

FUTURE IN OUR HANDS – THE GAMBIA
PCO PRE – STUDY REPORT
ON MIGRATION THROUGH THE BACK
WAY TO EUROPE



Community meeting on the illegal migration to Europe

JUNE 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

#	Activity Description	Page
	Table of content	2
	Acknowledgements	3
	List of Acronyms	4
	Executive Summary	5
	Chapter One	6
1.0	Introduction	6
1.2	Methodology	6
1.3	Objectives of study	7
1.4	Scope	7
1.5	Limitations	8
2.0	Chapter Two	9
2.1	Presentation of Findings	9
2.2	Analysis of Findings	18
3.0	Chapter Three	19
3.1	Lesson, Conclusion and Recommendations	19
3.2	Lessons Learnt	19
3.3	Conclusion	20
3.4	Recommendations	21
	Table 1 : Migration trend on the back way to Europe	16
	Table 2: Bar Chart Graphic showing migration trend by community and by Variable	17
	List of Reference materials	23
	Group Members	24

I. Acknowledgements

On behalf of the study group and on my behalf as group leader, i wish to express my profound gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to the following institutions and individuals for their immense contributions towards this study on illegal migration to Europe in The Gambia, courtesy of FIOHS in collaboration with FIOHTG.

- The Board Chair and members of Gambia Groups in Sweden for soliciting funds for the study.
- Forum Syd for funding the pre – study for incorporation in the PCO budget.
- Kristina Lundahl for the wonderful coordination and supervision of the entire study process.
- Siv Kanon for her technical input shared with the group before and after the data collection exercise.
- Management and staff of FIOHTG for prioritizing and supporting the study process.
- The team members (see names at the end of the report) for their commitment and dedication during data collection and the entire study process.
- Mr. Sakou Jobe - Local Consultant for his invaluable input and technical guidance.
- The 11 study communities and other stakeholders such as Local Government Authorities, Key Informants and Operation No Back Way to Europe Organisation for the information they provided and the patience and time accorded to this study.
- Mr. Momodou A. Jallow – Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for designing the graphic bar chart showing the migration trend.

These synergies culminated in the production of this study report, where the opinions of the study communities and Key Informants formed the basis of the findings of the study.

I am indeed grateful and appreciative to the importance and cooperation attached to this study.

Yankuba Manneh

Group Leader;

Illegal Migration Study Group.



LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THE REPORT

CBO.....	Community Based Organisation
CILIP.....	Commuinty Infrastructure and Livelohood Improvement Project
CRR.....	Central River Region
FDG.....	Focus Group Discussion
FIOHTG.....	Future In our Hands – The Gambia
FIOHS.....	Future In Our Hands – Sweden
GIEPA.....	Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency
HDI.....	Human Development Index
KI.....	Key Informant
KII.....	Key Informant Interview
LRR.....	Lower River Region
MDG.....	Mellinium Development Goal
NBR.....	North Bank Region
NEDI.....	National Enterprise Development Initiative
NGO.....	Non Governmental Organization
NYC.....	National Youth Council
ONBE.....	Operation No Back Way to Europe
PCO	Program Contract Organisation
UNDP.....	United Nations Development Programme
URR.....	Upper River Region
WCR.....	West Coast Region

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study report presents the results of a study on the perception of various stakeholders on the reasons behind youth migration through the "Back way to Europe" in The Gambia. The findings will form part of the proposed 3-year plan and budget application being prepared for submission to Forum Syd by Future in Our Hands – Sweden, which has just been awarded a Programme Contract Organization (PCO) status and intends to work with Future In Our Hands The Gambia as the Partner Organization.

The field work on data collection was carried out from 14th – 13th June 2016, using participatory tools referred to as Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews in 11 communities across five provincial Regions of The Gambia. The study targeted different categories of stakeholders as Key Informants from the 11 study communities such as; Parents of affected families, unsuccessful and successful migrants, those individuals planning to embark on the journey to Europe, Local Government Authorities, The Gambia Immigration Department and Non state Actors discouraging illegal migration in The Gambia.

The main objective of this study was to identify main reasons behind the illegal migration of Gambians (mainly youths) to Europe and to find possible recommendations to assist in addressing the problem.

The study revealed that poverty, unemployment, limited economic opportunities, peer pressure, social media are key factors responsible for the illegal migration in the Gambia, especially in the rural areas.

The collected data was processed using qualitative and quantitative data analysis to interpret the findings. The analysis produced a picture of the migration trend in the study villages over the past 3 years.

