What Survival Strategies for Sub-Saharan Migrant Women? Networking Competences in a Gender-Aware Perspective

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Introduction

How to move from irregular and unsafe condition of "illegal migrant" to the position of recognised immigrant, and finally (if ever!) to the status of citizen? And, what if I am a woman, or rather – an African woman? These are some of the preliminary questions that lie at the bottom of the present work.

Prior to formulating any suggestions, some background knowledge is required. Therefore, the paper is split into few sections: after depicting the context (crisis, political answers, impacts on migration processes, etc.), the paper focuses on African communities in Europe and Italy with particular attention to women native to Sub-Saharan Africa (including an outline of community organisation, social mobilisation, and support networking among African migrants). An in-depth understanding of the background provides an indicative input for further speculations aimed to arrive at a training proposal as elaborated in this work..

The said proposal is envisaged as a practice-oriented pedagogical action relying on survival strategies, focusing on networking competence coupled with gender awareness; as for its beneficiaries, the proposal is referred to Sub-Saharan women who have undergone a risky and often illegal migration experience through North Africa and the Mediterranean so as to start seeing prospects for a different future. The core idea of the proposal is to train migrant women with such an experience to become "resource persons" and "counsellors" for newcomers in order to help them to mobilise their survival strategies in South Europe, and to facilitate the circulation of information and knowledge on national and transnational levels. This strategic profile is being materialised in "network facilitator", a professional figure that brings together the tasks of mediator, informant, guide, adviser, interpreter, along with other relevant skills, to be put into practice within activity of network facilitating.

The originality of the proposal consists in a strong accent on the gender perspective connoted by intercultural dimension, the target group being composed of African women from Sub-Saharan regions, with a focus on Nigeria, and the Horn of Africa, esp. Somalia and Eritrea. Women coming from these realities present different migratory experiences, but share the common risk of ending up in a sort of "ghettoisation" with no prospects of integration in

the countries they are being stuck due to the EU migration policies. In such a scenario, an approach focusing training for survival strategies may represent a bridge towards receiving societies, especially when the vulnerable part of their population is likewise forced to resort to survival strategies.

The contents of the paper rest upon findings and results, emerged from the ongoing European Project, titled *Learning for Female African Migrants' Solidarity: Help-Desks for Female African Migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region* (LeFAMSol). In the frames of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the Project involves three partner countries, namely Greece, Italy, and Turkey. To date, several data and important information have been produced in form of research reports and progress deliverables[1].

As suggested by its title, the main objective of the LeFamSol Project is to pave the way for a community "Self-Help-Desk" service to be run by network facilitators coming from the concerned communities. Being simultaneously the point of departure and arrival, the idea of producing a community Self-Help-Desk channels the upcoming stages of the Project and their planning, including methodologies and concomitant activities and sub-activities to be pursued with women native to the Sub-Saharan African region: broadly speaking, the former include network building, elicitation, fieldwork, focus group and training activities, being underpinned by identification of beneficiaries, stakeholders and strategic partners, activity planning, preparation, and implementation.

Furthermore, the paper elaborates methodological indications adopted in the frames of the LeFamSol Project, which are interrelated with the dynamics and roles of social support and change networks in relation to social capital, gender roles, migrations and social mobility (cf. Bourdieu, Burt, Lin, Coleman, Granovetter, Curran & Saguy, Podolny & Baron), with particular attention to learning patterns (cf. Becker, Haraway, Helliwell & Putnam, Jarvis).

1. *Some Basics: Crises, Policies, Impacts*

1.1 *Southern Europe Facing the Economic Crisis*

South Europe has been struck by the crisis since 2008. And the answer, offered by the European Union in the form of austerity policies, has produced catastrophic effects in Southern European countries. The understanding of

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[1] For the purposes of the paper, the following reports and deliverables have been consulted: *Summary Report based on National Reflection Papers*, including *National Reports and relevant Literature Review* (Del. 2.1); *A Focus Group Delineation Strategy for a Female African Migrants' Curriculum* (Del. 2.2); *National Focus Group Delineation Progress Report* (in particular: *Italian Focus Group Delineation Progress Report*) (Del. 2.7); *National Stakeholders' Networks Outreach Assessment* (Del. 4.3); *National FAM Networks Outreach Assessment* (Del. 4.4); *Target Group and the Stakeholders: how to Exploit Ethnic and Gender Networking against FAM Marginalisation* (Del. 2.8).

common problems in front of the "Europe's madness", as Joseph Stiglitz[2] has defined the economic policies implemented by the EU, could lead to counteracting the spread of "wars among the poor" that the crisis has deepened. But, it seems not to be the destination of these policies. For the purpose of illustrating their roots, we will avail ourselves of a synthesis offered by Sony Kapoor: "*At the outbreak of the crisis, EU leaders insisted on national solutions to what was essentially a European problem: the fragility of large often pan-European banks. This increased the final bill, as countries refused to bite the bullet and delayed recognising that their banks were bust.*" (Kapoor 2015).

While analysing the phenomenon, S. Kapoor stresses that the outlined condition has concerned banks throughout European countries. The author continues by reminding that, while being recognised by many, the unsustainability of Greek debt was concurrently used by German and French banks which owned large amounts of Greek bonds. And the answer was an "*ill-designed programme*" as condition of financial aid to Greece. In fact, "*Greece's fiscal problems provided a godsend distraction*", and a bailout of European banks at the expense of Greek citizens and European taxpayers (cf. Kapoor 2015).

What is more, the North-South battle was further stirred up by a new narrative having "fiscal crisis" and "lazy southerners" as its protagonists: once conceptualised, this sentiment invaded the imagery of many northern Europeans, and even "crowded out the reality of an untreated banking crisis." (Kapoor 2015).

The consequence is that Greece and other Southern European countries were imposed a bulk of austerity policies bringing devastating effects upon their economies: the phenomenon particularly affected the budget aimed at social activities and services, hence a huge suffering, as a final result, has been produced among people.

Greece is certainly the country that has been more ravaged by recession and austerity: 1.3 million people – 26% of the workforce – is without a job, and most of them have no access to benefits (50.6% of which are under-25, and 29% are women).[3] More in detail: wages went down by 38% in 2009, pensions – by 45%, GDP – by a quarter; 18% of the country's population is unable to meet their food needs; 32% is placed below the poverty line; under 3.1 million people, meaning 33% of the population, is without national health insurance (cf. Henley 2015). Spain and Italy have also suffered from the crisis: in 2014, unemployment concerned 23.9% of the Spanish (53.5% – under-25, and 25.3% among women)[4], and 13,4% of the Italian (43.9% – under-25, and more then 14% for what concerns women) population[5]. Spain has poverty levels of some 20%, and Italy 18.2%[6].

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[2] Stiglitz Joseph, 2015.
[3] See: Countryeconomy.com, 2014, *Greece unemployment rate*.
[4] See: Countryeconomy.com, 2015, *Spain unemployment rate*.
[5] See: Countryeconomy.com, 2015, *Italy unemployment rate*.
[6] See: Inequality Watch, *Poverty in Europe: the Current Situation* (2010 data), *Inequality Watch* – the European observatory of inequality (http://www.inequalitywatch.eu/spip.php?article99&lang=en).

As one may read in these lines, another pressing problem faced by Europe is youth unemployment. In November 2014, Istat (the Italian Institute of Statistics) produced figures that showed a record high youth unemployment rate of 44%: "*Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) was 43.9%, +0.6 percentage points in a month.*" (Istat 2014). Comparable trends have been registered throughout the European South in the last year, namely: Spain with 53%, Greece – 53%, and Portugal – 36%.

Needless to say, this situation is one of the main reasons that many southern-Europeans decide to migrate. Actually, the austerity-ridden South of Europe is becoming an emigration area again, and – most importantly – sizeable portions of this emigration are composed of youths: "*Fuelled by a deep recession in southern Europe, tens of thousands of young people have left Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece since 2008. Precise figures are hard to pin down though – [...but local data are impressive:] more than 500,000 Italians in the UK, of which 250,000 in London alone [, about the size of an average Italian city]*"[7].

In detail: "*Intra-European migration flows are complex to investigate though, mainly because young migrants tend to not document their journey. According to INE, the Portuguese national institute of statistics, almost 200,000 Portuguese people aged 20-40 have left Portugal since 2010. Based on official data, the Spanish National Statistics office counted 133,000 young migrants between 2008-2013. While, Italy hit a similar amount in four years, with 135,831 young leaving the Belpaese since 2010. There is no data from Greece, where the Hellenic Statistical Authority does not record the migration of young Greeks*" (Ottaviani 2014).

1.2 *The Impact of the Crisis and EU Austerity Policies on Migrations in South Europe*

While producing continuous budget reductions to basic services, the package of austerity policies has also had a strong impact upon the actions and services for migrants, beginning from reception aimed at refugees and vulnerable migrant groups (e.g. unaccompanied minors and trafficked women). In spite of the economic crisis and austerity measures, the African and Sub-Saharan exodus towards the EU southern borders has not diminished: on the contrary, it has increased over the last five years, bringing a number of new arrivals up.

