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Why the EU should help former smugglers get a job

An integrated approach for Agadez (and beyond)

In mid-2016, EU efforts to disrupt the business model of migrant smugglers – one of the main pillars of its migration policies – resulted in the sponsoring of police actions in Agadez, Niger. The assumption underlying this course of action was that smuggling and trafficking can and should be addressed by the securitised and militarised approaches that the international community generally applies to transnational criminal activities. In the case of Agadez, however, this approach eventually dug its own grave as it did not provide direct economic alternatives to a local community that lost an important source of livelihood. The approach could have benefited from lessons learned from the international community's decade-long experience with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), which combines securitisation with programmes for economic integration. Applying best DDR practices to the case of Agadez allows for the formulation of an integrated approach to human smuggling in Agadez and beyond.

Introduction

Disrupting the business model of smugglers is an objective of most – if not all – European Union (EU) migration policies.¹ To achieve this, since mid-2015 the EU and its member states have scaled up their efforts to dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks

in the Sahel and northern Africa.² Recourse is mainly sought in securitised and military responses – such as police trainings and increased border controls – as a quick fix to stop irregular migration flows.³ This strategy

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1 See, for example: the Malta Declaration on the Central Mediterranean Route, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/02/03/malta-declaration/>; the basis for the EU-Turkey Statement, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-830_en.htm; and the European Agenda on Migration's first pillar, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-830_en.htm.

2 Examples are the police trainings in Agadez, trainings of the Libyan Coast Guard and – more recently – Italy's deployment of a military contingent to the Agadez region to target smuggling networks. See, for example, Ursu, A. 2017. *The Italian Military Deployment. Nothing new under the Sahelian sun*. CRU Commentary, The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/italian-military-deployment>.

3 More development-oriented projects have been envisioned as well, but mainly with a view to sponsoring structural economic development in the long term.

is representative of a more general international approach towards transnational organised crime, which usually consists of the deployment of armies, navies, military assets and other militarised approaches to ‘generate the perception that governments are actively engaged on issues of concern to the public’.⁴ As the extensive literature on this topic shows, however, such approaches often fall short of reaching their stated aim because they fail to take into account that transnational criminal activities are phenomena that are deeply embedded in global and local socioeconomic contexts.⁵ The case of Agadez is an excellent case in point.

Initially, the EU-sponsored interventions targeting irregular migration in Agadez were quite effective at putting human smugglers out of business. EU police training missions and EU support for the development of migration action plans contributed to the arrests of many facilitators of irregular migration. However, our research has shown that this securitised approach has caught mainly low-level facilitators of migration who were often unaware of the illegality of their actions.⁶ The shutting down of irregular migration has harmed the economic opportunities of these individuals, the households that depend on them for their livelihoods and the larger community that had developed all sorts of economic opportunities around the facilitation of

irregular migration. At the same time, higher-level smugglers have been able to maintain and further consolidate their hold over the business through their political connections and a general level of inviolability. The police actions have thereby only addressed the most visible symptoms of smuggling rather than its root causes. They have also increased the risk of political corruption.

Current migration policies therefore present a paradox: a substantial amount of development money is being relabelled to stop smuggling but is actually strengthening the position of criminal kingpins and harming the economic development of local communities.⁷ A combination of increased economic hardship and security approaches that are perceived locally as unfair and as playing to a foreign agenda – and applied in the volatile context of the Sahel today – is not sustainable in the long run. It delegitimises state authorities and the international community, which are seen as working for the benefit of the EU rather than the local population. It therefore has the potential to create new conflict lines and aggravate existing grievances.⁸ In the case of Agadez, this has resulted in the halting of smuggler arrests as local authorities feel that the EU’s approach has become detrimental to the region’s stability.⁹

An important lesson from the Agadez region is thus that securitised approaches aimed at stopping human smuggling should – at the very least – be combined with efforts to provide economic alternatives for former human smugglers. Lessons can be learned from the international community’s decade-long experience with disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR),

4 Reitano, T. et al. 2018. *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime: The War on Crime*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

5 See, for example, Duffy, R. et al. 2015. ‘The militarization of anti-poaching: undermining long term goals’, *Environmental Conservation*, 42(4), 345–348; Reitano, T. et al. 2018. *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime: The War on Crime*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Eade, D. 2007. ‘Capacity Building: Who Builds Whose Capacity?’, *Development in Practice*, 17(4–5), 630–639; Jespersen, S. 2016. *Rethinking the Security–Development Nexus: Organised Crime in Post-Conflict States*, London: Routledge.

