University of Sussex
Sussex Centre for Migration Research

In recent years, debates about the three interconnected themes of the migration development nexus brain drain, remittances and diaspora have been dominated by Northern academics and policy-makers. This paper gives voice to the migrants themselves, exploring their experiences and perceptions of skilled migration and its relationship with development. It is based on semi-structured interviews with thirteen skilled migrants from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda who have emigrated to Belgium but participate in the development of their homeland with the support of the IOM MIDA Great Lakes programme. The main findings of the study relate to the complexity of the dynamics at work in the migration development nexus; the centrality of conditions in home countries in shaping the developmental impact of migration

Introduction: The Migration Development Nexus

In his foreword to Dambisa Moyo's pamphlet (2009), Niall Ferguson writes:

> It has long seemed to me problematic, and even a little embarrassing, that so much of the public debate about Africa's economic problems should be conducted by non-African white men
>
> colonised as surely as the African continent was a century ago.

This remark certainly applies to the 'migration development nexus' (Nyberg-Sørensen 2002), understood as the particular sub-field of migration studies which is concerned with the impact of international migration on developing countries of origin.

Whereas migration used to be ignored or condemned in the development discourse, the theoretical debate has recently focused on the positive effects of migration on development (Bakewell 2008). This theoretical activity has been matched by considerable policy-making interest with a number of high-level UN initiatives and the multiplication of related development programmes. This debate has focused on 'three major interconnected themes: remittances; skilled migration and brain drain; and diaspora' (Skeldon 2008: 7).

The steady increase of remittance flows,[2] particularly when compared with other types of international financial transfers such as export income, FDI or ODA, has played a crucial role in their celebration as 'the new development finance' (Wimaladharma 2004). Macro-economic studies establishing their poverty-reduction impact in the developing world (Adams and Page 2005) have also contributed to convert remittances into 'the new development mantra' (Kapur 2003). Development agencies and governments have therefore attempted to increase the amounts transferred and their alleged developmental effects. The intensification of skilled migration has also contributed to the recent interest in the migration development nexus: 'between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of skilled workers among immigrants [in OECD countries] increased by 4.8 percentage points (from 29.8 percent to 34.6 percent)', raising the stock of skilled migrants in OECD countries to 20.4 million (Docquier and Marfouk 2006: 168).[3] According to the World Bank, 'more than 20,000 African professionals leave the continent each year' and 'around one-third of the most qualified African nationals have settled outside their country of origin' (quoted in Davies 2007: 60). As a result, the idea that diasporas can be mobilised to mitigate the detrimental consequences of the phenomenon has gained increased currency. More generally, authors have called for a broader consideration of the role of diasporas,

2004). Since then, this theme has attracted considerable attention (Davies 2007; De

[2] Remittances were estimated at $305 billion in 2008 (Ratha and Mohapatra, 2009: 1). These figures do not include the large amounts transferred by migrants through informal channels.

demand driven capacity building programme' aiming at 'the mobilisation or transfer of knowledge, know-how or expertise, financial and other resources of Africans in the diaspora to meet the identified skills needs for development in African countries' (IOM 2007: 9).

Although MIDA builds on the expertise of previous IOM 'return and reintegration of qualified nationals' programmes implemented since the 1970s (Pires 1992), it differs from its precursors in that it offers 'more options than simply definitive return, as for example temporary returns, short

existing technology for providing support to universities, schools and private companies' (IOM 2007: 15). Since its creation, the programme has been implemented in sixteen African countries with funding from a variety of donors including Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK and USA.

The MIDA Great Lakes programme, funded by Belgium, was created in 2001 'with the aim of reinforcing the institutional capacities of Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic

Finally, the two epigraphs quoted at the beginning of this study essentially describe a

migration itineraries of the participants. The subsequent one focuses on the interplay between their identities and the conditions of their integration in Belgium, on the one side, and the forms of their transnational

patterns of migration also considerably evolved from the 1980s, with family reunification and asylum-seeking becoming major entry routes for sub-Saharan Africans in Belgium.

