

Migration and Poverty

Linkages, Knowledge Gaps and Policy Implications

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Acronyms

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
GDP	gross domestic product
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

This paper explores the links between migration and poverty, and their implications for social policy. It argues that research on linkages between migration and poverty can, and should, start with knowledge about poverty itself: what it is, what causes it, what reduces it, poor people's agency as well as constraints, and so on. Poverty research offers several established understandings on the natures, structures and processes driving poverty, and these should be central to how the issues are framed in migration research and policy. Much of the migration of the poor is not seriously recognized, and nor are major categories of the poorest migrants, some of whom are children. Migration tends to be defined as an adult activity, thus underplaying how migration affects – and is undertaken by – children.

While much of the literature focuses on international and South-North migration, this paper focuses on internal migration and international South-South migration. The poorest families and people from the poorest areas tend to be excluded from migration to the North; and when they do so, they tend to move under extremely exploitative conditions. The poorest tend to migrate within national borders, and often within rural areas or to small towns, remaining invisible in most statistics.

The paper discusses links between poverty and migration, and policy implications, in four sections. The first section discusses different theoretical approaches to the study of migration and their relevance for understanding the migration of the poor. The second reviews empirical studies on linkages between migration and poverty, with a focus on remittances. The third section elaborates on a large research gap: migration by children independently of their families. The fourth section discusses implications for aid policy and donor-driven processes to tackle poverty. Challenges for policy makers at the national and regional levels include practical ways of integrating migrants into development processes, but also more entrenched issues related to the way social policy interacts with citizenship and the diverse forms of migration.

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Résumé

Les auteurs explorent ici les rapports entre migration et pauvreté, et les conséquences à en tirer pour la politique sociale. Ils expliquent que la recherche sur ces rapports peut et doit commencer par ce que l'on sait de la pauvreté elle-même, de sa nature, de ses causes, de ce qui la fait reculer, de l'agence d'individus pauvres et des obstacles qu'ils rencontrent, etc. Les recherches proposent plusieurs conceptions de la pauvreté, de sa nature et des structures et processus dont elle dépend, et ces conceptions devraient être très présentes dans les esprits lors de la formulation de ces questions dans les recherches et politiques relatives à la migration. La majeure partie des migrations des pauvres n'est pas sérieusement prise en compte, pas plus que les grandes catégories des migrants les plus pauvres, parmi lesquels se trouvent des enfants. On tend à définir la migration comme une activité d'adultes, sous-estimant ainsi la migration des enfants et la façon dont elle les affecte.

Alors qu'une grande partie de la littérature porte sur les migrations internationales et les migrations Sud-Nord, cette étude s'intéresse aux migrations internes et aux migrations internationales Sud-Sud. Les familles les plus pauvres et les habitants des régions les plus pauvres sont le plus souvent exclus des migrations vers le Nord et, lorsqu'ils y parviennent, c'est fréquemment dans des conditions d'exploitation extrême. Comme les plus pauvres ont

tendencia à migrer à l'intérieur des frontières nationales et souvent de zones rurales ou à destination de petites villes, ils passent inaperçus dans la plupart des statistiques.

L'étude des rapports entre pauvreté et migration, et des conséquences à en tirer pour les politiques, se divise en quatre sections. La première traite des différentes approches théoriques de l'étude des migrations et de leur intérêt pour comprendre les migrations des pauvres. La deuxième passe en revue les études empiriques des rapports entre migration et pauvreté, surtout axées sur les envois de fonds des migrants. La troisième section développe un sujet négligé par les recherches: les enfants qui migrent indépendamment de leurs familles. La quatrième section tire les conséquences de ce qui précède pour la politique de l'aide et les mesures de lutte contre la pauvreté que préconisent les donateurs. Les difficultés pour les décideurs politiques au niveau national et régional consistent notamment à intégrer les migrants aux processus de développement mais tiennent aussi à des problèmes tenaces, liés aux interactions entre politique sociale et citoyenneté et aux diverses formes de migration.

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Resumen

En este documento se examinan los vínculos entre la migración y la pobreza, así como sus implicaciones para la política social. Se argumenta que la investigación sobre los vínculos entre migración y pobreza puede, y debería, comenzar por conocer lo que es la pobreza misma: cuál es la causa, qué la reduce, las capacidades de los pobres para hacer frente a este problema, así como sus limitaciones, etc. La investigación sobre la pobreza ofrece varios conceptos básicos ya establecidos sobre las naturalezas, estructuras y procesos que llevan a la pobreza, aspectos fundamentales para determinar la forma de enmarcar estos problemas en la investigación y la política sobre migración. Buena parte de la migración de los pobres no recibe mayor reconocimiento, como tampoco se reconocen las principales categorías de los migrantes más pobres, algunos de los cuales son niños. La migración tiende a definirse como una actividad de adultos, con lo cual se subestima cómo esta afecta a los niños y cómo estos la asumen.

