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Rural-urban migration in West Africa: Contexts, trends and recommendations

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KNOMAD Seminar, 31.3.2021





- West Africa is one of the global sub regions with the highest levels of intraregional migration
- During the late colonial and early postcolonial era rural-urban migration intensified in several coastal countries
- The distinction between internal and cross-border migration in West Africa is largely illusive also due to colonial legacies and the ECOWAS FMP
- Regional migration in West Africa has become more diversified (forced displacement in the Sahel, climate change, feminization of migration etc.)
- Rural-urban mobility still appears as the principal pattern
- Forced immobility due to COVID-19 related mitigation measures and climate change is also a significant problem



- Urbanization rates have been quite uneven across West Africa countries
- In particular, coastal and economically better-off countries (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal) have a larger share of their population living in urban areas
- West African urbanization has taken place in both large and small urban centers & future population growth is projected for both bigger cities as well as smaller urban areas
- Rural-urban migration flows have not been the main driver of urban population growth as compared to natural population growth and the transformation of rural into urban areas
- Unfortunately, data on rural-urban migration in West Africa is rather insufficient
- Mainly driven by the need to send remittances, temporary and circular forms of (labor) mobility appear prevalent, which results in many multi-locational households.
- In the context of nonpermanent moves and multi-locality, gender differences are significant



- Negative view on rural-urban migration in particular to large cities result in neglect rather than proactive strategies
- Internal migration dynamics are not a focus in national migration policies or strategies, example of Ghana
- Urbanization policies if in place often address informal settlements, but do not link urban informality to migration dynamics
- Although rural-urban migration is related to many policy fields (urbanization, climate, health etc.) connections are seldom made explicit



- Understand the diversity and dynamics of rural-urban migration
- Bear in mind the cross-border dimension of rural-urban migration
- Explicitly address rural-urban migration in national policies and spatial development
- Focus on vulnerable groups



Thank you!

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