Although the figures of irregular migrations are inherently difficult to count, the UNHCR and Frontex (the EU border agency) reported that 2014 was shaping up to be one of the most important years for illegal arrivals to Europe (See Table 1). More than 107,000 undocumented migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea

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[7] "*The UK is the top destination for Italian migrants, with 220,000 Italians officially living in the UK according to Italian authorities. However, as reported by the Italian newspaper* Il Fatto Quotidiano*, the Italian consul in London, Massimiliano Mazzanti, cited estimates of 'more than 500,000 Italians in the UK, of which 250,000 in London alone.' This is nearly the size of the Italian city of Genoa (which has a population of 600,000), Italy's sixth largest city.*" (Ottaviani Jacopo, 2014).

into Italy from January to August 2014, eclipsing thus the 141,000 who arrived at Europe's borders in the first year of the Arab Spring[8] (Dore 2014). In Greece, another important border country, migrant arrivals by sea reached 25,000 in the first six months of 2014: this is more than double the number for the same period of 2013, and this number covers those migrants who were picked up by the Greek police only (Dore 2014). What is more, most of the new arrivals reaching Greece were made up of Syrians and Iraqis, often families with children.

African, and particularly Sub-Saharan migrants, constitute an important tile in the mosaic of international immigration to Europe. What has changed are pull and push factors, or rather the dynamics ruling them: once deemed as the main pull factor to emigrate, the possibility of finding employment has been gradually added, in the last two decades, by "new" push factors, i.e. internal conflicts, wars, dictatorships, and increasing insecurity.

To boot, terror and conflict in Syria, Iraq and Libya, as well as in many African countries, are acting as powerful push factors on the local people. Violent turmoil in Libya, a major departure point for migrants attempting to reach Europe across the Mediterranean, is causing panic among the migrants that are awaiting there, causing an overloading of boats by traffickers and smugglers. The result are the dreadful shipwrecks we see every day, and, for the ones who succeed landing, the impossibility of being taken care of.
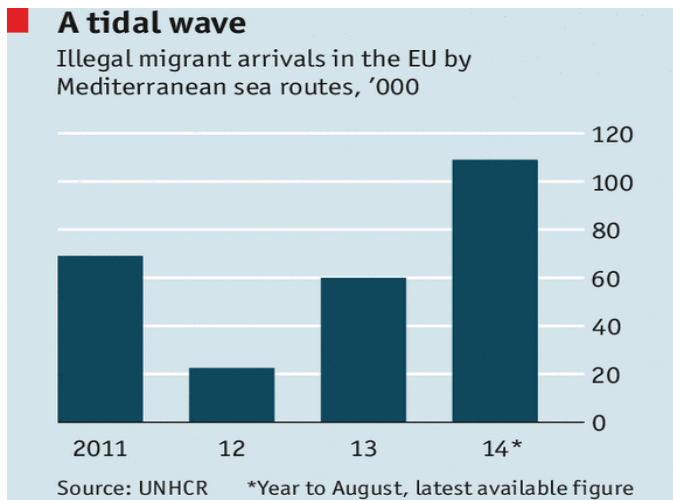
A tidal wave
Illegal migrant arrivals in the EU by Mediterranean sea routes, '000

Source: UNHCR   *Year to August, latest available figure

Table 1: Illegal migrant arrivals in the EU by Mediterranean sea routes (UNHCR).

[8] The Arab Spring, or *Ar-rabī al-arabī* in Arabic, is a revolutionary movement that struck the Arab world in the last years. The phenomenon commenced in late 2010 (Tunisia, 18 December, 2010), and spread throughout the countries of North Africa and South-west Asia in form of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, unrests and civil wars, followed by a row of reforms is some realities. While it is generally deemed to be ended in mid-2012, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa are regarded as a continuation of the Arab Spring, at times referred to as the Arab Winter i.e. the aftermath of revolutions and civil wars.

The crisis inevitably had an impact on the reception of migrants and refugees. As stated by the UNHCR: "*The economic situation in the region [South Europe] has had an impact on the capacity and readiness of many countries to strengthen their protection systems. Austerity measures have also hit civil-society organizations that provide services to asylum-seekers and refugees. Xenophobia and intolerance have led to incidents of discrimination and violence. States have responded by concentrating on curbing irregular movements, including through tighter border controls and detention, or penalization for illegal entry*" (UNHCR 2015).

In fact, Southern European countries cannot cope with a surge of migrants and asylum seekers. Moreover, it is well-known that the appeal of Europe, perceived as an area of prosperity, primarily rests on the EU's rich countries: accordingly, the majority of migrants regard Italy, Greece or Spain as the borders of Europe, that is way stations on their path northwards, rather than their final destinations. Indeed, they commonly try to go ahead by moving from European South, and imagining Central and Northern Europe as the endpoint of their movement: often having members of their families and/or networks, they try to reach central and northern European countries in order to find more opportunities for building a new life.[9] Besides, a good deal of migrants aim to reach the USA and Canada being these the final dream destinations for many of them.

At this point, it is relevant to recollect some clauses of the Dublin Regulation[10]: the document says that the first European Union state where a migrant arrives, his/her finger prints are stored or an asylum claim is made, is responsible for the claimant. In the light of this measure, Italy finds itself among the five EU countries (along with Germany, Sweden, France, and Great Britain) that receive 70% of asylum applications, which is partly due to the Dublin Regulation[11]. Basically, if the finger prints are taken, a migrant must stay in the country s/he had arrived at until his/her status is decided. Accordingly, this is why many migrants try to escape controls before applying for asylum in a Southern European country.

Given the situation, migrants are forced to stay in Southern European contexts that are rapidly changing because of the crisis. If Italy, Spain or Greece have turned to be, for a time, immigration countries, possibilities of integration for newcomers are nowadays rapidly decreasing, while xenophobic feel-

[9] The situation has been pointed out by the Italian Minister of the Interior, Angelino Alfano, too. He warned the EU of the need to patrol the Mediterranean border along with Italian forces: left alone, Italy will be obliged to send all those who ask for asylum in Italy to where they really want to go, that is to "*the rest of Europe, because they don't want to stay in Italy.*"

[10] See: ECRE, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (http://www.ecre.org/): *Dublin Regulation* (http://www.ecre.org/topics/areas-of-work/protection-in-europe/10-dublin-regulation.html).

[11] The Dublin Regulation, which states that migrants must remain in the country in which they arrive until their status as refugees is decided. This regulation has been under attack from the EU Mediterranean states for its lack of financial and political solidarity from northern, wealthier EU members. Nevertheless, it has remained unchanged since its inception in 2013, and it is unlikely to change any time soon.

ings are spreading all over the Region. Golden Dawn in Greece, Forza Nuova and the Northern League in Italy are the political forces exploiting these conditions and concomitant sentiments.

Moreover, migrants face a complex settlement situation in South Europe, strongly affected by the crisis. Given the high level of unemployment, informal economy is the only place where labour integration is possible for many of them; along with that, services are reduced, and housing is precarious. Therefore, many migrants – and especially newcomers – are pushed to develop survival strategies so as to survive in a new context.

"*Yet the European Union is dragging its feet on forging a more unified approach to migration that would distribute the financial and social costs of coping with refugees more fairly. Last month, the United Nations said the rising death toll of migrants desperately trying to reach Europe required urgent action.*" (New York Times 2014). As a consequence: "*The European Union needs to reform a migration policy that clearly is not working. Besides more and faster search-and-rescue operations at sea, Europe must provide legal avenues to safety, lest more migrants lose their lives on deadly journeys.*" (New York Times 2014).

Considering the crisis and policies raging over the European South, this is not going to happen in the near future. Consequently, what can be done in the region of South Europe in order to support, at least in some way, the newcomers?

2. *The LeFamSol Target Group*

2.1 *African and Sub-Saharan Migrant Communities in Europe*

As already observed, the exodus of African migrants has not ceased in spite of the economic crisis and austerity measures imposed by the European Union. On the contrary, migratory movements coming from the African continent has increased due to various reasons which have underwent some changes meanwhile.

The pull factors that have for a long time driven migrants to Europe, especially the possibility of finding employment, are no longer the only reasons that cause people to migrate: the bulk of push factors – including internal conflicts, wars, dictatorships, and insecurity – has been incessantly growing and driving people out of their native countries in the last two decades, both from the Horn of Africa and Western regions of the African continent. The case of Nigeria, shaken by various inner conflicts, is highly significant in this respect.

Moreover, in the eyes of African and Sub-Saharan migrants, Italy, Greece and Spain represent the borders of "Europe", being the Continent (as a whole) seen as an area of prosperity. Yet, final destinations imagined by African migrants are not located in southern, but in central and northern Europe, where they often have members of their families and/or networks, and where they expect to find better chances for building a new life.