Mientras que buena parte de los documentos escritos sobre este tema se centran en la migración internacional y Norte-Sur, este trabajo se ocupa de la migración interna y la migración internacional Sur-Sur. Las familias y personas más pobres de las zonas más desprovistas tienden a ser excluidas de la migración al Norte; y cuando migran hacia el Norte, tienden a hacerlo bajo condiciones de explotación extrema. Los más pobres tienden a migrar dentro de sus propios países, y a menudo dentro de zonas rurales o hacia poblaciones pequeñas, por lo cual no figuran en la mayoría de las estadísticas.

Este trabajo de análisis de los vínculos entre la pobreza y la migración y sus implicaciones para la formulación de políticas se divide en cuatro secciones. En la primera de ellas se debaten los distintos enfoques teóricos del estudio de la migración y su pertinencia para comprender la migración de los pobres. En la segunda sección se examinan los estudios empíricos sobre los vínculos entre migración y pobreza, con hincapié en las remesas. La tercera sección se dedica a una gran laguna que existe en la investigación sobre la migración: la migración de niños de forma independiente de sus familias. En la cuarta sección se analizan las implicaciones para las políticas de asistencia y los procesos de los donantes para combatir la pobreza. Entre los desafíos que deben enfrentar los responsables de la formulación de las políticas a nivel nacional y regional destacan las opciones prácticas para integrar a los migrantes a los procesos de desarrollo, así como problemas más arraigados relacionados con la forma en que la política social interactúa con la ciudadanía y las diversas formas de migración.

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Introduction

This paper explores the links between migration and poverty, and their implications for social policy. It argues that research on linkages between migration and poverty can, and should, start with knowledge about poverty itself: what it is, what causes it, what reduces it, poor people's agency as well as constraints, and so on. Poverty research offers several established understandings on the natures, structures and processes driving poverty, and these should be central to how the issues are framed in migration research and policy. The paper argues that context-dependency, rather than generalized conclusions, is the main way forward. This could help develop migration research that is more strongly poor-centric, and consequently, move migration debates and policies toward issues more favourable and relevant to the poor.

The paper focuses on internal migration and international South-South migration. The reason for this focus is that these are the forms of migration the poorest families tend to engage in, including child migrants individually. The poorest tend to migrate less to high-income countries. Studying migration with insights from poverty research broadens the focus in terms of types of migration and migrants. Much of the migration of the poorest is not seriously recognized, and nor are major categories of the poorest migrants. It is often asserted that the poorest do not want to or cannot migrate, or migrate only in exceptional circumstances and crises. Empirical research has tended to apply limited definitions of migration (such as to high-income countries), or be based on sources of information that tend to describe better-off or skilled migration more than others, potentially omitting the many other types of migration that the poorest do undertake.¹ Moreover, migration tends to be defined as an adult activity, thus underplaying how migration affects—and is undertaken by—children.

Such neglect of the poor has existed in other areas of development research. For example, there was a long-standing view that the poor did not want, or were unable to use, financial services (see Yaqub 1998 for review). Empirical research has shown, first, that much of the financial activity of the poor was unrecognized, occurring informally with traders and landowners, rather than through the types of financial intermediaries that were most researched, such as formal banking systems. Second, perspectives that included the poor needed to draw insights from the complexity of poor people's lives; this led to better theorization of how financial sectors in developing countries worked, and not the other way around. Third, research into informal financial systems used by the poor—albeit often on highly unfavorable terms—revealed the incentives, terms and barriers to participation, such as transactions costs and collateral requirements.

Similarly, migration research needs to include the types of migration the poor do undertake; better situate migration in the complex socioeconomic structures and family strategies through which the poor secure their livelihoods; and unpack why the poor migrate the way they do. Managing children's consumption and production is often part of family strategies among the poor. A proper understanding of children's migration is particularly sensitive to the right framework, because while aspects of children's migration can be framed like adult migration ("push-pull"², labour and so on), child migrants raise distinct issues. Children's biologically evolving human capacities, and cultural and legislative norms on maturity and childhood, affect children's vulnerabilities and resiliencies in migration in distinctive ways—just like biological differences and social constructions raise gendered distinctions. And because childhood is a foundational life stage affecting an individual's later achievements, child migration may have long-term effects on migrant outcomes.

¹ We do not claim the poor migrate as often as the non-poor, although the point requires greater empirical investigation than currently exists. But there are different forms of migration with different costs and rewards, and the poor are associated more with some types of migration than others.

² Push factors are those that push people to migrate (usually in the country of origin), and pull factors are those that attract them to the destination country.

The paper discusses links between poverty and migration, and policy implications in four sections. The first section discusses – very briefly – different theoretical approaches to the study of migration, and assesses their relevance for understanding the migration of the poor specifically. The second reviews empirical studies on the linkages between migration and poverty, with a focus on remittances. This literature is still evolving and is fairly controversial – but it has a long tradition, and has shown the main channels by which migration can, but does not always, reduce poverty.