6 Molenaar, F. et al. 2017. *A line in the sand. Roadmap for sustainable migration management in Agadez*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sustainable_migration_management_Agadez/.

7 Also see: Oxfam. *An emergency for whom? The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa – migratory routes and development aid in Africa*. Oxfam Briefing Note. 2017, November. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/emergency-whom-eu-emergency-trust-fund-africa-migratory-routes-and-development-aid-africa>.

8 Molenaar, F. et al. 2017. *A line in the sand. Roadmap for sustainable migration management in Agadez*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sustainable_migration_management_Agadez/.

9 Interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council, Niamey, September 2017.

which is an integrated approach to the demobilisation of combatants that combines securitised measures, such as disarmament, with measures aimed at fostering the socioeconomic reintegration of former combatants and the communities hosting them.¹⁰ This policy brief provides an overview of DDR best practices and uses the case of Agadez to formulate recommendations for more integrated and sustainable policies to combat human smuggling.

The paradoxes of the securitised approach to human smuggling

Although the criminalisation of irregular migrants and people involved in the migration industry is a side effect of the recently-implemented EU migration policies, human smugglers do not necessarily qualify as seasoned criminals.¹¹ The irregular migration industry in Agadez, for example, is closely linked to age-old cross-border commerce routes within which the transport of people was generally regarded as a regular form of intraregional movement.¹² The circulation of temporary labour migrants between Niger and Libya/Algeria is a case

in point. More recently, the increased popularity of the route connecting West Africa to Algeria and Libya transformed the migration sector into a low-barrier industry that offered the Agadez population crucial economic opportunities at a time of larger economic decline.¹³ Many new facilitators of irregular migration were flexible opportunists jumping on a chance to make a living in a challenging regional context, rather than hardcore kingpins heading criminal networks.¹⁴ Or, to put it differently, although there are organised criminal elements among the facilitators of migration, not all human smugglers are organised criminals.

The international response to irregular migration tends to overlook this distinction. The EU-sponsored security operations that the Nigerien government put in motion mid-2016 are a case in point. These operations resulted in the arrest of 282 facilitators and the confiscation of at least 169 pick-up trucks used to transport migrants through the desert.¹⁵ These measures mainly targeted

10 The objective of DDR processes is to 'contribute to security and stability in post-conflict environments so that recovery and development can begin'. DDR programmes entail the collection, documentation, control and disposal of arms and ammunition (disarmament), the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups (demobilisation) and the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life and helping them gain sustainable employment and income (reintegration). *What is DDR? Introduction*, United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, New York. http://www.unddr.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx (Accessed 1 Dec. 2017).

11 See also: European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). 2014. *Criminalisation of migrants in an irregular situation and of persons engaging with them*. http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-criminalisation-of-migrants-1_en.pdf.

12 Molenaar, F. and F. El Kamouni-Janssen. 2017. *Turning the tide. The politics of irregular migration in the Sahel and Libya*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turning-tide>.

13 Hoffmann, A. et al. 2017. *Migration and Markets in Agadez. Economic alternatives to the migration industry*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Migration_and_Markets_Agadez.pdf.

14 Tinti, P. and T. Reitano. 2016. *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*. London, C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.