However, this illegal migration is not happening without consequences in the communities and by extension country at large. Some of these are listed below:

1. Limited labour force both in agriculture and in domestic chores.
2. Loss of artisans and skilled persons.
3. Young girls at puberty rarely have men to marry them due to the high rate of youth migration.
4. Further loss of income due to parents' payment of ransom to kidnappers when youths are abducted through Back way to Europe.
5. Loss of lives (youths dying) through the back way to Europe.
6. Brain drains affecting the socio-economic development of the country.
7. Social class conflict at community level leading to bad relationships.

Based on the results of the study, a number of recommendations were made. They include among other things capacity building and skills transfer for youths as potential solutions to the growing problem of illegal migration to Europe taking place in the rural communities of The Gambia.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0: Introduction:

The following is report on a preliminary study conducted in the Gambia on the perspective and or perception of various stakeholders on one of the burning issues of the last few years - the mass migration of people especially the youthful population through illegal routes into Europe commonly referred to as the "back way to Europe". The study was done during the period from Saturday May 14th to Friday May 20th 2016.

The findings of the study are expected to form part of the proposed 3-year plan and budget application being prepared for submission to Forum Syd by Gambiagrupperna (Gambia groups) in their capacity as Programme Contract Organization (PCO) and Applicant Organization in partnership with Future in Our Hands the Gambia in its role as the Parther Organization. The PCO is the Coordinating Organization for all Forum Syd funded projects and programmes in the Gambia.

The mass migration of people into Western Europe especially West Africans including Gambians is a major issue facing western countries including Sweden. The phenomenon has turned into a crisis situation and therefore requires urgent attention.

The report will therefore enhance understanding of the issue and attempt to inform and probably influence programme planning and development aimed at providing lasting solutions to the crisis.

1.2: Methodology:

A group was set up comprising staff of FIOH Sweden, FIOH The Gambia and community representatives, assigned to conduct the preliminary study referred to as the pre-study on migration through the back way to Europe in various parts of the Gambia targeting some important stakeholders and communities. For ease of coordination and to enhance the understanding of members, the group was further divided into two teams. Pre study induction meetings were held to discuss and clarify the approach for the study – leading to the ensuing methodology.

Desktop review – in this process the researchers reviewed various relevant documents such as the National Youth Policy, the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) Report (2014) and other reports. This process helped to better understand the migration issues from the perspectives of the Government and other stakeholders for comparison with what obtains on the ground.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) - This was the main participatory tool applied during the study. The identified study communities were chosen through a random selection process at the preparatory level. People were met and gathered in their respective communities and their opinions were sought on the "Back way to Europe" and its effects in society. A checklist was prepared and used to guide the information collection exercise. The exercise attracted men, women and youth, young and old in

all the 11 study communities and they freely participated in the discussions. This enabled the group to collect information free from any biases or external influence in each community.

Key Informant Interviews (KII) – This was another method used for data collection during this study. Key informants for different categories such as Successful migrants, Returnees, Parents of the affected families and Those planning to go through the back way, Local Government Authorities – Governors, Chiefs and National Assembly Members were targeted, identified and interviewed using a checklist designed for each category. This was mainly within the study communities selected for this study. This enabled the group to collect relevant information from categories that are directly involved or affected.

Information Processing and Analysis – Raw information obtained from the above processes were all collated and analyzed, using qualitative and statistical analysis. A table and bar chart were constructed showing the trend of migration based on the statistical data obtained from the study. This helped in making independent judgement and conclusion free from biases and external interferences at all levels.

1.3: Objectives of the study:

1. To engage all stakeholders to be able to determine their knowledge and perception of the mass migration of people through illegal routes into Europe commonly called **"Back way to Europe"**
2. To determine the possible causes and conditions responsible for the mass migration/exodus of people from the Gambia
3. To determine what is being done at local, regional and national levels to deal with the situation
4. To seek the aspirations of all stakeholders as to what can be done to address the situation for the common good.
5. To provide GG's main sponsor (Forum Syd) with requisite information and strategic plan as to how to address the "back way" migration of people into Europe both in the short and long term.

1.4: Scope:

The field work lasted only seven days and those targeted for the interviews were:

- Returnees (not successful and having to return home)
- Those planning to venture into the "Back way to Europe"
- Successful travellers through the back way- someone legally recognized.
- Parents of illegal migrants.
- Local Authorities including the Alkalo, district chiefs, National Assembly member, Regional Governor and an immigration officer.

- Focus Group discussions also targeted a cross section of people including youths, men and women, young and elderly of every community visited by the two teams.
- Communities visited included Barra, Munyagen and Njabba Kunda villages in the North Bank Region. Kunting and Chargel villages in Central River Region. Bakadagi, Sutukonding and Suduwol villages in the Upper River Region, Misera and Kaiaf villages in the Lower River region and Kalagi and Kuloro villages in the West Coast Region.
- Immigration officers and officers of the “Operation No Back Way to Europe” (ONBE) were also targeted in the Greater Banjul area.
- The study was premised on a number of checklists prepared for the various categories of targets as can be referred to in the annexes of the report.