The third section elaborates on one large research gap: child migrants. Poverty is recognized to be multidimensional, dynamic over time and different among household members. Placed within the context of migration research, these basic understandings of poverty generate some unknowns in migration-poverty linkages. While research on migration-poverty linkages is multidisciplinary, most of it has focused on one dimension of poverty – its material dimension – in income, consumption, remittances, assets and so on. Household dynamics, risks and intergenerational effects have received some theoretical attention but empirical research in this area is limited. Intrahousehold variations have been mainly motivated in terms of gender. A particular intrahousehold and generations issue raised in this paper relates to children. On this issue, many of the perceptions that exist are often wrong, not very useful and bedevilled by faulty assumptions, starting with the idea that children's well-being in the context of migration can be lumped together with adults' in a phenomenon almost always conceptualized as an adult enterprise.

Based on these findings, the fourth section discusses implications for aid policy and donor-driven processes like the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), developed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Challenges for policy makers at the national and regional levels include practical ways of integrating migrants into development processes, but also more entrenched issues related to the way social policy interacts with citizenship.

1. Migration Theories: Do They Help Understand Migration by the Poor?

Early migration theories focused on poverty of places rather than people. This was symptomatic of thinking at a time when poverty reduction was seen as synonymous with national development and the growth of gross domestic product (GDP). Development was posed as a problem of structural transformation of the rural backward sector into the urban modern sector (Lewis 1954). The Harris-Todaro model – probably the most important theoretical starting point for migration theories – is built on this idea (Todaro 1969; Harris and Todaro 1970). In this, a prospective migrant weighs the difference between the expected earnings from formal sector urban employment (possibly after an initial period of informal sector employment), and the expected earnings in the village. While the general validity of the model has been affirmed empirically,³ its two-sector characterization simplifies patterns of migration (it ignores rural-rural migration, and return to rural areas, for example, and as a result underemphasizes migration by the poorest) and misses how labour markets connect to product or output markets.

More recent migration literature has emphasized family strategies as crucial elements in migration decisions (Stark 1991). The family is conceptualized as a coalition vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and family members share the costs and rewards of migration. Migration is seen as a form of income and asset diversification by families, with families investing in migrants, migrants in families, and both expecting returns from that. Adolescent children are probably part of this, especially in poor communities where a long period of childhood is unaffordable, but the literature on family migration strategies generally does not recognize children (a point

³ For example, Lucas' (2002) theoretical model of rural-urban migration emphasizes increasing skill levels in urban areas, and a widening gap with agricultural workers.

developed in later sections). Economic models using this line of theory have been of two types (de la Brière et al. 1997). One type focuses on implicit insurance contracts between the migrant and the family left behind to cope with risk, and shows the role of remittances as a form of portfolio diversification. A second type builds on literature around bequest motives, and sees remittances as investments in household assets that the migrant will later inherit, supported by analyses of different remittance behaviours between men and women (caused by gender-differentiated inheritance rules).

Using households rather than places as the unit of analysis is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, it sits more comfortably with sociological and anthropological analysis. Second, it takes better account of the fact that much, if not most, migration is “circular”, with continued interactions with areas of origins rather than a one-way and one-off move. This takes the analysis out of the (implicit) emphasis on “transition” in the rural-urban models of Harris and Todaro. Third, a focus on households should, in principle, make it easier to incorporate findings from the dominant kind of poverty analysis (much of which focuses on household-level analysis).

However, the “new economics of migration” remains grounded in a functionalistic and individualistic framework. Migration is seen primarily in terms of contractual arrangements within the household, and as solutions to market failures, such as the absence of access to insurance or investment in education. There is little attention to the “non-economic” factors driving such decisions that help, for example, to differentiate migration for women, men, girls and boys. A large part of the literature emphasizes the role of social and other institutions in migration, sometimes seen as being consistent with traditional values and other times as “unravelling the social fabric”. While the new economics emphasizes the role of family in analysing migration-poverty linkages, it fails to sufficiently emphasize that these linkages are mediated by cultural factors, values and so on.

Even in circumstances of poverty, migration responses are not simple responses driven by economic incentives, but informed by ideas of appropriate actions in a particular context.⁴ Research focusing on migrant networks has played a very important role in helping to see movements of people as part, not only of traditions of migration and interpreted in a cumulative migration theory, but also of wider processes of social and economic development. Finally, gender analysis has contributed greatly, not only in understanding differentiated motivations for, and impacts of, migration, but also in the way migration processes are structured, emphasizing power and exploitation: gender is an essential tool for unpicking the migration process (Chant and Redcliffe 1992; Wright 1995).

Marxist perspectives offer a long tradition of analysing links between migration on the one hand, and poverty and development on the other, mostly in terms of post-colonialism, apartheid and uneven capitalist development. Partly in the context of urbanization and debates on the informal sector, but also with its focus on migrant workers within rural areas, this tradition explicitly challenged the individualistic assumptions underlying models like Todaro’s, and has described migration as an inalienable part of the transition toward capitalism.⁵ With respect to international migration, this tradition has emphasized the exploitation of migrant workers as beneficial to capital and richer nations at the cost of labour and poorer nations and regions. Moreover, similar to neoclassical approaches to migration, Marxist models focus exclusively on economic factors. Migration processes can be understood adequately only as the outcome of interaction of a diversity of factors, including sociocultural and economic forces, and gendered and childhood norms and rules – and how migration in turn alters these factors.