15 In addition, at least nine gendarmes were arrested for migration-linked corruption. Data are available for the period from July to mid-October 2016 and for January to August 2017. Actual numbers may therefore be higher because no data are available for mid-October to end-December 2016. See: European Commission. *Second Progress Report: First Deliverables on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*. 2016, December, Brussels. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/second-progress-report-1_en_act_part1_v11.pdf (Accessed September 2017); European Commission. *Fifth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*. 2017, September, Brussels. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquartershomepage_en/31673/Fifth%20Progress%20Report%20on%20the%20Partnership%20Framework%20with%20third%20countries%20under%20the%20European%20Agenda%20on%20Migration (Accessed September 2017).

the small fish in the human smuggling pond, such as the drivers and guides operating on the route between Agadez and Libya and the Agadez inhabitants who had transformed the walled compounds of their private residences into migrant lodgings, known locally as ghettos. The influential businessmen heading the larger smuggling networks may have lost some cars and drivers to the police actions, but they were not themselves targeted. Their relationships with the political establishment – as well as their destabilising potential due to connections with armed trafficking rings and armed groups in neighbouring countries – prevented the authorities from going after the real money-makers in the migration industry.¹⁶ Consequently, the arrest of low-level smugglers has led to the concentration of the smuggling business in the hands of more criminal elements with transnational ties.¹⁷

The EU's securitised migration strategy has resulted in two paradoxes. First, it has transformed the facilitation of irregular migration from a low-barrier industry to an enterprise controlled by criminal entrepreneurs who maintain ties with foreign armed groups – thereby increasing the possibility for instability and insecurity in the region.¹⁸ Second, the low-level migration facilitators who left the industry following the wave of police arrests that started in 2016 are stuck between a rock and a hard place, having lost an important means of income at a time when many other important economic sectors in the region had already gone into decline. This has

resulted in a general climate of frustration and desperation, which local authorities fear may lead to the destabilisation of the region¹⁹ and which has resulted in their unwillingness to cooperate with the further implementation of securitised approaches to migration management.²⁰

One of the key flaws of the securitised approach to migration management in the Sahel has thus been the shutdown of irregular migration as a low-barrier industry without ensuring that alternative economic livelihoods had been put in place from the start to soften the fall for the local population. Recognising this tension, subsequent efforts have been made to create short-term economic alternatives for former smugglers through a 'Reconversion Plan' that provided seed funding to allow former smugglers to set up new economic projects (as discussed in more detail below). However, these efforts were unable to turn the tide, begging the question as to whether and how a more sustainable and integrated approach could have been put in place.

DDR best practices and the Agadez reconversion plan

DDR programmes form an important source of inspiration for an integrated approach to addressing migration and human smuggling because they combine securitised measures (disarmament, demobilisation) with more development-oriented measures (reintegration). The 2009 World Bank report on DDR identifies key components for successful DDR programmes as consisting of: a) enduring political will to see the process through; b) careful preparation that includes the profiling of participants and assessments of economic and social potential; c) transparent and effective

16 Molenaar, F. and F. El Kamouni-Janssen. 2017. *Turning the tide. The politics of irregular migration in the Sahel and Libya*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turning-tide>.

17 Recent reports from Agadez suggest, for example, that Sudanese rebels have moved in and now control a substantial part of the migration industry.

18 Since the start of the police arrests in 2016, migrants pay up to five times more for their journeys. See: Hoffmann, A. et al. 2017. *Migration and Markets in Agadez. Economic alternatives to the migration industry*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Migration_and_Markets_Agadez.pdf.

19 Molenaar, F. et al. 2017. *A line in the sand. Roadmap for sustainable migration management in Agadez*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sustainable_migration_management_Agadez/.

20 Interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council, Niamey, September 2017.

institutions that deliver assistance in a simple manner; d) timely and adequate financing; and e) integration with ongoing and future humanitarian/development efforts.²¹ Projects that are unable to manage expectations, that are poorly funded or only funded in the short term, that suffer from technical and management issues and that do not take economic reintegration seriously are not, or are only partially, able to achieve their aims.²²

The case of Agadez presents some success factors but was also subject to some of these key challenges.

1) Political will and adequate and timely funding

At the national and international level, political will and adequate and timely funding were present to engage in smuggler arrests. In 2015, when the issue of irregular migration first made it to the top of the European policy agenda, the EU created the 'European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa' (EUTF for Africa). This fund contained

€2 billion to address migration along the central Mediterranean route – €139.9 million of which was destined for Niger.²³ This allocation of funding was quickly followed by high-level dialogues and by the extension of the existing Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission to Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger), with a permanent field office in Agadez. Field office staff provide specific training and advice to the Niger civil security forces and prosecutors. In response, the Niger government immediately stepped up its actions against migrant smuggling, resulting in the arrest of suspected smugglers and the seizure of vehicles that started in August 2016.