As far as the sub-Saharan student population is concerned, it presented the following characteristics in 1996-1997: the Congolese (1,757 students), the Cameroonese (595), the Burundians (159), the Rwandans (99), the Nigerians (99), and the Senegalese (70) were the biggest groups, representing 80 percent of the total (5,918). These students were overwhelmingly male (4,170 men and 1,748 women) and were overwhelmingly studying in the francophone universities (5,204) as opposed to the Flemish-speaking ones (714). Concerning the fields of studies, they were also increasingly diversified. The health sector was still dominant, but areas such as law and economics also attracted sub-Saharan students (Kagné and Martiniello 2001: 8-9; 21-23).

Apart from one participant who arrived in Belgium as an asylum-seeker at the age of thirty-nine, all interviewees migrated to Belgium to complete advanced studies. While there is no doubt that student mobility does constitute 'a form of migration of the highly-skilled in its own right' and 'presents important opportunities to turn overseas education into more permanent forms of

> studied for 10 years after secondary school (interview 12).
>
> If I take the example of the health sector in Burundi, recently doctors were on strike, to the point that even the minimum service was eliminated. Can you imagine? Why? Doctors were saying,
>
> school, who is sitting in the National Assembly is making 2 millions, when I am making 200,000. This is not right' (interview 10).

The lack of equipment also constituted a serious obstacle to return in areas of expertise such as informatics, electronic engineering, chemistry, medical biology or genetics.

The narratives of these migrants therefore confirmed the blurring of the boundaries between economic and forced migration (Crisp 2003: 5-7) and the relevance of the notion of 'migration asylum nexus' (Castles 2003: 17).

Interestingly, although most participants were durably settled in their host country, they planned to spend their old days 'at home' and their narratives were deeply marked by the 'myth of return' (Anwar 1979). At first sight, their return project could be classified as a 'return of retirement' (Cerase 1974: 151; 257-258).[16] In line with the return migration literature,[17] their motivations related mainly to issues of social consideration and discrimination, as well as different forms of sociability and solidarity between European and African societies. Participants were extremely critical of some of the values underpinning Belgian society and saw old people's homes as the quintessence of individualism.[18] Only three participants did not see themselves returning upon retirement and criticised this idealised vision of African societies.

Three participants clearly did not fit with this majority pattern. One of them was a

[16] Cerase's typology applies to a very different context (mainly low-skilled returnees from the US to Italy in the 1960s), but certain elements can usefully be applied to our participants.

[17] See Ammassari and Black (2001: 17-24) for a literature review on return migration.

[18] Many sub-Saharan African migrants, particularly women, work as carers in such institutions in Belgium.

presented characteristics of both the 'return of innovation' and the 'return of conservatism' (Cerase 1974: 251; 254-257).

Finally, the sample included a Burundian academic who had returned 'permanently' since August 2008 as a professor in the newly established . He had never been employed in Belgium despite completion of a PhD in political science in 2004 and a MA in communication in 2007. His 'permanent' return, which had been supported by MIDA, was largely a 'return of failure' (Cerase 1974: 249; 251-254) as he explained that he would have stayed in Belgium if he could have found a job. The fact that he acquired Belgian citizenship in 2006 was also a sign of his will to integrate himself in Belgium. Moreover, his Burundian salary was so low that he needed to complement it with positions as visiting professor in two private universities, a situation that was only sustainable because his wife held a good position as post-doctoral researcher in Belgium and could therefore support their three-children family. His return was unlikely to be 'permanent' as he continued to search for better opportunities in Belgium or other African countries.

The two interviewees who were more inclined to return during their working life were the youngest and those who had the shortest durations of stay in Belgium. In a study about Africans living in Wallonia, Gatugu . similarly found that the duration of stay negatively impacted the willingness to return to Africa for work (2001: 112). There seems to be a short period upon completion of studies during which return is a potential option. If it is frustrated (for instance for security reasons) and people start working in their host country, the probability that they will return during their working life drops sharply. The acquisition of relative financial comfort is usually linked with the creation or extension of a family, which then becomes an additional constraint on return. For the interviewees, supporting the education of their children in Belgium up to university level was a priority which prevented them from considering any short-term return. The 'permanent' returnee to Burundi stated:

> For the children, for their education, these people are going to stay. This is really the fundamental question for everyone. You come when you are twenty, but time passes, and you are forty. At forty, you have children who are at school. You came on your own or with someone else. Probably after five or six years, you are four. The decision to go back will affect four persons. It's always difficult to take such a decision when you have a family, when you have children (interview 3).