⁴ Findley (1997) describes family-migration interactions in the context of African family structures, and de Haan (2005) discusses some of these issues, focusing on South Asia. See also Whitehead et al. (2007).

⁵ Safa 1982; Chapman and Prothero 1985; de Haan 2006.

An important theme cutting across the different analytical traditions is why people migrate, and this has led to theorization of migration as a selective process. The rational choice framework in labour migration theory suggests individuals with better education, skills and labour market experience are more likely to migrate because of their greater ability to capture its rewards.⁶ It is assumed that the poorest are selected out of migration because they cannot afford it, and because their lower human capital implies lower expected rewards. The “new economics of migration” suggests the poorest do not have access to migration opportunities because of their lower capacity for risk-taking, and literature on kinship networks in migration suggests the poorest lack social capital that facilitates migration. Although the evidence is limited and mixed (Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler 2003), there appears to be acceptance of an “empirical regularity” that the poorest and richest have lower migration propensities. The severely poor are believed to be almost unable to migrate, or migrate under such bad terms—for example, in bonded labour—that migration does not improve their well-being and often even makes them worse off (Mosse et al. 2002).

While international migration to the global North captures most of the policy attention, migration within countries and to countries in the South are probably more relevant for poverty reduction, and are likely to involve much larger numbers of children. First, middle-income countries attract migrants from nearby low-income countries (Hujo and Piper 2007). Migration costs to developing country destinations are lower and therefore more widely affordable. Cross-border migration in zones with particularly porous borders, and historical and cultural similarities, such as on the borders between Bangladesh, India and Nepal, or across much of West Africa, may present even lower barriers for poorer people. Second, the scale of internal migration is many times that of international migration, and participation in it is probably more widespread throughout the income distribution. For example, remittances from internal migration are estimated to be around \$30–40 billion⁷ in China alone, compared to international remittances of around \$200 billion worldwide (DFID 2007). In China, while remittances and investments of Chinese abroad have greatly contributed to its economic development, the internal migration of perhaps 200 million people has been one of the key factors in its impressive record of poverty reduction.⁸ Return migration following the financial crisis of 2008–2009 is expected to reverse a part of this progress, even though the Chinese government is making efforts to ensure return migrants are integrated in rural society.

Internal migration consists of many different types. In Thailand, a third of internal migration was multiple or seasonal (rather than a single move), and at least until 1990, migration *into* rural, suburban and peri-urban areas was twice as large as into urban centres (Guest 2003)—and while this has probably changed by now in Thailand, partly because of urban expansion incorporating areas previously classified as rural, the point is indicative of countries at earlier stages of their structural transformation. In India, with high rates of economic growth, migration within rural areas remains a significant—if not the largest—component of total migration flows. These kinds of migration may be more affordable, given that single-move migration is costlier because it involves more of the family. They may also be better suited to the human capital profiles of poor farming households.

International and internal migration studies tend to be separate fields of enquiry involving different researchers and concerns (DeWind and Holdaway 2008, 2005), which may make it harder to capture the poorest migrants in research. The same disconnect, though to a lesser extent, can be noted for research on migration into Northern countries versus South-South

⁶ See the review by Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler (2003). Also see Lipton (1980) who, on the basis of villages studies in India, showed that the poor do in fact migrate, as do the better-off, but different groups migrate for very different kinds of opportunities, hence contributing to increasing inequality.

⁷ All dollar figures refer to US dollars.

⁸ The literature on Chinese internal migration is large, and rapidly growing. A seminar on Migration and Development, organized at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Beijing on 17 December 2009, brought together three main relevant themes and scholars: Li Shi on the characteristics of an inequalities among migrants, Cai Fang on migration policies, and Ye Jingzhong on the impacts of migration on families and children left behind (www2.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/30years-development-success.asp, accessed in January 2009).

migration; and also cleavages between research on rural-urban migration, and that which focuses on diverse patterns of internal migration. This is not to deny that different issues are raised by the various fields of enquiry; however, from the view of a poor household, these may simply be alternative forms of movement. The type of migration a poor household undertakes depends on household strategies and opportunities, which themselves are partly conditional on the situation of poverty. Skeldon (2003:12) argues that “those looking at internal migration and those looking at international migration are separately looking at what are likely to be different responses to similar forces”.⁹

To conclude, theoretical diversity and the structuring of fields of study may to a great extent explain the persistence of diverging views on how migration links to poverty, between those who see migration as a key poverty reduction strategy and those who argue no clear empirical links can be established (de Haan 2006). The different intellectual traditions have also strongly influenced ideologies and perceptions around migration policy. The theoretical diversity has shaped empirical research, and the following section discusses what is known about the linkages between migration and poverty.

