



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
FOR MIGRATION

M I D S A

Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa



GOVERNMENT OF REPUBLIC OF
NAMIBIA

Background paper: “Ten years of MDSA”

The world’s population today is more mobile and more affected by mobility than it has ever been. Over the past 40 years, the number of international migrants has more than doubled and currently amounts to approximately 214 million people globally.¹ Southern Africa as a region houses about 2.2 million international regular migrants and an undefined number of irregular migrants. Between 2005 and 2010, the region experienced an estimated annual increase in migration of 7.3 percent². With increased emphasis on regional cooperation as a priority in southern Africa and greater economic liberalization, the movement of people in the region is likely to increase further. The ability to address migration issues comprehensively and coherently is therefore a fundamental requirement for present day responsible national governance; effective international relations and; full participation in regional as well as international institutions.

Regional consensus building and position convergence is thus essential – in particular in terms of migration management since south-south migration is increasing. The need for greater regional dialogue on migration resulted to the formal establishment of the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MDSA) in 2000 – a Regional Consultative Process (RCP) with the overall objective of facilitating dialogue and cooperation among governments and contributing to regional migration management. MDSA has created a platform for migration to be discussed in an informal setting – identifying, shaping and working towards the achievement of shared goals. MDSA further raises awareness on challenges and best practices, and has to date put different aspects of migration management on the agenda, including but not limited to migration and health, human trafficking, border management, and facilitated movement of persons in light of regional economic integration and trade liberalization.

Although it is difficult to determine direct correlation between MDSA and concrete outcomes of migration management in southern Africa, the creation of a platform for dialogue on migration ten years ago, has contributed to raise awareness on the risks and benefits of migration; identified gaps in migration policy and migration management; and put migration firmly on the agenda of governments, regional organizations and the international community. Over the past ten years, MDSA has provided an opportunity for governments to build trust and informal networks in a depoliticized setting allowing for actors to share concerns, information, and goals in an interactive way. Bringing together countries of origin, transit and destination, further promotes an enhanced understanding of migration and the different challenges as well as opportunities presented before States in the region. Hence, instead of “reinventing the

1 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009). Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2008). <http://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp>, retrieved 2010-09-26

2 Ibid.

wheel” States can benefit from the experiences of other States and can evaluate how an approach tried elsewhere might fit into its own context and legal landscape on migration.³

Regional consultative processes like MDSA has also proven to, inter alia, strengthen the existing bilateral relationships as well as the relationships between interior ministries and agencies responsible for integration and service provision, and can help create a consensus among states that migration brings benefits to both migrants *and* states.⁴ To reach this consensus, it is however important to understand migration and to enhance the capacity to mitigate its risks and respond to the various different aspects that comprise it. Only then can effective migration management policies be developed and implemented. MDSA provides a platform to identify potential gaps not only for governments themselves, but also for the partners in the international community to better align its activities to the needs of countries in the SADC region.

Since its inception, discussions on the route that MDSA should take to realize its objectives have been ongoing. As with other RCPs, MDSA depends on the political will and the level of engagement of SADC States. Participants at several MDSA workshops⁵ have made recommendations to elevate MDSA workshops to Ministerial level contributions in order to ensure the necessary political support and guidance needed for more action oriented recommendations. The 2010 MDSA workshop on *Migration management through regional cooperation* in Windhoek, Namibia, represents a stepping stone towards a new and long awaited era of migration dialogue in southern Africa in this regard. It is important that States in the SADC region take the lead in shaping their preferred operating mode of MDSA in the future. In sum, ten years after the inception of MDSA, migration is now on the agenda of governments in southern Africa and is being recognized by regional economic communities and the international community as an inevitable fact of a more integrated world.

The guiding questions for the session can include:

- How can regional consultative processes like MDSA feed into national and regional migration policy-making?
- How can countries take ownership of the process and lead MDSA in the future?
- How can international organizations, regional economic communities (RECs) and the international community best assist in this process?

³ IOM (2010), Professor Randall Hansen, *An Assessment of Principal Regional Consultative Processes on Migration*, IOM Migration Research Series No. 38

⁴ IOM (2010), Professor Randall Hansen, *An Assessment of Principal Regional Consultative Processes on Migration*, IOM Migration Research Series No. 38

⁵ Cf. MDSA (Selected) Conclusions and Recommendations: 2001-2004; Report and Recommendation of MDSA workshop on “Irregular Migration, including Trafficking and Smuggling in Persons in Southern Africa”, Republic of Mauritius, 2006