In reality, the distinction between the majority and the minority profiles was not so neat. All participants who planned to return, whether in the short or the longer-term, intended to keep strong connections with Belgium through various forms of circulation linked to their professional careers or family situations. This is in line with the concept of 'revolving returnees' as 'circular migrants

permanent return to the homeland, but who for a number of reasons don't return for good' (Hansen 2007: 132).

More generally, participants' experiences confirmed the relevance of the transnational approach, with transnationalism 'broadly [referring] to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the

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Issues of transferability also loomed large in their pension expectations. Moreover, they pointed out that they would still be 'young' at sixty-five the official retirement age in Belgium and that people usually worked much later in their home countries (not least because of the absence of pensions they could live on). As a result, many intended to be active 'pensioners' back home.

The sample only included one woman, a Burundian nurse who had emigrated to Germany with a government scholarship and later relocated following her marriage with a Belgium-based Burundian. Female involvement is extremely marginal in the MIDA Great Lakes programme. Participants are usually former students who came to complete advanced studies with a scholarship from their government or the Belgian cooperation, and women represent a minority of this population. In the case of Rwanda for instance, they accounted for 26.9 percent of the higher education students on overseas government scholarships in 2001-2002 (World Bank 2004: 143).

According to Kagné and Martiniello, women represented 30 percent of students from sub-Saharan Africa in Belgium in 1996-1997 (2001: 9). Although female sub-Saharan immigration to Belgium is increasingly diverse, the dominant pattern has long been family reunification with a male student in Belgium (Kagné 2005: 23), a feature which was reflected in the sample, since only two participants had a spouse who emigrated separately for studies. Nevertheless, this does not imply that these women have low levels of qualification. Out of the eleven participants who gave information about their wives' profile, seven reported that they had tertiary education before emigrating to Belgium. Moreover, three out of the four spouses who did not have tertiary education before emigration enrolled in higher education in their host country. And several of those who already had tertiary education studied further in Belgium.

The proportion of women registered in the programme expert database (slightly less than 25 percent) is in line with the figures quoted above. Nevertheless, the proportion of women having effectively been involved in the programme is extremely low with nine missions out of a total of 187 carried out in the third phase of the programme (0.05 percent).[19] According to the21(the1 g57434369

exploring to find out whether contradictory or concordant logics are at work. Nevertheless, migrants and diasporas are two different things. The concept of transnational engagement is therefore closer to the reality of their activities than the usual notion of diaspora engagement: all participants were transnationally engaged through the MIDA Great Lakes programme, but not all of them expressed a diasporic consciousness.

The MIDA documentation uses expressions such as 'African migrants', 'African diasporas', 'overseas African experts' or 'overseas African community' indifferently (IOM 2006; 2007). While some of the national programmes, such as MIDA Italy Ghana/Senegal are targeting diaspora associations, MIDA Great Lakes targets individual migrants who are problematically referred to as 'diaspora experts'.

This slippage between 'migrants as individuals' and 'diasporas as groups of migrants' is generalised in the migration development nexus, yet there are important conceptual and theoretical differences between the two concepts (Mercer 2008: 50-51). Brubaker proposes three main criteria as being constitutive of a diaspora: 'dispersion in space', 'orientation

1998: 5-6). A Burundian interviewee explained:

> Let's be honest, it's more convenient, that's all. If I come to France and you offer me French citizenship, I'm taking it right away. As long as you give me a job. In Canada, I'm doing exactly the same. It's about stability, peace of mind, and
>
> citizenship because I wanted to be at peace and have more chances to find a job (interview 10).