The largest population of African immigrants living in Europe (regardless of their particular origin and with different quotas per country) are placed in France, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and Portugal. All these countries are linked with diverse African realities through their colonial past.

"*About two-thirds of Africans in Europe are from north Africa (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia)*" (BBC NEWS 2007)[12]. In this scenario, the movements of Sub-Saharan African migrants represent an important component of the flows reaching South Europe, especially Italy, and some other European realities: "*An increasing number are travelling from Sub-Saharan Africa, mainly heading for the former colonial powers of France, Germany, Italy and the UK. Most Sub-Saharan migrants are from West Africa – Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, in particular.*" (BBC NEWS 2007). Their figures oscillate both in relation to their sending countries, and to the receiving ones which are being reached by Sub-Saharan African migrants native to different countries and in different quotas. Amidst various groups, the most numerous communities are those composed of migrants coming from West African[13] regions and the Horn of Africa.

As far as Sub-Saharan migrants in Europe are concerned, they are mostly coming from the Region of West Africa, esp. Senegal, and in particular from the countries surrounding the Gulf of Guinea (West African southern shores), as the phenomenon has mostly involved Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Cameroon (the latter being commonly included among Central African countries). In this scope, an increasing number of migrants from West Africa – esp. from Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal – has been observed in European statistics in the last years. Another important Sub-Saharan region, sending migrants to Europe, is the Horn of Africa, hence migrants from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia are constantly moving to Europe. The number of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, who are concentrated in Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, ranges between 3,5 and 8 million[14]. Less, but still present, are the communities of migrants native to the West African countries of Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Togo, and Mali.

Finally, African immigrants in Italy, the receiving country par excellence, are altogether over 1 million now: out of their totality, Sub-Saharan migrants reaching Italy are mainly native to Senegal, Somalia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria.

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[12] See: BBC NEWS, 2007, *Key facts: Africa to Europe migration.*
[13] The Region of West Africa comprises the westernmost subregion of the African continent, and is considered aside from the Maghreb, a separate subregion of West Africa (western North Africa or North-western Africa). The region of West Africa includes the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania (the latter is, sometimes, regarded as a country in the Maghreb region of western North Africa), Niger, Nigeria, the island of Saint Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, São Tomé and Principe, and Togo.
[14] Council of Europe, 2008, *Immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa.*

Due to the colonial past, along with migrants from other African regions, some less-represented communities count their members in Spain (migrants from Cape Verde and the former Spanish colony Equatorial Guinea), Belgium (mostly from Rwanda and Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Portugal (from former Portuguese colonies, particularly Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé).

2.2 *It is about Migrant Women Native to Sub-Saharan Africa*

In the frames of the LeFamSol Project, the target group has been defined as follows: migrant women native to the Sub-Saharan African region. It includes two main groupings, the former consisting of Nigerian women, and the latter of women native to the Horn of Africa, vis. Somalia and Eritrea. Such a rationale rests on the fact that the most significant portion of African migrants, esp. women, residing in the countries covered by the Project, are Nigerians; on this basis, another community of Sub-Saharan migrant women coming from the Horn of Africa was chosen by each project partner along with Nigerian women. By country, the picture of the target group is the following: Italy – Eritreans, Nigerians, Somalis; Turkey – Nigerians, Somalis; Greece – Nigerians, Ethiopians. The named are also among the most represented communities within the totality of African migrants in Italy, Turkey and Greece.

Common and distinctive features. The cluster of variables that should be taken into account while depicting the target group displays ample – both shared and unshared – contours.

In the set of shared features applying to the LeFamSol target group as a whole, the most transversal one is that they are *women*: thereby, it is essential to see how does *gender* affect their condition in their native countries, communities, migration projects etc. To be more precise, it is a matter of *African migrant women* – this characterisation proves to be highly generic so as to be accepted beyond its mere geographic demarcation. Only if taken in some specific aspects and analysed more in detail, the *African* or *Sub-Saharan African* denominator offers further intersection points: the target group is coming from unstable countries, sharing certain historical and political circumstances (with inner differences); many (esp. in the last decades) are fleeing from economic instability, socio-political insecurity, and, not seldom, armed conflicts.

Moreover, migratory pathways of Sub-Saharan African migrants, taking them to Europe by crossing the Mediterranean, generally match too. Their major *South-North routes* are the following: 1) from Nigeria through Niger or Algeria to Libya, and therefrom to South Italy; 2) from Somalia through Ethiopia and Sudan to Libya and South Italy; from Eritrea through Sudan to Libya and South Italy. 3) Another area of entry and transit is given by Turkey and Greece – in order to reach Turkey, the following routes are used: from Nigeria through Niger and Chad, and therefrom to Libya, than by sea to Turkey; from Egypt through Near East to Turkey; or from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia through Sudan and Egypt, but also through Arab countries and the Near East, to Turkey.

African migrants in Italy, Greece and Turkey are not a monolithic but heterogeneous community presenting a variety of: *origins*, life conditions in their native contexts, socio-cultural *backgrounds* (social strata, religion, language skills, education etc.); professional background; migration patterns (push and pull factors). They are also variously distributed in the territories of their new settlement, mostly in large urban centres. Depending on the context, the cluster regarding their *condition in hosting societies* (mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion, esp. labour and social integration) may be either shared or not by the LeFamSol target groups.

2.3. *Receiving Contexts versus Sub-Saharan African Migrants*

It is important to reckon the characteristics of the receiving countries in relation to *migration processes*. According to the goals of the Project, it was particularly relevant to analyse: recent migrations to Italy, Greece and Turkey, female migrations, flows coming from the Sub-Saharan Region, giving emphasis to the specificities of the target group.

Each of the three countries involved has a different immigration profile, thus making it unconducive to adopt a unifying approach to the issue. To start, *statistics* of the partner countries offer different national outcomes: broadly speaking, migrant women native to the Sub-Saharan Africa represent a relatively small, but significant component of the present flows moving towards Southern Europe. As observed by single country reports, African and Sub-Saharan migrant groups (women and men), display a higher demographic significance in Italy for various reasons, including Italy's colonial past in Somalia and Eritrea; on the other hand, African migration is a more recent phenomenon in Greece and Turkey, hence the available data are more meagre than in Italy. Besides, the Italian legal peculiarity, that does not seem to apply neither in Greece nor Turkey, distinguishes between residence and work permits.

Despite the differences among the countries, it is important to understand what are the *push and pull factors* of Sub-Saharan female migrations heading for Italy, Greece and Turkey, as well as for the rest of Europe. This implies an analysis of their migration projects and underlying reasons (socio-economic, cultural, study, family reunification, asylum/refugees, politics, war, trafficking, genital mutilation etc.), migration routes, and the mechanisms of integration into the receiving societies especially in terms of labour and employment.

Once in Southern Europe, African migrant women may receive a different *status*: while women coming from the Horn of Africa can receive a refugee status, for Nigerian women this is more complicated. Such an outcome is further relevant for their social and economic integration.

African migrants (as a whole) have not many *employment opportunities* in Southern European countries: in fact, many of them are employed in informal economy, which is – by the way – an extremely visible phenomenon (peddling, selling umbrellas, water bottles or other goods, etc.), including the phenome-

non of occupational "ethnic niches" (e.g. the Senegalese in peddling); other segments of African migrants, being mostly hired for low-skilled or unskilled jobs, are found in services, industry, agriculture, trade, and other sectors. Sub-Saharan migrant women share the same condition all over the region. In Italy and Greece, but also in Turkey which is not a part of the eurozone, their employment opportunities prove to be rather scanty: even here, unskilled jobs are reigning, along with some *occupational niches* e.g. some are engaged in domestic service and care work (e.g. Eritrean women working as maids and caregivers in Italian families) or entertainment sector (e.g. Nigerian women, a good part of whom are victims of trafficking). Those lacking in legal status have meagre chances of accessing health services (being e.g. victims of trafficking particularly vulnerable to STDs – the condition particularly observed in Greece and Turkey). Along with that, their condition makes female African migrants susceptible to exploitation, physical and sexual abuse by their clients, as well as employers and landlords (the condition strongly observed by the Turkish partner).

Typologies of labour market integration of Sub-Saharan African women in the host countries are interrelated with their *in/visibility*. Important observations regarding the migrant women community as a whole, and specifically the LeFamSol target group, have been expressed through the findings of the country reports. Thus, the reality of migrant women was defined as a "*triple oppression: social, economic and cultural*" (Campani 2007:5-6), which is chiefly due to their general condition in emigration, their employment in private (domestic) sector, and absence from public sphere. Female African migrants are, simultaneously, defined as the most visible and invisible group of migrant women, and intersectionally vulnerable group. To boot, the perception of *racism* in combination with the visibility of the target group is quite pronounced in all of the partner countries, even if the Greek and Turkish cases seem to present additional challenges. Thereby, they face diverse problems and difficulties in the host societies ranging from regularisation procedures to employment, housing, health service, racism-discrimination, etcetera.