The areas covered included the knowledge and general understanding of the respondents on the “Back Way to Europe, the motivating factors or reasons attributed to the mass exodus and measures being taken by the communities and authorities to discourage people from venturing into it.

How the problem has affected the communities and the country at large and what can be done to address the situation?

1.4: Limitations:

- 1) Some of the targeted key informants could not be reached for the interview. Official of the Department of state for immigration was not available – time available was not adequate to adhere to the protocol requirements. Agents involved in the trafficking of people through the back way to Europe and based in the Gambia could not be found anywhere as those approached through telephone contacts could not volunteer for the interview.
- 2) A more in-depth analysis of the situation could not be conducted due to limited time and resources. Thus the fieldwork had to be completed within seven days.
- 3) Focus Group Discussion intended for Sutukonding village in the North bank of Upper River Region could not be held due to the breakdown of the ferry at the river crossing point in Basse.
- 4) FGD for a cross section of people in Kuloro village in West Coast Region (WCR) could not also be conducted due to a fatal accident in the village on the same day the team intended to conduct the study.

2.0. CHAPTER TWO

2.1. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Perspectives of different target groups:

2.2: Parents

The perception of parents on the “Back way to Europe” revealed that the phenomenon is perpetuated by several factors. These among other things include parental pressure on youths to go through this dangerous route to Europe. This is a factor that is gaining momentum in the local communities. They noted that some parents put pressure either explicitly or implicitly on their children to travel through the back way, citing examples of success stories of their peers who went through the back way in the neighborhoods. Despite the fact that they clearly know the dangers involved in travelling through the back way, these parents are with the strong belief and conviction that what God destines will always happen.

The other fundamental reason behind the “Back way to Europe” is the high incidence of poverty encountered by families. The study revealed that the severity of the incidence of poverty is experienced in different households differently. Therefore, those with acute poverty conditions, see the “Back way to Europe” as a shortcut to an economic opportunity that is capable of changing family conditions, even though the risks involved are higher.

Parents also revealed the limited economic opportunities especially in the rural communities, as a factor responsible for youths’ migration through the “Back way to Europe”. They noted that aside farming which is also not attractive due to lack of adequate farm inputs; youths rarely have options for economic opportunities, especially during the dry seasons. This situation renders them idle and unproductive – consequently, they develop a strong desire to travel through the “Back way to Europe” for greener pastures to support their families back home.

However, despite the economic hardship encountered; some parents do not endorse travelling through the “Back way to Europe” – hence they discourage their children from travelling through these dangerous routes. Despite all the disapproval and control measures used by parents, some youths would insist on travelling and dodge to go through the “Back way to Europe.” Their parents usually get to know about their departure when they get stranded on the way and communicate back home for assistance. In such situations parents have no choice but to support their children by selling assets or other valuables to either help them return home or enable them to continue their journey.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that this “Back way to Europe” syndrome has had negative consequences on society in general and on rural communities in particular. Some of the negative consequences brought about by the migration of youths as revealed by the study include:

- Limited labour force both in agriculture and in domestic chores.
- Loss of artisans and skilled persons in the communities.
- Young girls at puberty rarely have men to marry them due to the high rate of youth migration.

- Further loss of income due to parents' payment of ransom to kidnappers when youths are abducted through "Back way to Europe".
- In worst case scenarios, loss of lives (youths dying) through the "Back way to Europe".

However, parents believed that this "Back way to Europe" syndrome can be circumvented by creating more economic opportunities for youths; i.e. creating skills centers and training youths on carpentry, masonry, tailoring skills and involvement in meaningful self-employment and income generation activities i.e. horticultural production, animal husbandry, poultry management and orchard development.

2.3: Community

The study sought the perspectives of communities on the "Back way to Europe" through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions. The following are the findings from the communities where this study was carried out.

Religious Conception: As believers in Islam, most communities endorsed and supported the idea of migration for greener pastures. They backed up their argument by stating that even the Prophet Muhammed (May Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon Him) who was and is still a leading example in the Muslim "ummah" (community) migrated to seek for protection, knowledge and wealth. Therefore, from this perspective migration in any form to seek knowledge or wealth for livelihood advancement is divine commandment. This is a strongly held notion compelling most youths to migrate through the "Back way to Europe" to seek wealth access better livelihood conditions in most communities.