The acquisition of Belgian citizenship was also viewed by many participants as a pre-requisite to engagement with their country of origin both in security (access to Belgian consular protection, possibility to come back to Belgium in case of troubles) and economic terms: Belgian citizenship offers

groups depending on their level of professional integration in Belgiu of

> You get advanced diplomas. You spend five years without finding a job, in the end you say I'm going to do this as well. You don't like it at all, but it's the only sector where you can hope to find a job. Can you imagine? You have studied for five or six years, and you start again in first year, you finish, and you still can't find a job. You start all over again. If you go to university, Africans are the oldest students. This does not mean that they're unable to graduate, it's to find a job, because they think, 'maybe I chose

> family members is working, for instance if my wife can make what we need to eat, then I can go back to study. If I find a small job, then she can also go ahead with her st
> this. They say 'if I stay with this diploma without a job for a year, I can't find anything to write on my CV', so you register with a university, and you keep looking for a job. As soon as you get one, you stop studying and you start

> my new job, I was about to register again at university to do another MA, whatever, anything but staying at home. Staying at home with nothing to do is very disturbing. When you have children who go to school, who see you staying home all day, how can you tell them to study? They say 'dad, you've studied but you don't have a job'. It's really hard to explain. I know many people who leave in the morning with a suit and a briefcase and they go for a walk, they come back at five and they pretend that

> stories like this, lots and lots. Among the Rwandans and the Burundians I know, people have too many diplomas, too many... and they're not using them. Unfortunately. It's a waste for Belgium

> (interview 9).

As highlighted in the previous sections, most participants shared an orientation to a homeland, although they did not necessarily express it in a collective way. Boundary maintenance also varied among individuals. It is wrong to assume that all these individuals expressed strong diasporic consciousness. The participants' experiences were also contrasted in terms of socio economic integration, but the majority had been confronted with barriers and discrimination. The way in which these elements interplayed to shape different forms of transnational engagement is the focus of the present section.

As far as the interplay between integration and transnational engagement is concerned, the findings corroborate neither the contradictory nor the concordant dynamics, in line with the positions taken by De Haas (2005: 1276), Snel . (2006) and Vertovec (2006: 8-9). On the one side, participants often associated their involvement in their home country or in Africa more generally with social recognition and appreciation of their individual skills and merits (Hansen 2007: 142-144). As explained by a Congolese participant:

> In terms of consideration, I'm better off there than here. I mean, when I am lecturing, people find that they have received teaching from somebody who is special, if I can put it that way. Because there are not so many doctors, it's not like here where thousands of people have a PhD. So when you teach, it's like a social recognition that you get. You can see that students are very happy, that the institution is happy to have been able to find someone qualified for this position. And this makes you feel good (interview 6).

A participant from Rwanda similarly stated:

> When you are here, no matter the high qualifications you have, you don't get access to the positions for which you have studied. So when you go back to Africa, you make use of your knowledge, and you're proud that what you're giving is visible. Whereas what you're doing here, everything you're doing, nobody sees it. You're just one individual, in a

Second, the externalities argument also needs to be put in perspective. One academic from the DRC explained:

> Imagine you're a doctor and you're working in a hospital. People come to you but they die. You know what's needed to cure them, but they die anyway because you have no means, you're in a hospital in name only where you can't work because there is no
>
> objective to contribute to development, but I can stay in Congo for years and yet not contribute to development because nothing there is at my disposal for me to make such a contribution. I can't do research in Congo because I would need a computer, a printer, money to submit an article and present it in a conference
>
> of this (interview 6).

This statement corroborates the arguments put forward by Skeldon (2009: 11) and Clemens (2007: 38) about the health sector: in contexts where essential facilities are absent, the greatest externalities are likely to be brought by personnel with a basic level of training rather than highly-trained specialists. Moreover, in such economic conditions, the highly-skilled might actually be unemployed due to the limited absorption capacities of their economies for

10-11), revealing that emigration is not the major cause of skill loss in the health sector.