2. Migration and Poverty: Evidence of Linkages

This section reviews empirical studies on linkages between migration and poverty. This is more complex than may be assumed at first, even with a narrow income-definition of poverty, as in this section. There is increasing evidence on key questions around the extent and nature of selectivity in migration, remittances and impact on inequality. However, a general difficulty – as applicable to the theory section – is that relatively little of the evidence is sufficiently poor-specific, to recognize that the particular contexts of poor people’s lives may generate different processes, constraints and opportunities.

Who migrates?

Part of the answer to the question of migration and poverty obviously depends on who migrates. Labour migration is usually by young able-bodied people. While they are often men, the gendered nature of labour markets (both demand and supply) is context- and sector-specific, and changes over time. For example, (young) women might migrate because of the expansion of service sectors, the preferences of export industries and cultural factors.¹⁰

Migrants are often not from the poorest regions, as remoteness may make migration more difficult, and usually not from the poorest households, because the cost of migration may be too high.¹¹ Evidence on land ownership as a determinant of migration typically varies strongly and can change over time. A lot of the research has shown that migrants tend to be slightly better educated or skilled (see de Haan 1999), but obviously much depends on the types of jobs available, and such patterns also change over time.¹² Comparisons of incomes of migrants and non-migrants in areas of destination show that the former are often not far behind the average – but equally important is the finding that the income inequality within the migrant working population is at least as large as among non-migrants and the population as a whole (de Haan and Dubey 2002).

⁹ Historical experience over the past century suggests that the participation of poorer—and previously excluded groups—in migration is dynamically evolving, subject to factors such as national income growth and economic restructuring through internal migration (Williamson 2006).

¹⁰ A classic example of the last is Andrea Menefee Singh’s article in the 1984 volume *Women in the Cities of Asia*, showing gendered differences in labour migration in northern and southern parts of India; quoted in de Haan (2005b).

¹¹ For example, research in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh (India) concludes that the poorest rarely migrate, possibly because of availability of labour in the household, and the resources required for undertaking the move (Deshingkar and Start 2003).

¹² For example, an historical study by the late Arvind Das (1985) described how migration from a village in Bihar started with the sons of landowners migrating to look for clerical work, which encouraged their domestic workers and other villagers to migrate.

While there is evidence that the poorest, least skilled, least physically capable and those without networks tend to migrate less, it is also true that the types of migration the poorest engage in are less likely to be captured in surveys and census. Underreporting may apply in places such as Viet Nam and China, where formal registration of residence influences coverage in surveys, but also for example, in India, where rural-rural migration is underrecorded (Rogaly et al. 2002).

The poorest migrate often as an extreme survival strategy, suggesting that when they migrate, it is likely to be less beneficial than the migration by the better-off. Evidence exists that migration by the poorest may reinforce exploitative structures like debt-bondage relationships (Mosse et al. 2002). People from the poorest areas often do not have access to the most rewarding opportunities, in urban areas or abroad, though they may migrate to activities nearby, for seasonal agricultural and less rewarding work. Also, survival strategies may mean that migration from the poorest households will include younger, more vulnerable family members—again, this migration is least likely to be picked up by surveys.

An important general finding is around the importance of migration networks, internationally as well as locally. Put simply, migrants move to places where friends, family members, neighbours or others from their village have moved before. As a result, migrants in a particular destination tend to come from specific areas of origin—particularly when the migratory jobs are relatively attractive and have higher returns. People who are better off may pave the way for migrants with fewer resources. Migration patterns are structured by social divides, such as caste in India, ethnicity in Viet Nam or religion. A neglected area for investigation is how migration networks may increase or decrease children's migration. Children's migration may depend on networks of adult migrants—as well as child migrants—for information, resources, travel and contacts to facilitate the migration decision and process. For example, de Haas (2007) documents how sustained migration from Morocco has meant that for many young people the question is not whether to migrate, but when and how.

Different migrants, thus, have different motives, reflecting diverse opportunities. For example, skilled international migrants tend to have clear views of bettering their and their families' positions, while rural-to-rural migrants tend to have survival strategies—often in the context of seasonal opportunities—as a main motive. Saving for a dowry is an important motive for female migrants in western Africa, and migration may also be linked to a particular period in the life cycle in other cases. Thus, there are important variations, and the characteristics depend on economic, political as well as cultural circumstances—changing over time, partly under the influence of migration itself.

Remittances

The question of remittances is of course central to much of the thinking on the impact of migration, and it has now become one of the new “development mantras” (Kapur 2004). Economic theories tend to differ in their interpretations of remittances, and data are difficult to interpret. What do we know about remittances in different contexts?