Poverty Status: Another reason behind going through the "Back way to Europe" as pointed out by community members is the acute poverty conditions of people, especially in the rural communities. They noted that poverty in the rural communities is widespread and is on the increase. This poverty is exacerbated by limited economic opportunities and poor farming conditions. Most families and communities are trapped in this poverty web and the only solution for them is to prepare their youths to go through the "Back way to Europe".

Big families: In average every woman in West Africa is giving birth to 7 children. A big family is still seen as a well factor and a security for the parents when they are getting old. Lack of a social security system in the country is forcing the families to take care of that. Only farming, which is the main living, can't feed these big families.

Unemployment and Underemployment: Community members also cited unemployment and underemployment as fundamental factors forcing youths to go through the "Back way to Europe" as alternative means for livelihood sustenance. They argued that most of their youth folk who have completed Senior Secondary schools or tertiary institutions are either in the urban areas looking for employment or back in the villages waiting for chances of employment.

They further revealed that even many of those who are already employed, for instance in the security forces, teaching field etc. are leaving their jobs due to low salaries which cannot meet their basic family needs. In the recent past, they noted an upsurge of these underemployed youths in the communities going through the "Back way to Europe" to seek for greener pastures to support families back home.

Social media and Peer Influence: People in the communities have also revealed that social media and peer influence have played a pivotal role in influencing their youth folk in going through the "Back way to Europe". They noted that youths in the communities are all inclined to go to Europe by any means necessary due to peer influence or what they see on face book. These are very powerful messages that are provoking the nerves and emotions of these youths to migrate to Europe.

However, despite the desires and aspirations to travel through the "Back way to Europe", community members including youths are fully aware of the negative effects of migration in our society. The following are some of the effects revealed during the FGDs:

- Youths perishing during the journey.
- Limited and reducing labor force in the communities.
- Limited production and productivity in the communities.
- Pressure on family resources to fund the journey to Europe.
- Increased poverty status and vulnerability of families in the communities.

During the study, people in the communities made the following suggestions aimed at solving the "Back way to Europe" syndrome.

- 1) The Government of The Gambia to make the fishing industry a more lucrative venture by providing fishing gears and other materials and making them more affordable for the youths.
- 2) The Government of The Gambia to provide credit facilities to skilled youths at reasonable terms and conditions to enable them expand their trade and professions and maximize their outputs.
- 3) The Government of The Gambia to encourage and attract more investors into the country in order increase employment opportunities.

2.4: Unsuccessful Returnees

The perspectives of the unsuccessful returnees are somewhat different from those who did not go through this dangerous journey to Europe. Through individual interviews, all the returnees (14.2%) interviewed narrated their different ordeals encountered through this horrendous journey to Europe.

Whilst some stopped in Libya, others crossed the Mediterranean Sea or reached their destination in Europe. The majority returnees interviewed still have fresh memories of brutalities and atrocities they have encountered. Some of them even narrowly escaped death along the journey to Europe. The returnees noted with grief that

hardships encountered coupled with financial shortages on the journey were the some of the reasons that forced them to return home.

These migrants have certainly learnt their experiences and lessons through the hard way where nothing else could have been done to alleviate their sufferings. This unfortunate predicament has caused a long term devastating psychological trauma and depression on these returnees as they:

- 1) Could not marry and bear children at the right time.
- 2) Wasted financial resources and time that could have been used on very important projects for livelihood sustenance.
- 3) Could not succeed in bringing fortune and well - being to the family.
- 4) In some cases, could not acquire skills for personal development.

However, when asked whether or not they would opt to go back through the same journey if they were accorded the opportunity, about 65% of the unsuccessful returnees said they would never do so, whereas 35% of them remained adamant on going through the "Back way Europe" again.

2.5: Successful Migrants



Large solid house house being built by a successful migrant from Chargel village in central river region south

This category of migrants represents only 3% of the individual informants interviewed during the study. For them, their perspectives about going through the "Back way to Europe" remain positive, as they noted that life is all about taking risks. They further argued that success cannot be attained without taking risks in life. Having experienced this life risking venture, all the successful migrants interviewed (now on holiday) noted that they were all motivated to embark on the journey by poor family conditions, unemployment, limited economic opportunities; frustration

and peer pressure to travel through the "Back way to Europe" to seek for alternative means of survival back home.

The successful returnees thanked God for being successful through the "Back way to Europe". These people have their life and that of their families completely changed. They have created descent living conditions for their families, they are able to pay medical bills for the family, send children to school and above all they command respect in society. These improvements could not have been possible without the risk they had taken through the "Back way to Europe".

Concerning the message, they have for the people, the successful migrants acknowledged and emphasized that Europe is not as easy as people think. They noted that their success was just out of luck, and that it is really risky to travel through the "Back way to Europe". They advised youths to get involved in other alternative means of survival in The Gambia.