As a matter of fact, the *level of social integration* is strongly dependent on the cluster of organisations (associations, NGOs, political groups), active in anti-racism and support activities aimed at vulnerable people, along with solidarity and mutual support networks made up by migrants themselves or along with other people.

3. *Survival Strategies, Gender Awareness, and Networking Competence*

3.1 *Survival Strategies*

Good will is not enough to face the variety of situations that may show up in a new – and often hostile – context. In the light of difficulties that are being met by female African migrants in South Europe, both "survival" and

"strategy" (in terms of their essential implications) seem expedient to determine the modality of action to adopt in their migration project. In this sense, the notion of "survival" as a basic instinct to *stay alive* is conjugated with that of "strategy" as a cognitive product, *a manoeuvre*, in order to enhance one's life prospects.

Original usage of the Greek term "strategy", whose meaning was that of "leading an army", has been progressively enlarged to other areas of strategic planning, especially to various sectors of politics, economy, industry, and sport[15]. Progressively, the notion reached the reality of social sciences, hence the term has been dyed in various shades of sociological nature[16].

The fusion itself delivers a cluster of patterns, namely survival or coping strategies, which – as a method and a plan – are expected to be implemented when one comes to grips with his/her life's challenges. Survival strategies are being put into action so as to overcome potential challenges and eliminate obstacles hindering the achievement of a success, or to a better future, as well as to achieve the desired success and gain a sustainability of one's life in the chosen societal environment. So, it is about problem solving, and searching for passable solutions. To do so, one is called to employ all of survival strategies s/he has at his/her disposal, both in relation to macro and micro contexts. At any rate, one should apply the available set of strategies in dealing with the stakeholders (survival strategies help managing the expectations of and relations with stakeholders), with one's own community and other social actors involved in the process (individuals, families, migrant communities other than one's own, organisations working with and for migrants, socio-cultural associations, social movements, etc.).

Therefrom the question is: what strategies to survive? And what survival strategies for Sub-Saharan migrant women in Southern European countries? Plus, what would be the main channel of strategic planning aimed at overcoming obstacles? The procedure entails initiatives, mechanisms, interventions so as to be strategic – furthermore, these actions have to be aimed at surviving, that is overcoming a particular situations or conditions.

As a result of the crisis and migration policies, often proving to be rather restrictive, many migrants – and especially newcomers coming from unstable regions including a great deal of African continent – are constrained to develop survival strategies in order to face the circumstances they find in a new context. It is even more difficult to develop and employ survival strategies in receiving European societies, a part of which is likewise constrained to resort to survival strategies: grounds to do so may be different between the two realities – native and migrant, but modalities of their realisation can find several corresponden-

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[15] Strategy: "*a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sport, or the skill of planning for such situations.*" (Cambridge English Dictionary).
[16] See: Crow Graham, 1989 (*The Use of the Concept of 'Strategy' in Recent Sociological Literature*).

ces on both sides. All told, survival strategies can be relatively successful only if migrants have sufficiently large support networks at their disposal.

Diverse are the possibilities of survival strategies, the set of which is raging from socialisation, information, negotiation, mediation (balancing potential conflicts, breaking down prejudices and discriminatory attitudes), domination of situations (contexts, relations, resources etc.), routine i.e. standardisation of situations (social relations, contacts etc.), promotion, production and reproduction of good practices, up to more tangible – both positive and negative – day-to-day operations such as making acquaintances and friendships, schooling/training, professional positioning, cutting personal and life costs, and so forth. What is important for migrant communities, especially for newcomers, is to have a reference point, a milestone of contacts and relations functional to the purpose of gaining their autonomy in a receiving environment. By using survival strategies, migrants are shown the opportunities surrounding their condition so as to utilise them in a process of enhancing their position in a new society.

And such a process requires a network as a survival strategy indeed.

If a strategy calls for a concrete planning to achieve a goal, and is concurrently a cognitive and rational means to reach an objective, it further implies that a network – in order to be effective – needs to go along the same path. Actually, a networking activity itself involves a number of strategies, including the set of survival strategies.

In this sense, a network calls for its strategising – put differently: to be functional, a networking activity has to be strategised. It means that a networking activity depends upon a plan of action, aimed at achieving success in the situations the given network has been planned and built up for[17]. As a continuous process, such a strategic planning requires from all the involved to engage themselves in continuous rethinking of their condition in order to make it better, to make it go beyond its current limits so as to reach new frontiers of autonomy. If these are the final objectives of a strategic action, a network itself constitutes simultaneously a strategy and a strategy setting, on one hand, while on the other it represents a starting but also arrival point for both newcomers and established migrants in the receiving context.

For the purposes of the Project, survival strategies and networking competence with a focus on gender perspective bring the notion of gender awareness in the arena.

3.2 *Gender Awareness as a Networking Competence*

Gender awareness, both as a notion and action, acknowledges the relevance of gender in a variety of its social dimensions. According to its definition,

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[17] Strategise: "*to think of a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sport.*" (Cambridge English Dictionary).

the notion of "gender awareness" encompasses "*the knowledge and understanding of the differences in roles and relations between women and men, especially in the workplace*"[18]. The examination of gender in a gender-aware perspective brings about recognising the human experience as a "gendered" reality founded upon a bipolar classification of the humanity between women and men, or rather: a gender-ridden reality (social feature) that has been produced around the category of sex (biological feature). Once shaped, such a social structure started dictating roles, relations, needs, and expectations, all subject to change though. Further analysis in terms of gender awareness takes us to perceive, identify and understand the dynamics which affect the participation of women and men in decision-making processes: who decides, who fulfils, and who benefits? In point of fact, the whole picture is touched by a variable dose of inequity.

Without such awareness it is difficult to reach the point of realisation: and if the needs of the involved are not met and their interests not served, the actions suggested within a process – in a training process for instance – have a high probability of failing.

Considering the goals of the Project, gender awareness should be reckoned in relation to migration experience and parallel networking processes. Therefrom, its characterisation as a fundamental competence in a training aimed at networking skills in a migration contexts takes shape. In fact, researches (Curran & Saguy 2001) point out empirical evidence of a differential impact of networks on male and female migrants, but also of a differential influence of male and female networks (Curran & Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Davis & Winters 2000; Stecklov et al. 2008, 2010).

For instance, while men and women have a comparable access to migrant networks, their networks differ in size and composition. Men's networks tend to be larger, and are more likely to be exclusively composed of male friends and/or extended family members. Women's networks, on the other hand, are smaller and mostly composed of close family members. Several studies (e.g. Toma & Vause 2010) show as women were two times less likely than men to move "independently" to a destination where no member of their network had settled.

In other words, networks are gendered too. After all, it should be kept in mind that the societies and cultures of the world are permeated by the same feelings, hence being gendered proves to be an universally diffused phenomenon.

Gender awareness is a fundamental competence, considering the significant dynamics existing between migration processes and gender roles. New family compositions, new roles in the society, and the encounter with different gender ideologies, institutions and practices, can lead to challenges and renegotiations of pre-migration roles, beliefs, relations, and practices.

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[18] Cambridge English Dictionary.

3.3 *Networking as Social Capital and Competence*

In recent years, a growing amount of studies has documented the importance and influence of social networks in international migrations (cf. e.g. Curran & Saguy 2001; Curran & Rivero-Fuentes 2003; Stecklov et al. 2008; Toma & Vause 2010). However, there is little research integrating networking competences in training programmes, especially those addressing migrants. Meanwhile, social networks – understood as a social structure made up of individual social actors and groups pursuing common goals – are requested as a competence though not referred to as a such in training programmes: this instrument is rather implied than clearly emphasised and approached as a method and competence.

On the other hand, networks should be regarded as forms of social capital in the meaning given by Bourdieu (1985): according to the author, each individual occupies a position in a multidimensional social space, being not defined only by social class membership, but by every single kind of capital that s/he can articulate through social relations. That capital includes the value of social networks, which – as showed by Bourdieu – could be used to produce or reproduce inequality. The notion of social capital relates to the resources or profits to which individuals have access as a result of their membership or participation in groups such as families, parties or associations. Bourdieu identifies social capital as the result of the time and energy directed toward a series of material and/or symbolic exchanges among members that help to reproduce social relationships with the conscious or unconscious goal of promoting long-term obligations from which tangible or intangible profits derive. The profits gained can be economic, cultural or symbolic.

If we consider networking as a social capital, it is essential to consider the difference between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital. While close community relationships promote the idea of "bonding" social capital, intercultural relationships foster its "bridging". "Bridging" social capital enables individuals to network amid heterogeneous groups, and to connect and become cooperative with people from different backgrounds (Helliwell & Putnam 2007; Putnam 2000).

In the light of these considerations, the point of departure for a training project aimed at Sub-Saharan African women, as envisaged by the LeFamSol Project, is the significance of networks for their survival and incorporation into receiving societies. Accordingly, networking proves to be a fundamental competence leading the involved social actors to reach their goals.