Levels of remittances vary widely, depending on factors such as accessibility of the home village, employment opportunities, costs of living, ease of remitting and the “orientation” of the migrant. Reardon's (1997) overview of the importance of the rural non-farm income in 25 case studies in Africa gives an idea of magnitude, and how this differs across locations. This showed that on average 45 per cent of total rural income was non-farm, varying between 22 and 93 per cent. In areas not close to major cities, migration earnings constituted 20 per cent of total non-farm earnings, whereas it was as high as 75 per cent in areas close to major cities. Ellis and Freeman's (2004) livelihood study in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda showed that in Tanzania about half of household income is derived from agriculture (less so for the better-off) and of the other half, 36 per cent was non-farm income, 11 per cent was wages, and a mere four per cent was transfers (slightly higher for lower income groups). So roughly, across Africa about a quarter of total rural incomes may be derived from migration, but with wide variations,

depending heavily on locations, and with varying importance for different socioeconomic groups.

The evaluation of the impact of remittances has shifted since the 1970s, when there was much stress on the “conspicuous consumption” of migrants and their relatives, toward more positive views, focusing, for example, upon the conditions needed to secure the investment of remittances, and at least internationally, the emphasis in reducing transactions costs of sending remittances and how the scale of remittances far exceeds official aid. Literature that emphasizes productive investments include Papademetriou and Martin (1991) and various publications by Adams (1991, 1996, 1998). Durand et al. (1996a, 1996b) show income from migration stimulates economic activity, both directly and indirectly, and that it leads to significantly higher levels of employment, investment and income. Finally, it needs pointing out that even very small amounts of remittances can be vital for poor people, including for their food security.

Assessments of the way remittances are used also show diversity, and can be modelled in different ways. There is no doubt that remittances can have negative and positive consequences—evidence suggests that the way remittances are used depends on the form of migration, the characteristics of the migrants and those who stay behind, and conditions for use of remittances and returning migrants. This points to one of the complexities of understanding the impact of migration: the conditions that make remittances helpful for development or poverty reduction are generally the same conditions that made migrants leave in the first place. Assessments of impact need to be sensitive to the complexity in which this is embedded. First, they need to take account of the fact that this counts only successful migration, and there is a possibility that many migrants have not remitted despite having invested heavily. Second, data on remittances need to take account of reverse flows of initial investment, but also, for example, of food transfers from villages of origin to cities. Third, from a home country public policy perspective, remittances need to be offset against the (public) investment in education and other forms of publicly funded investments.

Do migration and remittances reduce inequality?

As emphasized by Pritchett,¹³ migration has to have an impact on inequality between sending and receiving areas, and ought to reduce overall income inequality. However, assessments of this also vary, and are dependent on unit and indicator of analysis (Black 2004). For example, the multidonor research programme, Operationalizing Pro-Poor Growth, highlighted a key dilemma in assessing migration: while they generally helped to reduce poverty and increase the income of the poor, migration and remittances could also lead to increased inequality within countries. A similar theme was highlighted in the Indian Village Studies project in the 1970s, which showed that rural-urban migration did not tend to equalize incomes, between or within regions (Lipton 1982). Islam’s (1991) analysis of effects of migration to the Gulf from villages in Chittagong in Bangladesh shows some possible negative effects: land became concentrated in migrant families who stopped farming, which contributed to a decrease in production. Land prices went up, and so did the cost of labour, though not so high as to lead to reduction of labour inputs in agriculture.

But here too, generalizations appear meaningless. Of course, labour market opportunities are key drivers of these dynamics: where large numbers of opportunities for unskilled labour exist, as in China and Viet Nam, migration is more likely to reduce poverty and less likely to increase inequality within villages of origin. Some forms of migration lead to equalizing income within regions, though not necessarily between sending and receiving regions. In some cases migration increases income inequality, in others lowers it, and this relationship may change over time. The unit of analysis matters, too, as increased male income does not necessarily translate into the increased well-being of women or children. While in some cases migration and remittances have led to development, in other cases they have not. A key issue appears to be not migration

¹³ Personal communication by Lant Pritchett, World Bank economist, Ahmedabad, India, January 2005.

itself but the condition under which people leave and conditions for development generally which determine the impact of migration.

Impacts of migration

Given this diversity of migration patterns and motives, it should be expected that the impacts of migration are diverse too. In the first place, expectations that rural development will decrease out-migration may be unjustified (though it is likely to change the conditions of migration and the composition of migrants); “poverty reduction is not in itself a migration-reducing strategy” (Sorensen et al. 2002:35). For example, in the Punjab, the Green Revolution occurred simultaneously with high rates of out-migration and in-migration from poorer Indian states. In China the development of rural enterprises appeared to increase rates of out-migration, except among the more educated peasants (Liang and White 1997) – and this happened at a time of a rapidly expanding economy. According to Skeldon (1997), it is impossible to envisage development without migration, and migration is development. For example, as Skeldon notes, emigration was increasing while Japan was urbanizing. Similarly, migration patterns in the Indian Punjab are closely related to the development path of the Punjab, with large outflow of people from rural areas, continued links and investment by people overseas, changes in agricultural production within the state, and the accompanying inflow of relatively poor migrants from other states in India.