2.6: Those planning to go through the back way to Europe

About 42.8% of the people interviewed are all in this category. They are making plans to go to Europe through the back way. The reasons behind taking the back way to Europe according to the findings of the study are that:

- (1) The back way is an easily accessible route to Europe, and
- (2) Youths firmly believe that it is in Europe where one can make quick money to change life for the better.

The study also revealed that there is evidence of open class struggle between families that have their youths in Europe against families that could not send their youths to the same Continent. These families are usually stigmatized and discriminated against, especially during social gatherings or events. It was also revealed that, until the opportunity comes to send your child to Europe, these families are always regarded as the down trodden and the underdogs. This phenomenon is widely practiced in the rural communities, especially in the Upper River Region of The Gambia. This is a major contributing factor forcing youths to migrate through the "Back way to Europe".

Furthermore, this category of people interviewed are also said to be obsessed with the poor and deplorable living conditions of their families. They cannot withstand these conditions and are determined to leave through the "Back way to Europe" by any means necessary. Despite the fact that they know about the dangers involved, they remain adamant to go. They turn a deaf ear to tragic incidents they hear about and attribute them to fate and predestination. Evidently, the desire to change and improve their living conditions is much stronger than their concern about the risks involved on the way to Europe.

2.7: The Local Authorities

The Local Authorities interviewed during this study revealed that the “Back way to Europe” syndrome is widespread in the country and so both the authorities and society in general are concerned about this growing phenomenon. They share the belief and opinion that the back way to Europe syndrome is propelled by factors ranging from poverty, peer influence from both in country and abroad, parental pressure, lack of employment opportunities, peer pressure, positives stories heard about Europe, the improved status of the few successful travelers, etc.

Given this reality, a growing number of youths and even elderly men and women are inclined to travel through the “Back way to Europe” against all odds. It is revealed that these youths and the older age category use every means possible to raise funds to travel to Europe through the back way. For instance, some force their parents to sell their livestock such as cattle, land and jewelry. Others exploit forest resources and sell forest products such as timber and logs, whereas in extreme cases others are resort to stealing to raise funds in order to travel through the “Back way to Europe”.

Regarding measures taken by the authorities to discourage people from taking the “Back way to Europe”, the local authorities opined that the Youths and Sport Ministry has created a conducive environment for youths. They said this was done by linking them to other development projects and institutions such as GEIPA, NEDI and CILIP for possible support in the area of entrepreneurial development initiatives and other support services, and that most of them have since been engaged in productive ventures in their respective communities.

However, some of the local authorities were quick to point out that the support provided by these institutions is only centered around the urban areas and not in the rural areas. In their view, this imbalance is an issue that needs to be looked into, in order to decentralize the support services so that youths in the rural areas can equally benefit from them.

Despite the fact that frantic efforts are being made to discourage people from travelling through the back way, youths are ever ready and prepared to risk their lives through these dangerous routes to go to Europe. This they lamented is causing more harm than good in our society and by extension the country at large. They noted with grief that this migration is causing brain drain and loss of labour force, including skilled persons in the country. They further went on to say that if this economic migration trend remains unchecked it will eventually retard the socio-economic development of the country.

2.8: Operation No back way to Europe:

The **Operation No Back Way to Europe (ONBE)** is a local organization that is legally recognized with the mandate to discourage youths from travelling through the “Back way to Europe”. They carry out series of sensitization programs and other support services to enable for youths to stay productive and belief in their potentials.

When contacted about their perception on the back way to Europe, ONBE expressed concern over the trend of youth migration through the back way to Europe. Recognizing the important role youths play in national development, ONBE lamented that the trend of youth migration is unprecedented and that it has been on the increase during the past two years.

They noted that despite the awareness raising campaigns, vocational skills training, and other support services designed and carried out for the youths in rural communities, they are still bent on going through the "Back way to Europe". This is simply because they thought that Europe is the only option to make quick wealth and change live and livelihoods.

However, ONBE calls on the Government of The Gambia and stakeholders on 'No back way to Europe Campaign' to intensify efforts for more appropriate programs and projects geared towards empowering youths so as to enable them to get engaged in meaningful and productive ventures for self- reliance and self-confidence.

The organization also calls on the Government of The Gambia to engage embassies to the quota allocated for the issuance of visas, especially for the youth folk.