In the context of migrations, networks can be ethnic (or rather monoethnic), but also mixed: as for the latter, the role and importance of associations is being recalled and remarked several times in the paper. As such, networks provide their members with interpersonal ties having a crucial role of informal mechanisms for information sharing at different stages of their migration experience. Ethnic networks may be a starting point, but it should be thereafter connected to other existing networks. In this very sense, many migrants

develop ties with institutions and organisations assisting them in getting documents and jobs, or in adjusting to society in their destination country.

Training for network facilitator, as the final goal of the Project, represents a pedagogical action aimed at acquiring competences in a migration context. A network, indeed, provides a channel which is used to make information circulate. Accordingly, training for a networking competence as a survival strategy may further represent a bridge towards the receiving society, especially when the vulnerable part of its population is also forced into survival strategies.

In conclusion, network is a tool of information and dissemination, expansion and connection. And it works with relationship power: it is not sufficient for the involved to rely on their values and objectives, but also on relations (contacts, connections, interactions, etc.) that are being created and promoted within the frames of a network – without relationships, other relevant elements may lose their power. Besides, to be functional in a globalised world, the beingness of a local network calls for a continuous expansion, hence the practicality of a network rests on its capacity to spread out from local to national and transnational magnitude. Such an approach, including relationship and expansion, is imperative to unlock the opportunities offered by the social context that migrants are involved by.

3.4 *Emergence and Utility of Networking: Social Support and Social Change*

A network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (individuals, groups or organisations) that are reciprocally connected by common interests or attributes acting as the ties that are interactively weaved and interwoven by the involved actors. As a such, a network may emerge, either spontaneously or intentionally, behind various reasons, yet all converging in the purpose of gaining and exchanging information.

Another important goal of networking is to increase visibility and establish helpful connections for the involved, which takes the issue closer to the notion of *social support and social change networking*.

Three types of social change networks have been identified[19]:

1) the *connectivity (emergent) network* which connects people to allow easy flow of and access to information;

2) the *alignment network* which aligns people to develop and spread an identity and a collective value proposition;

3) the *production (action) network* which fosters joint action for specific outcomes by aligned people.

To be functional to their purposes, networks call for a constant expansion and reorganisation in terms of sharing and exchanging contacts, connections, relations, communications, ideas, suggestions, activities, etc. The sector has

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[19] See: *Interaction Institute for Social Change* (2009), about types of Social change networks, cf. Networks and Network Building: http://www.interactioninstitute.org/services/network.

been progressively enriched up to the newest communication and social media tools in the field of telematic interaction, increasing so the breadth and scale of networking extent. By creating a strong network an individual or a group of people are being enabled to introduce changes in their life by negotiating their social positioning on various levels. Thereby, a network constitutes an *omni-directional informative, supportive and empowering platform* for its members.

As an affordable means of information and support, often relying on self-sustaining and self-organising infrastructure, networking is largely utilised by any kind of activism. Its *extensive use* has been observed *throughout migrant communities* too with the goal of achieving their purposes in informing, organising, supporting and mobilising their members. Thus, networking is a strong tool in the processes of social, cultural and political participation of migrants.

3.5 *Network Building in Relation to the LeFamSol Project Goals*

Network building is a process that fosters, cultivates and develops connections and relationships in order to maximise the potential for people to actualise a shared intention[20]. In order to reach their goals, the LeFamSol partners are developing national networks in conformity to the Project's objectives. Before starting up, it is necessary to have clear what are the objectives and who are the beneficiaries of the action. These factors are relevant for delineating the networks in terms of their mapping, building and exploitation.

Two types of network are planned to be built up in the frames of the LeFamSol Project in order to cover relations with the Target group, on one hand, and with the Larger context, on the other. By doing so, the Project has entered the stage of *network building for social change*.

Schematically, the steps to undertake while moving from network identification and mapping to other networking activities are the following:

Identification-mapping activity: research, fieldwork, study/understanding

- *community / target group network(s)*: identification and mapping of community networks – in conformity to the goals of the LeFamSol Project, particular attention is paid to Sub-Saharan migrant population, especially to its female segment;
- *larger context network(s)*: identification and mapping of the networks involving other social actors operating in the field; the network based upon a larger context is then elicited, developed and utilised in conformity to particular FAM networks.

Once the networks are identified and mapped, they should be contacted in order to interact with them to the needs of the community or communities in question:

[20] See: *Interaction Institute for Social Change* 2009, http://www.interactioninstitute.org/services/network.

Building-exploitation activity: fieldwork, contacting, interaction
- *network building*: creation and development of a network functional to the prearranged purposes;
- *network exploitation*: exploitation of the network.

In the stage of network building, some common parameters should be followed. Applied to the case of the LeFamSol Project, the common parameters are the following:

- while surveying community networks of Sub-Saharan immigrant population, particular attention is paid to its *female segments* and *their needs*;
- consider differences that may emerge between explicitly *women's* and men's *networks* in order to identify *potentialities* and *specific needs* of the former;
- other *ethnic networks* and *migrant associations* should be considered too;
- in the frames of a larger context, *a number of structures* should be contacted and possibly involved into the LeFamSol network: state/national/regional/local bodies, international organisations, public administration, political parties, trade unions, research organisations, individual experts, and esp. 3rd Sector (NGOs, voluntary associations, social promotion associations, grassroots organisations, etc.);
- while undertaking these steps, it is important to *understand the role* of social stakeholders in the field, and particularly in relation to the purposes of the Project;
- possible *interrelations* between diverse networking sectors should be identified, explored, and possibly capitalised on for the benefit of the Project's development;
- both in the case of community/target group and the larger context, the potentiality of *naturally emerging groups* are to be reckoned and explored.

3.6 *Network Facilitating and Intercultural Competence*

The Project's philosophy relies on a gender-based approach to migration and networking dynamics. The idea is to move from needs to skills with the goal of shaping a professional profile defined as **"*network facilitator*"**: it is about a person who would integrate the skills of a social guide, informant, socio-cultural and linguistic mediator, interpreter, consultant, facilitator herself, including a variety of other possible *ad hoc* skills.

Considering the target groups and the context they are set in, networking, or rather network facilitating skills, coupled with gender awareness, should then be combined with intercultural competence. Accordingly, the Project aims at creating a cultural mediation module with the goal of creating a number of network facilitators per country. Educational model itself could be a source of "bridging" social capital. Such a model should enhance social skills, value the

learning potential of disjunctural experiences owing to unfamiliar situations, and develop outward-oriented gaze in individuals (cf. Onorati 2010).

As for the notion of intercultural competence, we refer (among other possible definitions) to the culturally aware mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enables people to manage unfamiliar situations and ever-changing problems (at work as in life), arising from the encounter with people socialised in different cultures, with a view to finding new and shared solutions (Onorati & Bednarz 2010).

Such a definition implies several pedagogical challenges, such as the transformative approach to learning (Mezirow 2000), and the need of embedding learning in relational and physical contexts inside which people move and meet. It entails a shift from a mere cognitive approach to competence building based on movements going from the inside out, towards external spaces, by activating meaningful interactions with and within living and working contexts, inside which we can experience relational dynamics. This is directly linked to a reciprocity principle that requires the willingness to integrate elements from other people's experience, and the potentiality to adapt one's own. Peer-to-peer approach makes this methodology a tool of training process.

Relationships and interactions are a fundamental learning driver and resource. Bridging strategic and tactical approaches to intercultural competence is needed so as to integrate the logic of constructivist and pragmatic approaches, the former (constructivist) being based on the idea of individual responsibility in building social representations, hence also in co-building of awareness and competency, while the latter (pragmatic) mainly focuses on improving intercultural communication skills throughout environments and contexts.

4. *Target Group and Training Needs Assessment*

The core objective of the Project is to provide a training to a selected number of migrant women from Sub-Saharan Africa with the goal of making them acquire necessary skills for identifying and approaching services crucial for their adaptation in host societies. Following the line of reasoning emerging from the principles of adult and intercultural education, it is essential to start from a process of needs assessment to be pursued with the selected target groups. Thus, both target – namely Sub-Saharan migrant women – and their needs have to be elicited: in the LeFamSol context, the focus group method has been identified as the most appropriate elicitation technique so as to gain access to both target group and its training needs.

In order to explore the set of training needs of the target groups by gaining access to their "indigenous coding systems" (Holstein & Gubrium 1995), it would be preferable to involve pre-existing or naturally emerging groups and networks (if existing) in the process. This would have several advantages including the following: participants having a shared experience which is particularly important in potentially stigmatising situations (Farquhar & Das 1999) (e.g. being a migrant, be a migrant woman, being native to Sub-Saharan

Africa etc.). As a key factor, pre-existing or naturally emerging groups can reduce recruitment efforts of the researcher, and instil a sense of shared obligation to attend atraining process.

4.1 *Elicitation as a Technique*

Being employed in diverse disciplinary fields, elicitation offers one of possible exploratory strategies used to collect information and gain novel knowledge so as to arrive at a deeper understanding of a context (cf. Cooke; Holstein & Gubrium). Since such a knowledge cannot be omitted from the field of networking and facilitating activities, it has been employed in the frames of the LeFamSol Project in order to get information useful for training activities.

