created in 2012 to combat terrorism and organized crime in Niger and Mali, failed to solve the Sahel's problems. This was the case with the EU Training Mission (EUTM), initiated to train Malian security forces in response to the Tuareg rebellion, jihadist occupation in the north and the March 2012 military coup, as well as the EU "Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020". By protecting both the political elites' and metropolitan interests, the efforts amplify resentments and radical tendencies in the region. Similarly, the European Union Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM) was established on 22 May 2013 under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to bolster the Libyan forces in border security. This and the EU-backed military patrols along the Niger-Libya border, the French, American, and Italian military contingents, etc. in the Sahel, complexify regional security and development challenges while further protecting metropolitan interests.

The above narratives reveal the complex interaction between human insecurity, geopolitics, and migration trends in the Sahel. The threats to human security - economic, political, food, personal, health, community, and environmental security (Hoogensen 2004; Gasper 2013) are causal factors for prevalent migration trends across the region. The EU border control measures, the French, and other foreign support to national authorities in the Sahel against dissidents, rebellions, and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) serve two major purposes. The first is to protect external powers' investments in extractive resources such as uranium (Niger), petroleum resources (Chad, Mali, and Libya), and gold (Mali and Niger). The second is to prevent migrant influx to Europe, without regard for their human security in the origin and transit countries. In effect, the containment of irregular migrants induced revenue or job losses for the smuggling networks (former Tuareg rebels—now migrant transporters, directly and the caterers—mostly women in migrant ghettos, indirectly), the banks, and individual businesses along transit routes (Comolli 2019). For instance, failure to compensate all former smugglers through the European Commission's Action Plan for Rapid Economic Impact in Agadez (PAIERA) scheme led to a considerable number of male adults departing Agadez and other migrant routes for jobs elsewhere. Lack of legitimate jobs, particularly for the erstwhile migrant smugglers, have reinforced criminality, banditry, arms proliferation and robbery on the one hand, and on the other, the diversion of smuggling routes to unmarked zones through the Sahara and the Sahel's under-governed spaces, including volatile Mali (Comolli 2019). How the European-led strategies failed to adapt to the Sahel's peculiarities and exacerbate local tensions, regional instability, and the migrant crisis, can be further imagined.

The EU strategy for stability in the Sahel (the anti-migration, counterterrorism, and development measures) fails to promote human security in the Sahel. It is unsustainable. The

militarization of migration (by external forces and local mercenaries) and the closure of legal migration channels in the region exacerbate the region's security-development predicaments. While the measures reduce migration toward Europe particularly through the Libya-Italy itinerary, they force migration underground, boost transnational crime, restrict migrant rights and endanger their well-being (Okome 2017; Cummings et al. 2015). Criminal networks, thus, profiteer from kidnapping, clandestine trafficking of humans, drugs, arms, and contrabands across the Sahel's ungoverned spaces. The reality of poor human development indices, mounting internal fragility, and incessant insurrection in the Sahel are testimonies of its plethora of development and security crises. Therefore, it relies on foreign assistance for food, security, finance, and investment.

The more stringent the European securitization measures, the more complicated the clandestine migration, land routes, and the temporary migrants' settlement stretches. Hence, social capital, information sharing, and the ability of African migrants as factors for cost maximization and risk reduction have become imperative (Castles 2000). Their agencies are reflected in the significant transit economy of the major link communities, transport, itinerant trading, hotel, and financial businesses, including mutual aid and religious groups. Meanwhile, adverse conditions induced prostitution among immigrant women, criminality by smugglers, document forgers, and kidnappers feature among other challenges along the migratory routes. Hence, the need to address irregular migration holistically without criminalizing it.

Policy Implications

Migration policy instruments have been conceived by the AU, RECs, in partnership with Europe, and other bilateral agreements. The *AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa* (MPFA), adopted in 2006 (revised in 2018), and the AU-led *Joint Labour Migration Program* (JLMP) for Africa,

2015 (Abebe 2017; Dinbabo and Badewa 2020).The ECOWAS *Common Approach on Migration*, (2007) was approved by member-states in January 2008, to address migration and development challenges in West Africa. Its six principles include combating irregular migration and human trafficking, as well as protecting the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, etc. *The Migration Dialogue for West Africa* (MIDWA) *Border Management Working Group* (1 August 2017) reviews and makes recommendations on the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, migration and irregular migration management, and regional data sharing (OCHA 2017).

Notable AU- EU partnerships–include *the Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration*- the Ouagadougou Action Plan (2006), the *Joint Africa-EU Partnership on Migration*, Mobility, and Employment (Tripoli Process, 2007); the *EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative* (Khartoum Process), 2014; and the *Valletta Summit's Action Plan on Migration* (2015). These attempt to address the root causes of irregular migration, combat trafficking, migrant smugglings, and advanced opportunities for regular migration, without any positive impact on Africa (Abebe 2017; Dinbabo and Badewa 2020). The ECOWAS and AU frameworks, despite their novelty, are undermined by abysmal implementation, inadequate funding, and manpower. The EU-led responses are responsive to the EU security imperative, without concerns for Africa's historical and current migration peculiarities.