There was, however, less enthusiasm to embark on the path of providing economic alternatives.²⁴ A year after the start of the policing actions, the EUTF funded a pilot Reconversion Plan, which provided seed funding for individuals who had worked in the migration industry to allow them to set up their own economic projects.²⁵ The Agadez

21 Nezam, T. and A. Marc. 2009. 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', *Social Development Department Working Paper, no. 119: Conflict, Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/Disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

22 Cockayne, J. and S. O'Neil. 2015. *UN DDR in An Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*, Tokyo: UNU – CPR; Felbab-Brown, V. 2015. 'DDR – A Bridge Not Too Far: A Field Report From Somalia', in *UN DDR in An Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit For Purpose?*, ed. Cockayne, J. and S. O'Neil. Tokyo: UNU–CPR, 104–137; Idris, I. 2016. 'Lessons From DDR Programmes', *Helpdesk Research Report*. Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham; Muggah, R. and C. O'Donnell. 2015. 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4 (1), 1–12; Nezam, T. and A. Marc. 2009. 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', *Social Development Department Working Paper, no. 119: Conflict, Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/Disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

23 A 2017 study by Oxfam found that '22% of the EUTF for Africa budget is allocated to migration management, 13.5% to security, peacebuilding and P-CVE, 63% to development cooperation and 1.5% to research and monitoring. Oxfam. *An emergency for whom? The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa – migratory routes and development aid in Africa*. Oxfam Briefing Note. 2017, November. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/emergency-whom-eu-emergency-trust-fund-africa-migratory-routes-and-development-aid-africa>.

24 Within the EUTF, a large sum of money was made available to fund two agricultural projects in the region. These long-term development efforts did not address the community's immediate economic needs following the wave of police arrests.

25 This plan was proposed within the framework of the EU Trust Fund's (EUTF) Plan d'Actions à Impact Economique Rapide à Agadez (PAIERA) and its Nigerien implementing partner Haute Autorité à la Consolidation de la Paix (HACP). Agadez authorities subsequently backed the plan in a meeting of the Commission Consultative Régionale de l'Administration Territoriale (Regional Consultative Committee of the Territorial Administration – COCORAT). République du Niger. 2017. 'Rapport des travaux de la réunion d'installation et de la première session ordinaires de la commission consultative régionale de l'administration territorial (COCORAT)'.

authorities were the driving force behind this Plan as they had become keenly aware of the tensions caused by the wave of arrests and confiscation of vehicles in their communities. The Plan provided these authorities with an opportunity to address the most serious economic needs of former smugglers and to show the community that constructive international support could be mobilised for their plight.²⁶ However, efforts to mobilise development organisations and national representations in Niger to back the Plan were unsuccessful. Development workers and policy makers doubted the quality of applications to participate in the Plan and the capacity of the Agadez economy to absorb new economic endeavours. In addition, these actors were concerned that the fund's stipends were too low to entice smugglers to leave the industry.²⁷ This latter concern overlooked the needs of the scores of migrant facilitators who had already left the industry.

As a consequence of the international community's lacklustre enthusiasm, adequate and timely funding was only partially available for the Reconversion Plan. The 15 municipalities in the Agadez region had created a list with the names of 6,565 individuals directly involved in the migration economy – including drivers, guides, smugglers and ghetto owners – to implement the Plan.²⁸ The Agadez Regional Council estimated that sponsoring these individuals' projects would cost well above €400 million (XOF 200,000,000,000).²⁹ To date, however, the EUTF has funded only a small pilot project allowing for the granting of a total of

€500,000 (XOF 300,000,000).³⁰ This is not an unsurprising development, as the 2009 World Bank report on DDR points out that a lack of political will among donors often stands in the way of the funding of DDR projects – thereby undermining their effectiveness.³¹

2) Transparent and effective institutions

In addition to political will and adequate and timely funding, the establishment of transparent and effective institutions is a key element for a successful integrated approach. On the securitised side of the approach, the EU and its Member States funded and facilitated the implementation of a short-term action plan to counter migrant smuggler networks in the region of Agadez. Over the course of 2016, the EU, through the Migration EU eXpertise Initiative (MIEUX) implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), also supported the development of a more long-term National Strategy to Counter Irregular Migration.³² As discussed above, the extended CSDP mission provided specific training and advice to the Niger civil security forces and prosecutors. However, in practice, the Niger government began to arrest smugglers and confiscate their vehicles before these institutions had been consolidated. As a consequence,

26 Molenaar, F. et al. 2017. *Local governance opportunities for sustainable migration management in Agadez*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Local_governance_opportunities_for_sustainable_migration_management_Agadez.pdf.