With respect to international migration and receiving countries, evidence exists that immigration has improved economic welfare, including raising tax revenue (Sriskandarajah et al. 2005). This is unsurprising, given restrictive immigration policies in receiving countries that allow in mainly people with skills for which there is an excess demand in the labour market. There is evidence that immigration does suppress wage levels in certain parts of the economy (or informalizes labour relations). Employers attract migrants to reduce the wages and bargaining powers of local workers, as Breman (1985) has extensively documented for western India. However, much of the research seems to contradict the popular belief that immigration contributes to unemployment, or substantial decreases in wages, in host societies. Moreover, policies matter, as measures that aim to restrict migration often do not result in the intended reductions of migration, but instead drive migrants underground, while making it less likely that supportive programmes for non-migrant populations are put in place.

Much less clarity exists about the effect of migration on the development of areas of origin, including in agriculture, even though this is perhaps the most relevant question for development studies and policies. Very few studies trace the effects of migration and remittances on villages of origin, even in areas with long traditions of out-migration – migration studies tend to focus on the top of the “migration hump”. There is evidence that migrants contribute to building of schools or other community activities (Russell et al. 1990). Migration can help to alleviate unemployment (Ghosh 1992). At the same time, out-migration can lead to a shortage of labour in some contexts, perhaps particularly the more skilled and, almost inevitably, entrepreneurial parts of the population. Field studies by Croll and Ping in villages of migrant origin in Anhui, Gansu, Jiangsu and Sichuan provinces in China, where out-migration was caused by land scarcity and rising costs of agriculture, showed a shortage of labour caused by migration. Remittances benefited families, but did not contribute to village development or the establishment and maintenance of village services, including those for facilitating agricultural development (Croll and Ping 1997).¹⁴

Not much is known, it seems, about the role of migrants in enhancing efficiency in agriculture. In England in the eighteenth century, and possibly elsewhere in Europe, migrants appear to have played important innovatory roles (Thirsk 1991). Lakshmanasamy’s (1990) literature review concludes that migration and remittances modernize the rural sector, both directly and

¹⁴ The World Bank Poverty Assessment for El Salvador highlights that remittances are important for raising household incomes (and stimulating demand for goods). But in assessing impact, the counterfactual is important too: families might have increased their labour supply in local markets if migration opportunities and remittances did not exist (see de Haan 2005a).

indirectly, through their impact on the production-increasing technological and institutional changes in the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the positive impacts depend on many factors like seasonality of movement, educational levels, length of time spent away, assets, and social structures and institutions allowing women to pursue activities previously reserved for men and household heads.

For decades, there has been a particular concern about brain drain (usually international migration by the better skilled, but equally important within countries). Recent analysis has started to look at the complexity of the issues involved, but has generally taken a more positive stance vis-à-vis brain drain (Kapur 2004; Pritchett 2003). However, international migration has become increasingly selective, which implies that there may be fewer opportunities for unskilled workers than in the nineteenth century. Detrimental effects of the selectivity of migration include increased international inequality, particularly if migrants are disconnected from those left behind. Beneficial effects include remittances, return migration, creation of trade and business networks, and incentive effects on human capital formation at home. Cross-country analysis indicates limited evidence that return migration is significant among the highly skilled (Docquier and Rapoport 2004), or that they contribute to technology diffusion. Docquier and Rapoport (2004) find positive benefits of prospect of migration on human capital formation and GDP growth—leading to a conclusion that brain drain should not induce developing countries to reduce education expenditures. But they find effects differ from country to country.

Analyses of migration tend to focus on the ascent and top of the migration hump. Impacts, however, can be long-term, and fortunes can reverse. One important example of this is the possibility of declining migration opportunities. On the one hand, areas of origin function as a safety valve, as seen in Indonesia during 1997 and in many transition countries. Other assessments—for example, on the effect of changing South African policies on migrant communities in Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland—are less positive. Chirwa (1997:650) gives a generally optimistic view about the effects of oscillating labour migration in the region, and describes the reasons for success and failure in the use of returns from migration: the “social, economic, as well as political disruptions caused by this process are just too great for weak economies and fragile political structures of the labour-supplying countries and local communities to effectively handle”. Leliveld (1997) describes the effects of declining migration on households in rural Swaziland: employment possibilities in the country are limited, and relatively young households with few working members and a weak economic position are among the most vulnerable in this context. Also, literature shows the negative effects of sudden barriers to international migration, such as the impact on sending countries of the Gulf War (for example, Addleton 1991).

Deshingkar (2004) mentions a whole range of issues that need to be taken up to better understand, and indeed enhance, the impacts of migration on development: for example, to better capture migration in surveys and censuses; integrate an understanding of migration in national planning; identify conditions under which migration and remittances can contribute to development; review laws and regulation; promote training; and identify conditions under which population mobility should be encouraged. China, whose reforms and perhaps even the closed economy under Mao benefited greatly from its overseas Chinese in nearby regions, recently has started to promote the return of migrants, including those that had started to move further away during the 1980s for study or work. In India, recent pilot programmes have begun to provide identity cards for migrants, primary education projects and the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with migrants. The question remains, though, whether such initiatives illustrate a more positive view of migrants and a better understanding of the importance of migration.