In conformity to its basic meaning of "extracting, drawing out", *elicitation* is an exploratory activity aimed at testing the ground: it is employed to probe, explore, examine the object of inquiry by eliciting any possible knowledge or information on it from the social actors involved in a particular field. Accordingly, elicitation implies a process of "evoking, educing", and finally "extracting" any kind of information be it about emotions, feelings, responses, ideas, suggestions, solutions, etc. referring to the object of inquiry. Originated in psychology (e.g. methods of emotion elicitation or evocation in social psychology) and neurolinguistics (esp. in neuro-linguistic programming, NLP, created by Richard Bandler and John Grinder in the 1970s), the practice of elicitation has expanded its horizons to other disciplinary areas including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, cognitive science, pedagogy/education, linguistics, language teaching, knowledge engineering, etc.

Elicitation practice involves two key elements: elicitor and elicitation techniques (cf. Cooke). The activity of elicitation is guided by the persona of *elicitor*[21] interacting with human subjects in order to elicit information from them. Elicitation practice enumerates a set of techniques which are (broadly speaking) based on deduction and derivation. Elicitor usually employs available techniques in a "hidden" way, meaning that the path to arrive at a sought-after information is followed in a logic and direct though (apparently) latent manner.

Elicitation techniques. Every reaction to an elicitation stimulus contains the potential of generating a novel information which is supposed to come out by means of various techniques. The following are the most recurrent elicitation techniques, or rather techniques mostly used or combined with elicitation:
- *documentation analysis* (gathering information from written sources: study of existing documentation, literature, press etc.)
- *survey* (data survey, used for studying a large sample of people, anonymously, in a relatively short time)

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[21] Depending on the context, *elicitor* may be defined as *experimenter*, *analyst*, *knowledge engineer*, or else.

- *observation* (empirical fieldwork, may require a long-term research activity)
- *interview* (open or structured, relying upon questionnaires)
- *brainstorming* (a technique of eliciting a number of creative ideas; relying upon a prearranged grid)
- *facilitated workshop* (more thematically oriented technique, guided by a facilitator; relying upon a prearranged grid)
- *focus group* (a technique of eliciting ideas and attitudes towards a topic; though being fluid and interactive, this technique relies upon a prearranged grid).

The named techniques can be diversified by the role of elicitor (researcher, teacher) in terms of her/his involvement, participation and interaction, which may be passive or active (in/visible, in/direct): accordingly, the first two – documentation analysis and survey – are passive (invisible) techniques; observation may be either passive or active (participant observation), or both in combination; so is interview which envisages the possibility of individual or group talks which may involve some aspects of both a passive and active methods, while a written interview represents passive method. Finally, brainstorming, facilitated workshop and focus group represent active techniques being set in an interactive group environment. Some active techniques rely upon a guidance in form of questions, suggestions, indications, and other encouraging tools put into practice so as to stimulate the participation of the elicited.

The outlined elicitation techniques are functional to the purposes of the LeFamSol Project too. They are discussed and prepared in advance so as to be shaped in relation to the context they are going to be applied to. Commonly, elicitation techniques are not employed separately, but in combination with each other.

Elicitation as a teaching and research technique. Elicitation is widely recommended in the field of education and teaching, with a particular attention to language learning. As a teaching technique, elicitation consists in extracting information or rather fragments of information from students: the latter already possess various information which, being distributed in casual and incomplete manner, seems not to be significant until its fragments, by eliciting, get connected among them. Important aspect of this technique is *anticipation* that allows the involved to explore diverse possibilities by anticipating answers before arriving at a more complete understanding of the problem. The role of elicitor (teacher) is to make the students aware of what they already know, and to guide them to conjugate this knowledge with a new input.

The same principles make elicitation one of the widely used techniques in the research process of various disciplines. It relies upon a number of techniques that may vary in accordance to the disciplinary field and the context they are applied to. In the context of the LeFamSol Project, the elicitation process

aimed at collecting a novel information largely relies on the previously identified networks.

Needs elicitation. Elicitation may lead to identifying and understanding various information. One of the main goals is to draw out the *priority needs* of the elicited individual or group in a determined context. In the frames of the LeFamSol Project, this cluster is given by the needs claimed by African Sub-Saharan migrant women in relation to their host societies. In this case, elicitation involves the actions that are taken to understand the LeFamSol target groups and their attitudes in relation to their specific needs in Italy, Greece and Turkey. Meaning that an analysis of their migration experiences (along with collateral effects in each country) implies their coping strategies in emigration contexts, which are further relevant for the upcoming steps in the Project's progress (training in this very stage).

Elicitation agenda. The practice of elicitation requires a pre-activity preparation. So as to reach its goals, the activity should be planned in advance in form of elicitation agenda. The process itself includes several variables, namely: interaction, exploration, discovery, collection, organisation, analysis, understanding, all being subject to a good dose of variability. Therefore, the named variables, esp. in relation to the potential of change, have to be taken into account while preparing an elicitation agenda.

First of all, the elicitor should have clear previously discussed aspects, namely:

- *target (of elicitation)*: what/who?, who is the subject of elicitation?, and in what context?
- *context*: who are other social actors/stakeholders to be involved into to a process of eliciting information?
- *needs*: what are the specific needs to be discovered by means of elicitation (*anticipation*)?, and what *other issues*, behind specific needs, are to be explored for the purposes of study, research, survey, networking activities, etc.?

Against the background of target, context and specific needs, operative steps should be planned. In this sense, the elicitor (researcher) or eliciting team should:

- prepare a *plan and calendar* of the fieldwork so as to have guidelines towards and during the process of elicitation;
- *contact* and *establish relations* with individuals, groups or organisations to be involved into the elicitation process;
- select *elicitation techniques* upon the needs of the context under consideration, and keep other possible techniques in reserve;
- determine, on the basis of the selected techniques, *operative tools* that could be useful for the fieldwork (grids, interview plan, reserve questions etc.);
- prepare *questionnaires* and *indicative discussion agendas* that interviews with stakeholders and FAMs (basically of open nature) will rely upon;

- consider the *possibility of changes* and (unexpected) responses during the elicitation process.

Thus equipped elicitor/eliciting team will be able to conduct a fieldwork and other activities functional to the objectives of the given programme.

4.2 *From Needs to Skills: Shaping the Basis of a Training Curriculum*[22]

Taking the discussions emerged during the focus groups as a background, the identified training needs will be translated into a coherent set of skills forming the basis of a training curriculum. A particular emphasis will be put on two criteria for selection of these core skills:

a)   The skills should be generic or transversal so as to be easily transferable from one context of application to another, and

b)   The contexts of application of these generic skills should be multiple and highly relevant to the migrants' experience.

Objectives	Acquisition and application of skills useful while facing the challenges that migrants daily meet in the host societies
Content	Generic skills should be multiple and highly relevant to migrants' experiences as emerging from the focus group discussions
Sequencing	From simpler to more complex and demanding skills
Pacing	Slow pacing so as to allow trainees to get involved and to reflect upon a multiplicity of authentic problem-solving contexts related to certain skills at a time
Evaluation	Transfer of the newly acquired skills for solving novel and authentic problems (other than those presented in the main training course)

As regards the training procedures, the Project adopts the principles of adult and intercultural education, with a focus on gender perspective, that can be summarised as follows:

- *Community building.* The activity of community building requires an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust; to reach such an atmosphere, it is important to share leadership, give a chance for each trainee to tell her own experiences and ideas, and involve all trainees into a cooperative work on commonly agreed problem-solving situations. What is more, this method validates their experiences as a knowledge.
- *Consciousness-raising.* This activity is related to the principle of positionality, namely making explicit how race, class, gender or other identity variables can influence the lives of the trainees.
- *Involvement in the training process.* All tasks and activities should involve all the trainees: to reach this goal, tasks and activities have to

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[22] This chapter is partly based on the works by M. G. Onorati and F. Bednarz; for further reading, see: Onorati 2009; Onorati 2010; Onorati & Bednarz 2010.

be highly relevant to the lives of the trainees who should be put into a position of active problem solvers. By this, the role of trainers is restricted to orchestrating relevant tasks and providing adequate support and feedback so as to allow the trainees to meet the challenges faced by them.

- *Increasingly higher levels of trainees' autonomy.* As the training course proceeds, trainees should enjoy increasingly higher levels of autonomy in fulfilling the training tasks and activities. On one hand, this strategy allows trainers to assess the level trainees have grasped the necessary skills, while on the other it will provide trainees with a sense of increasing self-efficacy which can make the outcomes of the LeFamSol Project more sustainable.