27 Interview with members of the international community. Agadez, September 2017.

28 Interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council, Niamey, September 2017.

29 Online interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council responsible for regional development. 2017, August; *id*.

30 Applications could be submitted either individually (for XOF 800,000 to 1,500,000, €1,200 to 2,200) or as a group (up to XOF4,000,000, or €6,000).

31 Nezam, T. and A. Marc. 2009. 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', *Social Development Department Working Paper, no. 119: Conflict, Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/Disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>; see also: Edloe, L. 2007. 'Best practices for successful disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR)', *New Voices in Public Policy*, no. 1, Fairfax, US: George Mason University of Public Policy. <https://journals.gmu.edu/newvoices/article/viewFile/56/56>.

32 European Commission. *Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*. 2017, June, Strasbourg. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/4th_progress_report_partnership_framework_with_third_countries_under_european_agenda_on_migration.pdf.

initial accounts from the region suggested that arrested smugglers were not being prosecuted. Later accounts suggest that arrested smugglers were simply released after a couple of months in jail to deflate communal tensions.³³ These developments did not contribute to promoting rule of law in the region.

At the Reconversion Plan level, transparent and effective procedures were put in place to manage access to the Plan's funding. The forms to access the funds could be found at the town halls in every municipality and assistance was provided to help applicants fill in these forms.³⁴ An independent Selection Committee ranked the applications anonymously based on independent parameters.³⁵ Nevertheless, contention quickly arose over who had made it onto the list of former smugglers drawn up by the municipalities. Accusations abounded that too many people had made it onto the list and that the wrong type of person now dominated them. The first selection of candidates in late August 2017 triggered further discontent. Only 218 projects (out of a pool of more than 1,800 applications)

were deemed eligible for funding, and out of those there was only enough funding (€220,000 – XOF 144,303,246) available for 98 projects.³⁶ The announcement triggered complaints about the process from people who did not receive a grant.³⁷

3) Managing unrealistic expectations and careful preparation

This problematic implementation of the Reconversion Plan touches directly on one of the biggest issues also faced by DDR programmes, namely the inability to manage unrealistic expectations. These unrealistic expectations are usually the result of technical and management problems, such as inadequate sensitisation of the population, poorly implemented microcredit schemes or the unsustainability of villages identified for interventions.³⁸ In the case of Agadez, both local authorities and the local population had expected cooperation with EU-supported migration policies to result in development funding being made available

33 Interview with a member of the international community working in Agadez. The Hague, November 2016. Interview with a high-level authority figure from Agadez. Agadez, December 2017.

34 Technical assistance was provided to those who could not write for XOF2,000 (€3). The regional and municipal councils and their implementing partners also set up information sessions where candidates could receive advice and support in filling out the required forms.

35 The Regional Consultative Framework on Migration (Cadre Regional de Concertation de la Migration, CRCM) has been set up to oversee the process. It is composed of 15 members representing various roles in the migration economy (drivers, intermediaries, smugglers), vulnerable groups (youth and women), national and international NGOs, security forces, civil society, traditional authorities and local state authorities. The CRCM is represented by one member in the evaluation phase of the projects. Personal interview with an EPGA researcher. July 2017. Agadez, Niger; online interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council responsible for regional development. August 2017. Regional Council of Agadez, *op. cit.*

36 Hadan, I. 2017. 'Agadez: La colère des acteurs de la migration', *Niger Diaspora*, 28 August. <https://nigerdiaspora.net/index.php/societe/1863-agadez-la-colere-des-acteurs-de-la-migration>; online interview with NGO Tamakrast. August 2017; online interview with a member of the Agadez Regional Council responsible for regional development and with NGO Tamakrast. September 2017.