2.9: Statistical Information on Migration Trend on the "Back way to Europe" in the last 3 years:

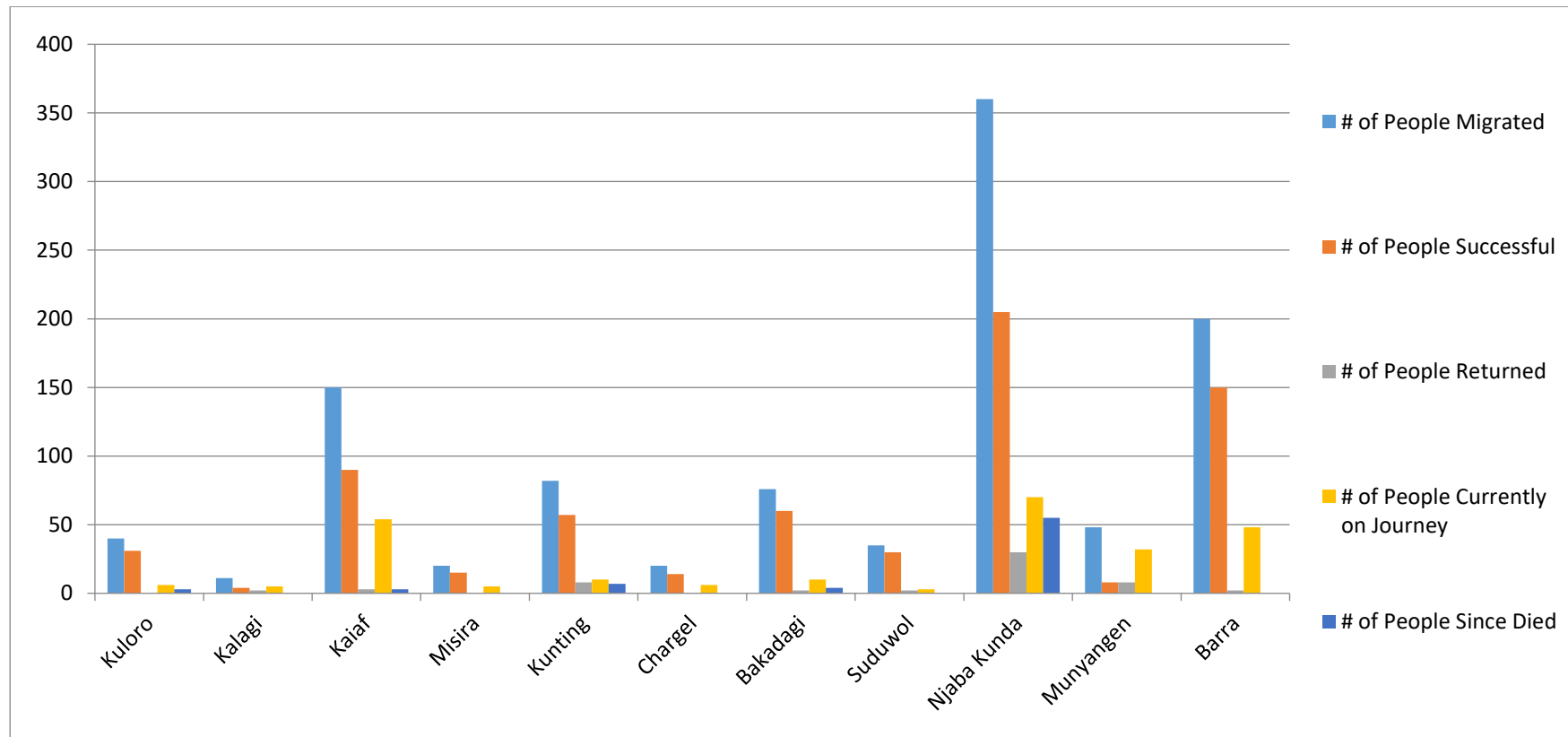
The study also presented the statistical information on migration trend of people who travelled through the "Back way to Europe" from the 11 study villages, in the last 3 years. The statistics show a grand total of 1042 people, out of which 1033 are males and 9 are females, representing 99% and 1% respectively, who have attempted going through the "back way to Europe".

Out of 1042 people who migrated, 664 (657 males and 7 females) have been reported successful, representing 63% and 0.67% respectively. Whereas 57 people (56 males and 1 female), representing 5% and 0.09% respectively, have been reported unsuccessful and had to return. Furthermore; out of the total number, 249 people (males only) representing 23.8% are currently on their way to Europe. Meanwhile the statistics disclose that 72 people (71 males and 1 female) representing 6.8% and 0.09% respectively are reported dead on their way to Europe. This is the trend of migration in these 11 communities in the last 3 years. Please refer to Table 1 and chart 1 below.