The academic literature about brain drain discussed above focuses on voluntary migration. Nevertheless, as noted above, the migration itineraries of the participants could only be understood in the conceptual framework of the 'migration

You go to Rwanda, to the University of Butare, and you train doctors, in surgery for instance. You train them, but you don't give them means, you leave and you don't give them anyt
These people are going to act as if they

The impact of remittances on developing countries is a hotly debated issue. The literature generally acknowledges their poverty alleviation impact and their social protection role 'which reduces vulnerability to shocks' for recipients (Kapur 2003: 15). Nevertheless, remittances do not reach the poorest households, due to the selectivity of migration, particularly international migration, as confirmed by the profiles of the participants. This selectivity also operates at the regional and national level: most remittances are flowing to middle-income rather than low-income countries (De Haas 2007: 10-11; Kapur 2003: 15-17; Kapur and McHale 2005: 135-142; Skeldon 2008: 8), with sub-Saharan Africa receiving the least amount of reported remittances: in 2007, it accounted for US$10.8 billion out of US$239.7 billion in official remittances received by developing countries (World Bank 2008: 59). As far as the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi are concerned, they were receiving in 2004, respectively only US$97 million, US$16 million and US$4 million of the US$6 billion remittances to sub-Saharan Africa in that year, which can be explained by the comparably small size of their diasporas (De Bruyn and Wets 2005: 71).

The assessment of the longer-term 'development' impact of remittances depends on the understanding given to the concept.[31] Historical structural and dependency views denounce the consumptive nature of remittance expenditures as opposed to a more productive use that would foster autonomous forms of development. In the current debate, Ellerman strongly argues

the economic insertion of home countries in the globalised economy (Kapur and McHale 2005: 116-118). Scientific or epistemic networks focusing on 'joint research projects, information exchange, technology transfers, joint ventures, or training sessions' have also attracted considerable attention (Faist 2008). Faist found evidence of approximately 40 such networks connecting about 35 developing countries in 2003.

Nevertheless, the literature unanimously concludes that diaspora engagement is no panacea. First, diasporas can only benefit source countries if certain pre-requisites are in place: 'the quality of home country organisations appears to be the single most important determinant of diaspora initiatives. Even when diasporas are massive, rich, entrepreneurial and

often run up against the binding constraints of home country organisations' (Kuznetsov 2006: 228). Second, there is no automatic convergence of agendas between the diasporas and their home countries, particularly in cases of politically or conflict-driven emigration: 'bitterness, suspicion, reluctance, resentment, stigmatization or discrimination can equally arise from diasporas, populations in the home country or governments' (Ionescu 2006: 56). Third, diasporas are not unitary actors and have conflicting interests. Finally, historical experiences prove that 'successful cases of diaspora engagement are relatively rare but

> door as well on the life of many people. These emigrants are needed here anyway. Enabling them to work, giving them contracts that enable them to sustain their families back home, I believe that it is very important (interview 5);

The same participant also stated:

> Do you think that when I'm giving money to my brother, do you think he's going to say 'great I'm getting money'. No, no, no, no! He needs this money to pay for the schooling of his child, to pay for electricity so that he can help his child with homework in the evening. With the small amount I am sending him, he can invest in something, go ahead. I'm not saying that some people are not living off others, it happens in every society. Here some people never work because they get the social benefits. But it's a minority, maybe 10 percent. People really want to make it through (interview 5).

While highlighting the importance of remittances for poverty reduction and the livelihood of their families, participants did not think that remittances could bring broader 'development' in their home countries. They pointed out that development could only come out of good governance and significant investments in economic and social infrastructures and that it was precisely the lack of such processes which made remittances necessary. In corrupted and ill-governed states, direct transfers to families were seen as the only way for money to reach the beneficiaries. Moreover, participants insisted that the business climate was simply not conducive for a more 'productive' use of remittances.

> with this or that project in Africa. I'm
>
> paid differently from the others? (interview 2).

This was even more the case since they reported facing financial demands from the extended family when travelling back for MIDA missions. Moreover, they felt that this lack of financial recognition negatively impacted the way they were perceived in receiving countries:

> When you're going with your Belgian papers, you should see the gibes you get: 'so you're Belgian?' Very cynically.
>
> They're making fun of you because you're Belgian only on paper. You don't show it in your lifestyle, in your appearance. You're coming as an expert but you're far from being the same as a Belgian consultant. One of us has found this expression, and I find it interesting, that we are
> (interview 4).

For some participants, the concept of 'diaspora expert' was a sort of emotional blackmail to make them accept discriminatory financial conditions. This 'MIDA fatigue' resonates with the observation that intrinsic motivations need to be supported by more extrinsic motivations for any form of involvement in the home country to be sustainable, whether through circulation or return (Ellerman 2006: 38).