37 Hadan, I. 2017. 'Agadez: La colère des acteurs de la migration', *Niger Diaspora*, 28 August. <https://nigerdiaspora.net/index.php/societe/1863-agadez-la-colere-des-acteurs-de-la-migration> *op. cit.*; online interview with NGO Tamakrast. August 2017.

38 Nezam, T. and A. Marc. 2009. 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', *Social Development Department Working Paper, no. 119: Conflict, Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/Disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>; see also Cockayne, J. and S. O'Neil. 2015. *UN DDR in An Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*, Tokyo: UNU-CPR; Idris, I. 2016. 'Lessons From DDR Programmes', *Helpdesk Research Report*. Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham; Muggah, R. and C. O'Donnell. 2015. 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4 (1), 1–12.

to the local community. In practice, however, EUTF contracts for agricultural programmes were awarded to international development agencies that needed more than a year to set up shop in Agadez, during which time the Reconversion Plan remained structurally underfunded.

Investing in information campaigns to accompany interventions and more careful preparation could have helped prevent some of these issues as the interventions in Agadez suffered from the haste with which they were implemented. Responding to the continuation of irregular migrant inflows in Europe after the EU-Turkey agreement, in a matter of months EU policy makers had set their sights on Agadez as the next target for intervention. In August 2016, within two months of the EU having enhanced its cooperation over migration with Niger, the Niger government stepped up its police actions against migrant smuggling. By comparison, it would take another three months before a local coordination platform on migration was put in place.³⁹ It was not until August 2017 – when Agadez authorities started to fear that the migration interventions would have destabilizing consequences for their communities – that efforts were undertaken to take stock of who was involved in the irregular migration industry and to seriously discuss putting in place economic alternatives.⁴⁰

This lack of careful preparation is also apparent in the Plan's implementation. Although it started with the construction of a list of participants in the migration economy, there was no assessment of the economic potential and market dynamics of

the Agadez region or of the participants on this list. In this sense, the Plan could have benefited from lessons learned from DDR programmes, which show that reinsertion and reintegration efforts are particularly weak when they are developed in isolation from local needs and opportunities and when they do not contain vocational training programmes.⁴¹ Moreover, the success of socioeconomic reintegration depends heavily on the absorption capacity of the employment market.⁴² The Reconversion Plan was not integrated within other ongoing and future humanitarian/ development efforts or with private sector development programmes. The fact that the Plan was not connected to an ongoing World Bank-sponsored business plan competition – which entailed crucial components such as training – was a clear missed opportunity.⁴³

39 European Commission, *First progress report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*. 2016, October, Brussels. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_700_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v8_p1_english.pdf.

40 It is telling that a first inquiry into the economic contribution of migration to the Agadez community was only undertaken in January 2017 and that this study was sponsored by the International Organization for Migration rather than the European Union.

41 Cockayne, J. and S. O'Neil. 2015. *UN DDR in An Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*, Tokyo: UNU-CPR; Idris, I. 2016. 'Lessons from DDR Programmes', *Helpdesk Research Report*. Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham; Felbab-Brown, V. 2015. 'DDR – A Bridge Not Too Far: A Field Report From Somalia', in *UN DDR in An Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit For Purpose?*, ed. Cockayne, J. and S. O'Neil. Tokyo: UNU-CPR, 104–137; Nezam, T. and A. Marc. 2009. 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration', *Social Development Department Working Paper, no. 119: Conflict, Crime and Violence*. Washington, D.C., World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/776831468324547527/Disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration>.

42 International Labour Office. 2010. 'Socio-Economic Reintegration of Ex-Combatants: Guidelines', *ILO Programme for Crisis Response and Reconstruction (ILO/CRISIS)*, Geneva, 12–13. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_141276.pdf; see also: Small Arms Survey. 2015. 'Waning Cohesion: The Rise and Fall of the FDLR-FOCA', *The Small Arms Survey 2015: Weapons and the World*, Geneva. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/A-Yearbook/2015/eng/Small-Arms-Survey-2015-Chapter-07-EN.pdf>.