TABLE 1: COMMUNITY MIGRATION TREND ON THE BACK WAY TO EUROPE IN THE LAST 3 YEARS

Community	Total # of People Migrated		Total	# of People Successful		Total	# of People Returned		Total	# of People Currently on the Journey		Total	# of People Died		Total
	M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F	
Kuloro	40	0	40	31	0	31	0	0	0	6	0	6	3	0	3
Kalagi	11	0	11	4	0	4	2	0	2	5	0	5	0	0	0
Kaiaf	144	6	150	85	5	90	3	0	3	54	0	54	2	1	3
Misira	20	0	20	15	0	15	0	0	0	5	0	5	0	0	0
Kunting	79	3	82	55	2	57	7	1	8	10	0	10	7	0	7
Chargel	20	0	20	14	0	14	0	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	0
Bakadagi	76	0	76	60	0	60	2	0	2	10	0	10	4	0	4
Suduwol	35	0	35	30	0	30	2	0	2	3	0	3	0	0	0
Njaba Kunda	360	0	360	205	0	205	30	0	30	70	0	70	55	0	55
Munyangen	48	0	48	8	0	8	8	0	8	32	0	32	0	0	0
Barra	200	0	200	150	0	150	2	0	2	48	0	48	0	0	0
	1033	9	1042	657	7	664	56	1	57	249	0	249	71	1	72

Chart 1: Bar Chart Graph Showing Migration Trend by Community and by Variable



2.10: Analysis of Findings

The study has revealed several factors that have been responsible for youth migration through the “Back to Europe”. Key among them include: poverty, unemployment, limited economic opportunities, peer pressure, social media, unattractive agricultural practices and predestination. These are strongly held reasons behind the illegal migration syndrome especially in the rural communities. Although there are various ways people reacted to these problems, all the categories of people interviewed alluded to the above mentioned factors as problems that exist in communities, families and individuals. Hence the “Back way to Europe” is seen by many as the most ideal alternative means of survival.

In respect to these findings, the poverty status is herein compared to the general context in The Gambia taking as an example, the UNDP HDI poverty ranking in 2013. The country was ranked 172 out of 187 countries in the world. The human development report indicated that 83% of the population survives on less than 2 United States dollars a day, while 17% survives on less than 1 United States dollar per day. Livelihood in the Gambia is only partly sustainable due to low agricultural production and limited natural resources, a narrow economic base and an underdeveloped human capital base. The country is highly constrained in terms of economic diversification and growth. Basic social indicators show that poverty is pervasive and increasing both in the rural and urban communities of the Gambia.

Furthermore, according to The Gambia National Youth Policy (2009 – 2018), The Gambia Millenium Development Goals status report has also confirmed that poverty in the Gambia is mostly a rural phenomenon. The report further stated that the urban areas (i.e. Banjul and Kanifing) have lower levels of extreme poverty (0.8 and 6.8) than the rural areas estimated at 10% and 30.5% in Lower River Region and Central River Region – North respectively. Extreme poverty is reported to be lower among the urban areas because of the availability of both formal and informal employment opportunities. Most of the rural dwellers depend largely on agriculture mainly cultivating cereals and groundnuts for their livelihood and income.

Although there is no documentary evidence to show the rate, unemployment is evidently noticeable everywhere in the country, especially in the rural communities where youths are always seen loitering in the streets or brewing “ataya” (green tea) at common meeting points or gatherings. Their valuable time is spent in vain at the expense of very important activities that could contribute to improving family livelihoods.

Also in the wake of technology and globalization, youths are always kept abreast of current events in the outside world through friends on face book, What Apps, Viber,

etc. These youths are so touched and motivated by what they see and hear about Europe that their resolve to travel to the continent through the back way keeps increasing.

More importantly, the Islamic religion has made many people to believe (either rightly or wrongly) that what ought to happen to an individual must happen to him or her and that nothing can prevent it from happening.

Suffice it to say that these are some of the reasons that are forcing youths and even middle – aged people to travel through the “Back way to Europe”. Based on the statistics in table 1 above, as many as 1042 people in 11 communities have travelled to Europe through the back way in the last 3 years. Out of this total, 664 people representing 63%, are reported to have done so successfully. In this context, successful means reaching to ones’ intended destination (in Europe) and securing legal documents that permit free movement or employment. On the other hand, returnees are those travellers who could not reach their intended destination and for one reason or the other returned home voluntarily or were reprieved.

About 57 out of 1042 travellers, representing 5.4% of people who migrated had returned due to challenges they faced on the way, whereas 72 people, representing 6.8% have since been reported dead. Meanwhile, 249 young people, representing 23.8% as at the time of this study are currently on their way to Europe.