Interviewees were generally cautious about the actual impact of the programme on development. Once again, conditions in home countries appeared to be the central determinant of the contrasted outcomes. One alleged positive outcome of the programme is 'the creation of lasting ties,

first convention giving birth to the 'Rwanda Diaspora Global Network'[33] (De Bruyn and Wets 2005: 59-63). Rwanda is also implementing an IOM-funded project aiming at mapping the Rwandan diaspora in Belgium to assess its development and investment potential.[34]

Nevertheless, even in countries which have a consistent diaspora engagement approach, it is difficult to overcome mistrust and suspicion toward migrants (Gatugu . 2001: 114). Around half of the participants reported having faced difficulties in their missions due to the hostility of colleagues or hierarchies. Those who had not been confronted with such difficulties often believed that it was due to the fact that they were returning on a temporary basis and that they would have had problems if they had returned permanently:

> Imagine you graduate from Harvard or something like this. You go back, and there's a minister who has not studied
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> qualifications are not even comparable. He's your boss. When you have an incompetent boss above you, what do you do? He's trying to downplay you until
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> back with a nationalist feeling, you get there, you see what they do to you, you leave again. That's when you like your host country. People have often tried to return by their own means. But when they get there, sometimes they find out that it's worse than what they're trying to escape (interview 9).

As noted by Nyberg-Sørensen, 'in the case of refugee repatriation, but also in the case of labour migration from ethnically or politically divided countries', the barriers to diaspora engagement are also political (2007b: 203). Rwanda is again a case in point, since the country does not really offer professional opportunities for the return of its Hutu migrants, a point that was confirmed by participants from both ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, participants reported that MIDA could once again contribute and reinforce the positive dynamics that existed in a given country:

> When I was there, there was a MIDA expert, a Rwandan pre-1994 who was responsible for State enterprises at the time. He's an engineer, he has nothing to reproach himself. He applied for MIDA and he went there and carried out his assignment. He's not planning to

[33] The RDGN is a non-profit umbrella organization that brings together Rwandan diaspora associations.
[34] <http://mida.belgium.iom.int/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=298&Itemid=211>

> spreading out over 20 years, financing decreasing each year, every year the
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> would be curious to see which mechanisms the African who is Head of State, who is Minister of Finance, or rather Manager of Debts as I call him, I would be curious to see how he's going to stand up and think about how to
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> always been told about aid, nobody ever speaks about the situation without aid. It's as if the aid institutions were going
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> talking about an electroshock. We say
>
> going to help those who are performing, who are proposing concrete projects that we can finance and in which we have interests'. We define interests clearly. And you'll see... People will work hard, they're not going to stay seated. And they will find solutions (interview 8).

Their arguments were extremely close to those developed by Moyo (2009). They also agreed with her that aid was in many cases encouraging corruption as conditionality on good governance was not implemented in practice. Although the long-term goal was endogenous development, they believed that development aid efficiency could be improved in the short term by enforcing real conditionality and accountability. They clearly stated that African governments had a primary responsibility in the development failure of their countries:

> Responsibilities are shared. African politicians have contributed to their own
>
> has received money from the World Bank, but we could see the result. Where is the result of investments made in Africa? So there is an accountability issue. The African elite was not held accountable. These billions that have been injected, where did they go? The road sector remains to be built, agriculture is still at the subsistence stage, there is no industrial sector, no research infrastructure... (interview 8).

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stemming emigration. The interviewees' assessment of the impact of remittances and diaspora engagement stressed their usefulness in alleviating poverty and critical shortages in the short term but emphasised that they could by no means replace endogenous dynamics to foster development in the longer term. They could, nevertheless play a powerful catalyst role to reinforce positive forces at work in source countries. Participants also highlighted that the diaspora option, although praised in discourses, was in practice neglected and under-

contribute. If there are investments and interventions in the social sector, they will take part in them. But in the long-term where are we going? If MIDA still exists in 50 years, I'm sorry but we will have lost. Do you agree with me? People in MIDA must tell themselves 'we will have succeeded when our mission is closed' (interview 8).

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