43 Hoffmann, A. et al. 2017. *Migration and Markets in Agadez. Economic alternatives to the migration industry*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Migration_and_Markets_Agadez.pdf.

Due to these limitations, the Reconversion Plan could not be turned into a larger driver for economic development in Agadez. Instead, the first round of project proposals generated scores of applicants who sought to set up small shops, restaurants and cybercafés, as well as micro-projects in commerce, farming and herding.⁴⁴ These applications are symptomatic of a programme design that lacks the components needed to provide low-skilled workers with the tools to contribute to communal economic development and prosperity. In its optimal form, the Reconversion Plan would have been accompanied by a detailed assessment of how individual projects could be connected to existing employment opportunities and ongoing private sector development projects, as well as how services (education, vocational training and matching community mobilisation) could be made available to ensure that the Reconversion Plan would contribute to long-term economic development. Again, the fast-tracked nature of the intervention stood in the way of durable change.

Conclusion and recommendations

In its' Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration, the EU describes the Government of Niger as 'a proactive and constructive partner', whose cooperation 'is emblematic of what

can be achieved with a transit country'.⁴⁵ It goes on to list all the successes that the securitised approach has brought about for migration management, mentioning as a final *next* step the need to 'implement the approved projects to address the economic needs of communities losing revenues from the smuggling economy'. This prioritisation of actions speaks volumes to the imbalance of interests that characterise the migration partnerships, where the need to address the local economic hardship resulting from the EU's efforts to promote its own interests (stopping irregular migration) is a mere afterthought. More balanced partnerships can only be achieved on the basis of the following conditions:

European Commission – ensure that any external financial instrument for migration management includes benchmarks related to respect for human rights and support for local development, not (just) reducing irregular migration. Current discussions on the place of migration within the European Commission's new Multiannual Financial Framework have the potential to make the interests of partner countries even more subservient to EU domestic interests. The proposal to create a singular financial instrument with a strong focus on migration runs the risk of making the reduction of irregular migration the main benchmark of successful migration policies. This is of particular concern if the instrument will follow the EUTF's lead and combine funding from the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home) and the EU's development instruments. Instead, care should be taken to fund migration policies that aim to address irregular migration within the broader framework of development work, and that support local populations, respect human rights and, specifically, increase safe and regular migration options (not just to Europe but, more importantly, in the region).

44 This is in line with the results of a survey conducted by CRU and EPGA in mid-2017. In response to the question of what economic opportunities respondents would pursue if (economic) support were made available to them, half of the respondents (53%) answered that they would want to engage in commerce, while an additional 20% would engage in (more) herding activities. Molenaar, F. et al. 2017. *A line in the sand. Roadmap for sustainable migration management in Agadez*. The Hague, Conflict Research Unit, Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sustainable_migration_management_Agadez/

45 European Commission. 2017. *Fourth Progress Report on the Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration*, June, Strasbourg. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/4th_progress_report_partnership_framework_with_third_countries_under_european_agenda_on_migration.pdf

EUTF – combine the implementation of migration projects with an assessment of local needs. Too often, the conversation about adequate migration measures takes place in discussions with national governments rather than with the local communities that will be affected by those measures. In addition, the Agadez case shows that precedence is given to the quick implementation of securitized measures over the creation of economic alternatives. Current discussions on the next round of EUTF projects should result in the adoption of a larger budget line for the funding of direct economic alternatives. Migration management projects must be based on a careful assessment of the situation on the ground and start from inclusive consultations with host communities and migrants about their expectations and needs. Economic alternatives and support for local governance structures must be put in place *before* migration management projects are implemented.

Project level – manage expectations and invest in careful preparation. As discussed above, the management of local expectations is key to preserving the legitimacy of an intervention. To this end, collaboration can be sought with local radio stations and traditional authorities, which generally serve as an information bridge between communities and state authorities. Most importantly, careful preparation of integration efforts is key to their success. This requires the profiling of participants and local market opportunities. Beyond handing out seed funding, truly successful reintegration programmes entail training components that allow participants to be matched to market needs. Such efforts could be strengthened by connecting reintegration efforts to ongoing humanitarian/ development efforts and private sector development programmes.

About the Clingendael Institute

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