Although the migration trend shows a high percentage of successful travellers, the “Back way to Europe” syndrome is economically and socially causing more harm than good in our society. Therefore if this migration through the back way remains unchecked, it will continue to affect the human capital base, who indeed constitute the critical mass (youths) of this country.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0: Lessons learnt, Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1: Lessons Learnt

- 1) The study has shown that there are limited job opportunities which have led to high unemployment rate.
- 2) Poverty is the leading factor for the movement of people from Africa to Europe.
- 3) More than 50% of the youths in most of the sample villages have left for the journey. Among them, some have arrived and in the refugee camps, some are still on the journey whilst others are reported dead or missing.
- 4) Community members are frank and bold to say that the “Back way to Europe” is a matter of necessity because the only success role models are people who went through the “Back way to Europe”.

- 5) 80% of all those who are interviewed were in support of the practice.
- 6) Some skilful youths have fewer opportunities to utilize their talents because they lack both financial and material support.
- 7) Many people especially those in the up- country felt that development is not decentralized; therefore, youths in the rural areas felt left out. They enjoy very few social facilities.
- 8) People who serve as links between travellers and traffickers (Agents) are afraid to be interviewed even though they played a crucial role in the process.
- 9) There are mixed feelings about the government's attention and participation in preventing the young people from using the "Back way to Europe".
- 10) Many girls are married and waiting for their unsettled husbands abroad while some are getting worried that they may not even get married. As a result, girls have started to go for the risky journey in their numbers.
- 11) There is an established Community Based Organization called **Operation no back way to Europe (ONBE)** whose ultimate goal is to discourage youths from taking the risky journey to Europe and instead equip them with skills and knowledge that could earn them a better income and livelihood. Unfortunately, this organization has virtually very little or no support from the government or other NGOs to be able to be more effective in pursuing their objectives.

3.2: Conclusion

After embarking on the pre-study through focus group discussions and interviews with different target groups, it was found out that community members are aware of the fact that the workforce (youths) are leaving through the "Back way to Europe" thus creating a big vacuum in their respective communities and in the country at large.

The general phenomenon is that migration is inevitable because every single migrant is searching for greener pastures. According to our findings, many people believe that youths are desperate and frustrated because they have very slim chances of employment opportunities or other sustainable sources of income that could keep them within the country. The practice of illegal migration to Europe is generally accepted despite the horrible nature of the journey and all the risks involved. Most communities know about the route, how to go about it and the costs involved. It is strongly indicated that most youths preferred to take the risk to go through the "Back way to Europe" than to stay in the country. The tension will remain higher for illegal migration to Europe. As stated earlier, youths are desperate. Despite the risky seas, sorrowful stories, tragic films acted about the journey, youths including girls will still move in their numbers bent on fulfilling their dreams of a better future.

Parents are at limbo whether to encourage or discourage their children. At some points they (parents) feel obliged to counsel and discourage their children from the back way.

However, they often stop to think of the bad living conditions in which they find themselves and their families compared to their neighbors who became better off after a successful back way journey. In several ways the back way has certain demerits notably: reduction of the labour force, loss of property, destruction of marriages, enmity amongst family members and neighbours and loss of lives. Despite the aforementioned disadvantages, there are success stories registered by some people who travelled through the "Back way to Europe".

3.3: Recommendations

The findings and conclusion in this report support the following recommendations:

- 1) Embark on facts and data collection nationwide about the practice which could be used during the sensitization as substantial evidence on the effects of the back way. (eg. Collection of video documentation while on the journey).
- 2) Conduct mass sensitization with the use of the media and community outreach programs on the impact of the "Back way to Europe" and suggest better alternatives.
- 3) Collaborate with stakeholders and other authorities like National Youth Council (NYC), Operation No Back Way to Europe (ONBE) in addressing this alarming situation.
- 4) Invest in agriculture by supporting farmers with fertilizers, farm implements and inputs and provision of processing, storage and marketing facilities.
- 5) Engage the government and the western embassies to network and get more involved in addressing illegal migration.
- 6) Support junior and senior secondary schools to establish peer motivators' clubs and conduct sensitization activities in the schools and the communities.
- 7) FIOHTG to expand their coverage to cover North Bank Region because it is the most vulnerable region in terms of the "Back way to Europe" practice.
- 8) FIOHTG should conduct a pilot project by supporting one village from every region with a full-fledged skill and advocacy centres that could be used to support the youth in each region.
- 9) Support education even at tertiary level because the higher the education levels of an individual the better the chances of employment opportunities.
- 10) The government needs to review the retirement age of civil servants. This will create more job opportunities for the younger generation.
- 11) Building factories especially in the rural areas is considered a major action to address unemployment.

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Submission date: 30 June 2016

Reference Materials:

- UNDP. (2013). HDI report
- The Gambia National Youth Policy (2009 – 2018)
- GBOS. (2013). National provisional population census report

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Team Composition for field work

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