

'Migration: African Perspectives' during Afrikadag 2019

The sun was shining on this fresh spring morning of 13 April. A vibrant Afrikadag was about to start, with more than 80 volunteers of FEPS and FMS were preparing for the day to come. Around 9.30 the first visitors entered into the large 'Marmeren Hal'. The Afrikadag started at 10 with a packed 'Grote Zaal' ready for the Grand Opening.

The Grand Opening

The Afrikadag 2019 was opened by FMS director Arjen Berkvens. After this warm welcome, Hedwig Giusto of the FEPS spoke to the audience about the theme "Migration: African Perspectives", saying: Migration is not about the numbers, but about the people that decide to leave their country. The FEPS and FMS have been working on a research project that looks into the African perspectives on migration for over a year (read all about it [here](#)). The Afrikadag was the perfect time to discuss this subject with a broader audience. This we started with in the opening!

Next up was inspiring comedian Mo Hersi, who recited humorous stories from his youth and told everyone about his own experience as an immigrant in the Netherlands. He even got a standing ovation from the audience, at his own request.

During the panel discussion Nigerian author Lola Shoneyin, Zimbabwean Labour Union leader Peter Mutasa and Liberian-Dutch writer Vamba Sherif talked about migration. With moderator Seada Nourhussen, editor in chief of OneWorld, an open and personal conversation about the topic took place. Lola described a sense of anger, about negative misconceptions surrounding migration in the Netherlands. As a writer, she sees possibilities to inform and inspire people. Vamba talked about having a positive view on migration. By living in different parts of the world, you will be inspired and learn different norms and values. Furthermore, he was critical about the role the West has played in the African economy and the current image of migration. Fair trade will ensure Africans can build their own lives in their home country. Peter Mutasa agreed to this and referred to the consequences of colonialism in Zimbabwe. "Officially we are independent, but due to the economic structures that the country inherited there is still much inequality and dependence on the former imperialists."

This inspiring but critical opening was a fruitful start of the successful Afrikadag to come.

Addressing root causes of irregular migration: dead-end or egg of Columbus?

After the opening, we continued to talk with politicians, scientists and NGOs about a fair approach to migration in the high-level debate in the "Grote Zaal". Akinyi Walender (country director Cordaid Ethiopië) and Khadija El Madmad (director Law and Migration UNESCO Centre, Morocco) emphasised that migration is of all times and that many people migrate within the African continent. Antony Otieno Ong'ayo (researcher International Institute of Social Studies) pointed out that mobility is a part of humanity: "How is African migration to Europe different from the ways in which Europeans have migrated to all parts of the world? How is mobility suddenly irregular and illegal?"

Philip Bob Jusu (African Union Permanent Mission, EU) also wondered why mobility is separated from humanity in the political debate. According to him, economy and race underlie this. Khadija El Madmad noted that safety and humanity are confused. She believed safety is a part of humanity and that the focus should be on that mostly. Judith Sargentini (MEP GroenLinks) stated that the long-term perspective is lacking in the political debate that is often focused on the root causes of migration. Sargentini noted that this approach is not the right one: "There is nothing wrong with migration, but how can we make it regular?", says Judith Sargentini.

All speakers agreed that development must be fair and honest. Regulation is possible when you take a fairer approach, have an equal relation between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU), when there is fair access to markets, and when legal pathways for migration are present. Currently, the salaries of AU staff are paid for 70% by EU funding, which makes the relationship between Africa and Europe unequal by definition. Fortunately, much has changed in the AU. Africa is economically interesting for Europe, yet European countries do not want African people to come. "The voices of African people must be included and heard," according to Jusu.

“The diaspora needs to be taken seriously”

The Afrikadag theme ‘Migration: African Perspectives’ was not only addressed in the main programme. During the many different workshops that took place on Saturday, the subject was frequently touched upon. This was also the case in the FEPS workshop, which discussed the contribution of diaspora to the development of their country of origin through remittances. Here, among others, Fatumo Farah (HIRDA) emphasised the importance of the diaspora: “The amount of remittances that are received in African countries is often 3 to 4 times greater than the income from development budgets of other countries. It is therefore of great importance that the diaspora and their contribution are taken seriously. “

Albert Schweitzer Prize 2019 won by ‘Heal a Wound, Buy a Bee’.

This year the Albert Schweitzer Prize was awarded for the second time on the Afrikadag. During the well-attended workshop “Initiatives for a healthier Africa”, the top 3 candidates presented their own project to improve Africa’s health to a professional jury and the Afrikadag visitors. Afterwards visitors were able to vote for their favourite candidate during the poster presentation on het Bordes.

The award ceremony took place at the end of the day: Jonathan Vas Nunes won the top prize of €5000 for his initiative ‘Heal a Wound, Buy a Bee’. With this initiative Jonathan wants to produce organic honey for wound care in Sierra Leone. In addition, Batuo Hillmann received the public award for project ‘The Power of CPR’ and Marijke Kingma (‘Stimulate to simulate’) and Bongor’s ‘Masanga Dental Project’ won an incentive prize. This means that with the Albert Schweitzer Prize 2019 a number of great initiatives for a healthier Africa have been supported!

Culture at the Afrikadag

This year we welcomed two cultural programmes to the Afrikadag. In the ‘Grote Zaal’, people could enjoy the film programme by the Yangambi Foundation. The films *Burkinabè Bounty* and *L’oeil du cyclone* were screened, followed by a conversation with the audience. The films triggered a lot of emotional response, and during the conversations there was plenty of input based on personal experience from the audience.

The second cultural programme, organised by El Hizjra, evolved around the topics migration and literature, with a guest lecture by Abdelkader Benali ‘migration is of all times’ as very interesting headliner.

Inspiration market

For those who did not attend a workshop for a while, there was the information market at the ‘Rotonde’. There were more than fifteen stalls where you could learn more about various projects and NGOs. In this way you could talk about the activities of FMS and FEPS, have a look at African books at the ASC Leiden stand, fit colourful clothes at Africa Beauty and watch a virtual reality film about the Masai in Kenya. An excellent opportunity to network and be inspired.

Athenaeum bookstore had its own market ‘Onder de Bogen’, where a multitude of books could be found. A number of those books were discussed in the literature program ‘Africadag Talks: Literature about Africa’ and could then be signed on the spot by the authors that were present. The book market was a busy spot as always!

FEPS and the FMS would like to thank all the partners, visitors, speakers, volunteers, musicians, artists and caterers for their contribution and participation in the Afrikadag 2019.

Afrikadag
conversations 
 of a changing
continent 