These principles go hand by hand with the principles of the learning model for network facilitators taking into account an intercultural dimension:

- incorporating the experience of participants as a tool that allows trainees to start developing their skills with immediate feedback;
- emotional-relational dimension of learning process;
- planning approach that focuses on working in a group, and planning of events or productions;
- focus on case studies / specific cases / example cases;
- acknowledgement of critical points and research of possible solutions by using theoretical schemes, elaborated or inferred from one's own experience;
- use of reflection tools intended as classifiers of experiences aimed at systematisation in terms of knowledge.

5. *Naturally Emerging Networks: the Italian Case*

In order to build, support, and strengthen a network, the Project moves from the concept of "naturally emerging networks", meaning that a network is as strong as its "natural" members and environments are strong, the qualifier "natural" being perceived in its social dimension. In the frames of the LeFamSol Project, such a framework entails the involvement of two communities: naturally emerging stakeholders (the context), on one hand, and naturally emerging groups of female migrants (the involved), on the other. The scenario that emerged should be, finally, placed into a general context, be it embedded in a local, regional, interregional, national, transnational, or other reality. Herein, the situation will be illustrated on the example of the Italian national context.

5.1 *Outline of Support Networking among African Migrants in the LeFamSol Countries*

By entering the field of support networking among African migrants we are back to the differences existing between the countries of the LeFamSol

consortium: despite specificities of single communities, a certain level of social mobilisation (through associations, NGOs, parties) is being observed in Italy, while Greece and Turkey present a rather different situation.

Since the emergence of African migrations to *Italy* (esp. in the 1970s), associations have constituted an useful resource to provide *solidarity and mutual support networks*. Though based upon national links and common migratory history (which esp. applies to the reality of migrant women associations), several among relevant organisations are actually mixed, including Italian citizens, less other migrants. Thus, though being built up around a group of African women native to a particular or more than one nationality, it is often the case of multi-ethnic associations gathering both African and Italian women. Gender classification has also played important role in some cases, while it has been left aside in others, hence both exclusively female, and mixed-gender associations can be reckoned among African migrants residing in Italy. Besides, some communities or groups of African migrants are linked to churches or mosques, though not exclusively.

In other two countries, the situation proves to be far less developed. There are very few places where African migrants might seek assistance in *Turkey* (a limited number of Christian Churches, Refugee support programmes, the UNHCR, human rights associations and solidarity networks). Besides, African migrants in Turkey lack in social networks: West Africans, such as Ghanaians and Nigerians, are the only ones to have important social networks organised through churches. Networks and associations founded by African/Sub-Saharan migrants are a recent phenomenon in *Greece* too: more than a half have been founded since 2005 onwards, while more than 90% of their associations are based in Athens, basically in the city centre.

For many African migrants, racial discrimination, exploitation, extreme poverty, no health care, along with the lack of social support networks, is the reality which makes their daily struggle harder, putting them in a particularly vulnerable position. Conjugated with the lack of legal long-term stay prospects, their condition pushes many African migrants to abandon Greece, Turkey, and (even) Italy, in order to move towards other EU destinations.

5.2 *Naturally Emerging Stakeholders in Italy*

The following paragraph reports on the engagement of social stakeholders in the frames of the Italian national context. All variously concerned with migrations, the following are the sectors covered by the action of the involved stakeholders: Public Administration, International Organisations (IO), Research/Education (Knowledge Exchange), and Third Sector. The relations existing between various sectors are of complementary nature as they reciprocally rely on the contributions provided by each of them: while Public Administration bodies supply policy directives, IO and Research/Education Sector offer their knowledge capital, the Third Sector is directly involved with actual situations and implementation.

Public Administration. Public Administration bodies operate on various territorial and operative levels. Concerned Ministries are engaged with issuing national provisions and policy directives regarding immigration (laws, guidelines, reports etc.), and establish national and international relationships aimed at action planning, implementation, cooperation, and other activities. The Florence-based LeFamSol team prevailingly relies on relationships with local authorities, namely Region, Provinces, and esp. Municipalities (*Comuni*). The Municipality of Florence, along with its inner bodies (esp. *Assessorati* – Town Councils or Boards), variously contributes to social policies relevant for the Project. The Municipality provides a row of services (social and health services, register offices, public employment agencies etc.) that can be employed for the benefit of the Project. As for the phenomenon of migrations, the Municipality offers specific services e.g. immigration office, immigration help desks, healthcare counselling for immigrants, including the production of relevant guidebooks and other information materials, which altogether constitute valuable references for the overall Project objectives and activities.

IO (International Organisations). IO offer a precious expertise in terms of action and research oriented activities (e.g. refugee support programmes), and support tools (reports, surveys, recommendations, social policies etc.). As regards the spectrum of IO in relation to the LeFamSol Project, the UF research team is in contact with IOM and UNHCR offices in Rome, and with Oxfam Italia (main office in Arezzo, Tuscany).

Research/Education (Knowledge Exchange). The focus of the sector involved with research and education is knowledge exchange. More in detail: its goal is knowledge creation, promotion and transfer through knowledge exchange activities, with particular attention to knowledge exchange opportunities. The structures that fall into the knowledge exchange sector are universities, research centres, training agencies, language schools, statistical centres, including individual experts. They develop research and study activities, produce research reports, surveys, data collection, propose recommendations, create training etc., as a social capital usable for various purposes. The aspects which are particularly significant for the LeFamSol Project are knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange opportunities. In the frames of the Project, the main expertise is supplied by the research team of the UF having connections and relations with a row of Universities, research centres, training agencies, and individual experts on both national and international levels.

Third Sector. Places where migrants can seek immediate assistance and support are primarily concentrated in the Third Sector. In fact, the services supplied by the Third Sector prove to be notably consistent and significant in many aspects, especially from a practical point of view. Being directly involved with actual situations, the Third Sector offers a large gamut of social support services in form of reception, orientation, legal assistance, translation/interpreting, mediation, language courses, and many others. Thus, various Third Sector segments cover a good deal of needs and emergencies that migrants,

and in particular FAMs, might face in Italy. In this sense, important is the role of the Third Sector network which brings together NGOs, cooperatives, solidarity networks, anti-violence centres, women support centres, community organisations, social promotion associations, grassroots organisations, housing associations, trade unions, voluntary associations, churches etc.

The segment of *ethnic/community networks* and *migrant associations*, including African migrants in Italy, is addressed by the following paragraph.

5.3 *Naturally Emerging Groups of Female African Migrants (FAMs) in Italy*

African migrants, community organisation and social mobilisation. The reality of African migrations is not a new phenomenon in Italy: it particularly applies to Senegal, Morocco, the Horn of Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, and other nationalities whose citizens have been migrating to Italy since the 1970/80s. Despite specificities of single communities, a certain level of social mobilisation (associations, NGOs, parties) is being observed in Italy. Several among African national groups have been making attempts of organising themselves since the very beginning of they migratory experience in Italy. Amidst various forms of community organisation, associations have constituted an useful resource to provide solidarity and mutual support networks among African migrants. Though being present all over the Italian territory, the bulk of African migrants is settled in larger urban centres, esp. in the Centre-North of the Country, where they got socioculturally and politically organised. In this scenario, Tuscany Region presents important experiences of inner organisation among African citizens.

The will to get organised has led African migrants in Italy to creating a space for their associations, parties, networks, founded on various grounds, namely: community, ethnic, national; interethnic, multinational i.e. mixed-African (e.g. *ADAS - Associazione Donne dell'Africa Subsahariana / Sub-Saharan African Women Association*, Milan); international i.e. mixed with other migrant groups; mixed with Italian citizens. Beyond their national affiliation, these structures are further characterised by their experience (associations / networks made up of students, youth, workers, professionals of a particular sector etc.) and commitment (sociocultural promotion, voluntary work, struggle for peace and equality etc.). From a gender perspective, male, female and mixed-gender organisations are reckoned in this arena. Finally, religious aggregation with churches, having main centres in Rome, is another pattern of community organisation (esp. Eritrean, Ethiopian, Nigerian communities).

Some organisations are established on rather informal grounds which is often the case of associations acting as an inner tool of community organising and governing. In other cases, African migrants have been organised so as to cover up to a national level of community networking, e.g. *Ass. Donne somale in Italia* (*Somali Women Association in Italy*), or *Comunità Eritrea in Italia* (*Eritrean Community in Italy*), with the possibility of local branches, e.g. *Comunità Eritrea in Toscana* (*Eritrean Community in Tuscany*), *Comunità Somala in Toscana* (*Somali Community in Tuscany*), *Nigerian Citizens Commu-*

nity (Tuscany), or more generally – *Federazione Africana in Toscana* (*African Federation in Tuscany*).

In this panorama, organisations and support networks among *African women* have not been missing either. Broadly speaking, migrant women organisations tend to reproduce the specific migratory history of single national groups (associations of women native to Cape Verde and the Horn of Africa exist since the 1980s), and to reflect somehow the degree of group cohesion and inner gender relationships (mixed-gender and/or exclusively female associations). To boot, migrant women are frequently gathered on a gender basis in multi-ethnic associations, often including Italian members too, with the goal of supporting migrant women in achieving their rights and developing specific skills in providing welfare services to the migrant population. Women native to Sub-Saharan regions count experiences in this sector as well. Be they involved with either female, community, national, mixed, or other sort of associations, Nigerian, Eritrean and Somali women play a key role in sociocultural life of their communities and beyond in Italy.

