Building local research infrastructures: Wachemo University

CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the crucial role that migration plays in Ethiopia, Centre for Migration Studies are few and lack recognition at the national and local levels. MIDEQ's Ethiopia team sought to change this by supporting local research capacity in partnership with Wachemo University. Doing so promotes the creation of an efficient research infrastructure to facilitate sustained local knowledge production on migration in the Ethiopian context. The university is located in Hosanna, the capital of Hadiya Administrative Zone where most Ethiopian migrants in South Africa originate.

As one of the youngest public universities in Ethiopia, with a student population of over 20,000, Wachemo established the Centre for Migration Studies and Entrepreneurship (CMSE) in 2021 with limited resources. Thus, the MIDEQ team in Ethiopia partnered with Wachemo to support the development of its Migration Research Resource Centre and small grants for empirically oriented research. In addition, they organised academic workshops and staff exchange visits between Wachemo University and renowned centres of Migration Studies in Ghana and South Africa.

BUILDING CAPACITY

To support the development of CMSE, MIDEQ Ethiopia provided small grants to five postgraduate students and six senior researchers studying migration related topics to facilitate knowledge production on migration at the local level. The students received supervision and support from MIDEQ Ethiopia as they completed their research. Topics ranged from migration and urbanisation to migration through historical perspectives. In addition, they explored the impact of migration on places of origin, through the lens of education, health and children who stay back.

The postgraduate students graduated from their programme, completing their thesis through the support of their small grant. The senior researchers produced research reports that are either being published into publications through Wachemo University or are being submitted to academic journals. Academic books were also purchased and donated to CMSE to support the development of the Centre's resource library.

As part of this intervention, Wachemo University scholars also participated in training workshops to build capacity amongst local researchers. The training focused on migration theories and methodologies. A training workshop was conducted in collaboration with the MIDEQ team in Haiti in July 2022. Over 150 people

MIDEQ ETHIOPIA AND HAITI AT WACHEMO UNIVERSITY

Photo via MIDEQ Haiti

participated in the training, including recipients of the academic grants and students and staff from Wachemo University. The workshop served as a platform for MIDEQ to disseminate its major findings and for CMSE to introduce its vision and mission. Training included ethnographic tracing method and adapting an interdisciplinary approach to migration research, specifically through understanding the importance of the arts to migration research. The workshop also presented an opportunity to focus on gender, in particular facilitating greater conversations around gender diversity in migration research.

The training workshop also brought together Hosanna policymakers along with the Vice Provost for Research at Wachemo University and researchers to delve into the challenges that constrain knowledge production efforts in Ethiopia. The discussion focused on factors such as institutional and socio-political crises, weak research infrastructures, structural violence, gender-based inequalities, economic challenges, environmental degradation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By connecting researchers with policymakers, the workshops aimed to encourage greater engagement and interest in migration studies at a regional level.

RESEARCH EXCHANGE

MIDEQ REGIONAL CONFERENCE – ACCRA, GHANA

Photo via MIDEQ Ghana

Members of CMSE also participated in research exchanges to share experiences and insights with migration centres across the continent. For example, the team visited the Centre for Migration Studies in Accra and participated in its regional conference on migration and inequalities in March 2023. The conference was attended by more than 170 policy makers representing organisations such as ECOWAS, the African Union and IOM. Immigration officials, security staff, academics and students were also in attendance. Two members from Wachemo attended the regional conference. Not only was it a learning opportunity but also an opportunity for networking and partnerships which have been pursued after the conference.

In addition, MIDEQ Ethiopia created a platform for academics, government officials and local migrants to connect in South Africa. The team organised a trip to Cape Town which included representatives from Wachemo University and local government officials. Together, the delegation met with Hadiya migrants in Cape Town to discuss investment opportunities and challenges in Ethiopia. The meetings aimed to encourage migrants to use remittances and their knowledge on entrepreneurship in South Africa to invest in local industries in the Hadiya Zone. Doing so would help support local communities and economies, harnessing the development potential of migration.

The trip served as an opportunity to open communication between key stakeholders. Often the relationship between government officials and migrants are strained but including Wachemo University in the meetings helped build trust with migrants in South Africa, given the university's reputation in the region. Since MIDEQ Ethiopia's visit to South Africa, the Hadiya Bureau of Investment reported that five shareholder companies were established by Hadiya migrants and they have applied for investment licenses. Wachemo University has also expanded the work of the CMSE to actively engage in policy work that encourages migrants to invest in their place of origin.

CHANGING NARRATIVES

The workshops and research exchanges also served as a platform to critically engage with CMSE's vision and philosophy around migration. The discourse on migration, from CMSE's perspective, focused on a 'containment approach', which reflects a broader, global securitization discourse that discourages migrant mobility. With support from the MIDEQ Haiti team, conversations with CMSE led to discussions on the nuances of the migration process; from the respective gains of remittances and diaspora investment to the challenges and risks that come with migration. In addition, MIDEQ worked with key leaders of CMSE on expanding the idea of 'entrepreneurship' to include harnessing the developmental potential of migration.

CMSE also brought new dimensions to MIDEQ's research on the Ethiopia-South Africa corridor. CMSE highlighted the challenges that emerge during the migration journey and in the process of settlement. This in turn led MIDEQ Ethiopia to further explore the experiences of migrants during the transit phase of the process.

Through MIDEQ Ethiopia's intervention, Wachemo University has expanded its network and scholarship on South-South migration. Members of the university are now engaged in South-South migration scholarship and connected to a broader group of African scholars working on this topic. In addition, the intervention has also increased engagement between the university, local government and Ethiopian migrants in South Africa. Through this, new opportunities are emerging as Wachemo University strives to help improve the lives of migrants, their families and communities where they live in their country of origin.

RELATED CONTENT

MIDEQ Ethiopia's partnership with Wachemo University was part of the team's Impact Interventions. The interventions focused on deepening engagement with migrant investments and centring migrants as knowledge producers. Further details and outputs from their research and interventions are listed below.

Publications

- "Migration and love", a book by Yonas Tadesse, Hadiya returnee migrant
- Guide to investing in Hadiya zone
- Enhancing the development potential of South-South migration
- Remittances and transformations in funerary practices among the Hadiya
- The entanglement between tangible and intangible factors in shaping Hadiya migration aspirations to South Africa

- From Ethiopia to South Africa: The human cost of a neglected migration route
- Migrants as knowledge producers

Cover Image

MIDEQ Ethiopia and Haiti team in the Hadiya region. Photo by MIDEQ Haiti . CC BY-NC 4.0).

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