The following suggestions are crucial to addressing the root causes and consequences of forced displacement and irregular migration in the Sahel and Africa. First, strategies are required, including the implementation of programs that strengthen transnational collaboration, unbiased legal framework, awareness of the dangers of irregular migration, and legal migration pathways. Such measures can be enhanced for proper identification of migrant smuggling; investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, while protecting the rights of migrants against torture, involuntary

servitude, exploitation, and other abuses. Stakeholders' engagement, improved communication, and coordination among African states, civil societies, and International Governmental Organizations on good governance, social justice, and youth empowerment are very crucial in this regard.

Second, capacity-building should be facilitated that aligns national legislation and counter-trafficking measures with international standards. This should incorporate cooperation between origin, transit, and destination states in effective repatriation or readmission of 'irregular migrants. 'Socio-economic support for returnees and their communities is crucial toward reintegrating 'illegal migrants' and preventing irregular migration in the continent (AU 2018). International obligations on the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, stateless persons, and other categories of migrants should be guaranteed across territories. This should include proper and humane screening of asylum-seekers at entry points, referral to authorities, and provision of sustainable solutions (voluntary repatriation, local integration, proper, well-resourced resettlement) in line with the Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Abebe 2017; AU 2018; Dinbabo and Badewa, 2020). The GRID[3] Project (Geo-Referenced Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development)—a regional geo-spatial data system on population, settlements, infrastructure, and administrative boundaries for significant mapping and development supports, will be instrumental in the success of the corrective responses are deployed.

Third, an inclusive regional mechanism for conflict prevention, management, and resolution should include a cross-border security force operationalized under the African Union's mandate towards stabilization in the Sahel. As implied, "the G5-Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), created in July 2017, lacks full operational capacity in combating the region's insecurity despite initial gains" (Respondent 14). An expanded multinational operation of the AU would integrate

diverse military formations in the region instead of serving external interests. This can be operationalized from the ECOWAS brigade of the African Standby Force, with collaboration from the Maghreb states, to incorporate military, paramilitary, and civilian components. Through local intelligence, effective communication, and regional early warning mechanisms, the task force can tackle the root causes of violent extremism, youth radicalization, and insurgency in the region. It will jointly police the international borders along the migratory routes, combat irregular migration, criminality, and banditry, particularly the region's under-governed spaces.

Finally, considering the importance of the environment to development and security in the Sahel, strategies for regional cooperation toward re-creating vegetation and water replenishment should be facilitated by the LCBC, ECOWAS, and their development partners. Three distinctive measures – afforestation, recharging the Lake Chad through water transfer from Ubangi River, and the re-channeling of the River Niger—are critical to addressing the threats to livelihood, climate change, conflicts over scarce resources, and environmentally induced migration. The potential benefits of sustainable development and resource management in the region will further boost regional trade and investment, as well as trans-border cooperation. Hence, enhancing the historical Sahel-Maghreb circular migration trend will also optimize the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis and explication of the irregular migration and regional security complex in the Sahel-Lake Chad corridor deconstructs Africa's migration narratives, linking the complex migration policy environment and outcomes in the Sahel to human security discourse. It maintains that human insecurity, resulting from development and security challenges largely affects the region's migration trends. The Sahel's complex challenges are understood from three

perspectives. First, prevalent conflicts resulting from social injustice and bad governance induce banditry, terrorism, and armed rebellion against state authorities in most parts of the region. Second, development challenges impair human security conditions in the Sahel. These, include the threats of drought and desertification, trigger resource scarcity, livelihood impairment, poverty, despondency, and conflicts among resource dependents. The third involves strategic and economic considerations that inform geopolitics and the protection of metropolitan and elitist interests. These phenomena are critical remote factors affecting irregular migration in the Sahel. However, the immediate factor is the disruption of the historical Sahel-Maghreb circular migration trend, triggered by the ominous collapse of Gaddafi's regime in Libya. Collectively, these factors exacerbate human insecurity and conflicts in the Sahel.

The components of the Sahel's complex security-development challenges include the region's delicate strategic location between equatorial Africa and the Arab world, insecure borders and (in several instances) vast landlocked territories, weak and often unrepresentative elitist regimes. Other factors are the Sahel's highly coveted mineral resources (oil, gold, and uranium), environmental degradation (droughts and desertification), reliance on foreign assistance for food, recurrent finance and investment capital, intractable violent conflicts by non-state armed groups and militarization by external powers. These factors underscore the imperative of skilled and efficient implementation of development policies, conflict prevention measures, and commitment to a holistic regional development strategy that addresses both the root causes and consequences of forced displacement and irregular migration in the Sahel and across the African continent. Ultimately, improving human security and effective migration governance are critical to harnessing the potentials of mobility in Africa.

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