Forms of community organisation and the extent of community action are important indicators for elicitation of community needs, while different typologies of organisation may imply different priorities. On the same grounds, this outline is further important for the following steps of the LeFamSol Project.

Scope of action. Regarding the scope of action of both African/FAMs associations, and the FAMs involved in the LeFamSol Project, the situation is rather variegated. As already said, the profile of African and FAM associations are variously defined – they can be: national, African, mixed; male, female, mixed; in relation to the territory of their migration destination (Italy), they reach local, regional, interregional or national level. A part of associations rely on other structures (authorities, NGOs, associations, churches etc.) operating in the field, making common efforts in presenting themselves and their activities (web information, press, conferences and other public presentations etc.). Accordingly, community cohesion is characterised by the same set of factors being dictated by the scope of action that a single organisation or a group of organisations may cover. On these grounds, their activities will be further diversified, meaning that community associations organised at national level (for instance) have different prospects of action in comparison with locally contextualised structures; the same can be said for mixed and nation (community) oriented associations. In many cases, organisations develop contacts and relationships with each other, often in the frames of particular projects, programmes, actions, though even temporarily. The FAMs involved with the LeFamSol Project in Italy are chiefly active on a local (city, municipality, province, region) level. As for the stakeholders involved, many of them have a larger action history – on the same grounds, some of the FAMs have experienced involvement in activities of a greater extent as members of particular structures operating in the field. In this sen-

se, some African associations have been rather active, as well as some mixed organisations, as e.g. *Arcobaleno* and *Nosotras*, which include (in various ways and to various extents) also FAMs into their activities (projects, programmes, cooperation, campaigns etc.).

Specific needs and community engagement. Characteristics of single communities, combined with the specificities emerged from their migration experience, are to be reckoned while delineating a training curriculum. Meaning that an analysis of their migration experiences (including concomitant effects in the receiving society) implies their coping strategies in emigration contexts, which is relevant for the Project and its actions. The engagement of African and FAM associations can be viewed through the prism of their activities, on one hand, and difficulties faced by community members, on the other.

Cohesion and promotion. Starting from the cluster of *priority needs*, the activities of African communities are aimed at promoting: inner cohesion and solidarity; cooperation with the surrounding social context; communication, information and exchange activities; sociocultural activities; educational activities; struggle for peace; struggle for rights and equality, etc.

Specific needs of FAMs. As far as the FAMs themselves are concerned, the said activities are added by further specific requirements based on the needs claimed by the target group, viz. African Sub-Saharan migrant women in relation to the context of their host society, i.e. Italy, namely: particular attention to female segments of African communities; reception and protection; attention to their specific needs and rights; specific health care; legal assistance (e.g. in regularisation procedures).

Pending difficulties and issues. Regarding difficulties in interacting with the host society, many African migrants keep facing several pending issues, ranging from race-based discriminatory attitudes to labour exploitation in several economic sectors conjugated (in some cases) with trafficking; some encounter difficulties in approaching services dealing with health care, housing, refugees/asylum status.

To boot, though being in continuous growth, African and generally migrant associations have a little weight in policy making and deciding in Italy. These variables altogether often preclude African citizens and FAMs from reaching an adequate social visibility and their active participation, which – in its turn – deepens their exposition to social vulnerability. Finally, their condition makes them susceptible to trafficking, exploitation, and abuse, putting them in a particularly vulnerable position.

Importance of networking in community mobilisation. As a strong tool in the processes of socio-political participation, networking constitutes an *omnidirectional informative, supportive and empowering platform* for its members. In consideration of their needs, issues and priorities, one of the main goals of social support networking is to increase visibility and establish helpful links for the involved FAMs. Therefrom, purposes in informing, organising, supporting and mobilising both FAMs and other members of their communities will be achieved.

Target group building. The target group involved is being shaped as a result of personal and institutional networks that the LeFamSol research group of the University of Florence was aware of. In this very sense, some women were contacted through personal contacts of the LeFamSol team; some contacts were provided by the Sub-Saharan women themselves; some others relied on institutional networking, esp. through interaction with certain associations, as for instance *Arcobaleno* and *Nosotras*. This way, the target group constituted in the city of Florence has come out as a naturally emerging group.

Target group composition. As envisaged by the Projects, the target group of FAMs that has been contacted for the purposes of the LeFamSol Project is composed of Somali, Eritrean, and Nigerian women; in the final stage of the Project, they have been added by women native to other Sub-Saharan realities, namely Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and else. In terms of their (migratory, professional, educational, linguistic etc.) background, the members of the target group present a miscellanea of life stories. They are all first generation migrants in Italy, mostly long- or mid-term arrivals (since the late 1990s throughout the 2000s including the most recent years). Their age varies from 25-40, rarely elder. Some are married, some with no husband, and some with their children in Italy. Besides, the contacted women are all variously involved by educational experiences ranging from basic education to university degree. Such a variety has been important for their current socio-cultural and political involvement in the new context: some of the FAMs are already and variously acquainted with diverse forms of social, cultural and political work; some others are active in the field of linguistic and cultural mediation on behalf of associations and organisations dealing with migrations, in particular with the flows coming from Africa; some of them are particularly engaged in the field of schooling and education; finally, some are refugees being interested in social issues.

Findings and Conclusions

Only a radical improvement in living standards of many Sub-Saharan African countries would stem the flow of desperate people from Africa to Europe. Yet, this is not likely to happen in the near future: Africa is strewn with the consequences of conflicts, unstable situations, socio-economic and political crises...; on the other side, Europe with a crisis on its hands that is feeding the rise of populist anti-immigration parties and xenophobia across the Continent.

Such a state of affairs leaves a little space to deal with. What is possible to do with and for a specific group – Sub-Saharan African women in a migration context – is to develop a particular survival strategy, namely networking competence in a gender-aware perspective with a network facilitator as a key social actor. In fact, the methodology adopted by the LeFamSol Project tries to provide Sub-Saharan African women with competences that can encourage

survival strategies in a particularly difficult context.

The Project considers the specific role of networks and gender dimension as social capital in the meaning proposed by Bourdieu (1985). Therefrom, it reckons the importance of "bridging" social capital in a migration experience in order to promote intercultural relationships, fostering thus a better understanding of and with the receiving society.

While moving from focus group activities to training, some preliminary observations on the cluster of priority needs, as expressed by the women contacted through interviews, informal talks, and focus groups, can be made. Accordingly, we would like to conclude the paper by presenting some findings reached by the LeFamSol research group of the University of Florence (UF, Department of Education) to date.

The UF research group organised 11 meetings purposely arranged with the goal of having a talk with selected female African migrants. Every meeting was introduced by specifications regarding the LeFamSol Project and its objectives. Meetings, held in various locations, were individual, and only rarely performed in couple (2 interviewees together). The majority of interviewees were Nigerian women, including a few native to Somalia and Eritrea. Besides, a talk with two Nigerian women, another one with a representative Somali woman, as well as three focus groups involving women from various African realities (Nigeria, Somalia, Eritrea, Senegal, Cameroon, etc.), run at the premises of the *Arcobaleno* Association (Florence), provided important information for the upcoming stages of the Project.

As for the outcomes emerged from meetings and talks with female African migrants the aspects which have been remarkably stressed by them are the following:

- *employment*: the need of job, followed by other hardships faced by migrants, and in particular female African migrants: women contacted by the UF team stated to be quite happy with reception and guidance they were given in Italy; but the general economic crisis is felt and entails a number of difficulties; our informants are all regular residents in Italy (with different stay permits), but they said that the whole situation is particularly hard for newly arrived migrants, and especially female African migrants: language barriers (at least initially), coupled with xenophobia, take them to unemployment or employment in irregular market.

- *remarks to ethnic/nation-based networks*: some women expressed their remarks with regard to ethnic/nation-based networks: they agree that this form of networking may bring people together; yet, it entails risks of reducing a person to "her/his" ethnic/national space, on one hand, and can be risky for certain individuals, women included, who have escaped from hostile conditions in their countries, or have suffered particular migration experiences.

- *sustainability and continuity*: what emerged as a fleeting aspect in research and action projects (in general) is a meagre potential of their sustainability and continuity, hence the need of a sustainable coo-

peration between all social actors in order to provide more effective services to the community of female African migrants; in the light of difficulties finding a long-term job, some women – especially those involved in mediation and other forms of social work – expressed their doubts regarding the sustainability of mediation and guidance activities.

- *self-help desk as a good practice*: along with previous remarks, women stated that a self-help desk could be an useful tool of guidance and positioning: although solidarity networks, information points and reception centres are not a novelty in the Italian context, the idea of creating a self-help desk for female African migrants with particular migration experiences and needs has been generally judged as a good practice.

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