This review so far of theories about migration and its links to development and poverty suggests that in spite of the fact that there is a certain amount of knowledge, much remains unclear. This is partly due to the relative neglect of migration in mainstream development

thinking and policy, but also because of treatment of migrants as a homogeneous category. The impact of migration is heavily dependent on contexts, of the demand as well as supply side of the (migration) labour market, and the specific characteristics of migrants.

3. Children as (Independent) Migrants

Childhood as an intrahousehold cleavage has been largely ignored in migration studies, with intrahousehold issues being framed mainly in terms of gender. Our intention is not to pose gender against childhood—neither is sufficiently mainstreamed—but child migrants are particularly overlooked. When children are considered, it is usually as extra categories in age breakdowns, lumped together with young adults as “youth”, or merely as additions to adult migration. This fails to capture that childhood is a biologically distinct and socially constructed experience, parallel to gender distinctions.

Children can differ from adults in some ways that may alter how they are incorporated into migration: physiology, psychology, life experiences, knowledge, legal protections and restrictions, and society’s norms regarding childhood. These can mean that, as migrants, children have special vulnerabilities; limited opportunities for documented migration; age-specific responses to incentives and risks; limited independent access to shelter or basic services or livelihoods; and in parallel to gender constructions, are subject to varied legal and social norms, restrictions and expectations as “children”. A normative framework recognizing the distinctiveness of childhood has emerged at the global level, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified almost universally by destination and origin countries. The convention accords under-18 year olds’ claims on societies and governments to promote and protect their development, and the rights could be viewed as borderless and portable.¹⁵

Migration literature regarding children largely concerns children with migrant parents or those left behind by migrating parents. Both these categories deserve greater attention, particularly from mainstream migration research perspectives (rather than viewing them as specialist “child issues”), to understand for example, how children affect adult migration through their roles in family bonds, schooling and household economics. This section focuses on a third category of children who are especially not well understood, migrate and live independently of parents and adult guardians at destinations.

Extrapolation from high-income countries has created the perception that independent child migration is less prevalent than it is in other parts of the world, misleadingly suggesting that it occurs in exceptional circumstances. In particular since migrant children generally do not work in the North, the debate fails to recognize the relationship between migration and children’s (paid and unpaid) work. The extent and nature of children’s migration for work has not been well researched in either child labour or migration studies. Local perceptions of children’s work may differ from international norms, such as expressed in the UNCRC, and migration may be viewed by both the families and the children themselves as an avenue for escaping intergenerational poverty in places with few socioeconomic opportunities.

Children migrating independently include street children; children in plantations and agriculture; children fending for themselves after migrating with an adult who was deported, died or abandoned them; migrant children in domestic service, restaurants, petty trade and workshops; and children crossing borders independently, mainly without documents, and often to other developing countries. Some are in school, but few can avoid work entirely. In addition, presumably children can benefit and succeed as migrants (and indeed many adult migrants migrated as children), although hardly any research exists on the “positives”.

¹⁵ “States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (Article 2, UNCRC).

Basic questions, such as scale, age or sex structure of children's migration, remain unknown in most places. Most migration statistics make no distinction between children migrating with families, and children migrating independently. World Bank (2007) reports large shares of 12–24 year olds in international migration (ranging from 19 to 50 per cent of migrant flows, and 6 to 47 per cent of migrant stocks). Barros et al. (2002) estimated that around half the irregular migrants in Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa were 15–25 year olds. The International Labour Organization (ILO 2004) reports 60 per cent of children working in the informal sector in Ugandan cities were migrants. In sending communities in Laos, children made up one-third of migrants, while Thai immigration police in border provinces placed it closer to half (Phetsiriseng 2003). A study in South Africa concluded: "What was clear from the research is that there are sufficiently large numbers of children crossing borders unaccompanied to warrant major concern. Researchers were able to interview at least 60 children...within a two week period...and they could have continued" (Save the Children UK 2007:4). No in-depth country study exists (developing or otherwise) that connects children's migration with its broader causes or impact. Mostly ethnographic studies exist, scattered across a few countries, all with small samples. While this serves to illustrate some of the complexity of children's independent migration, there still needs to be a more explicit focus on the role of poverty, and the impact of migration on children's well-being.

Until recently, trafficking, rather than migration, was thought of as mainly accounting for children's independent movements without parents or adult guardians.¹⁶ There is a genuinely difficult nexus in distinguishing trafficked children and migrant children. While the trafficking-migration nexus is emphasized for independent children, in reality an equally complex nexus exists for children moving with their families into exploitative situations (sometimes identical to those of independent children). In the family context, a migration/development lens is applied to understand the movement, but for independent children the main response has been to apply a trafficking/anti-crime lens. This overlooks that for many children, migration did not occur under duress, deception or force.

By giving voice to children and their families, research has revealed degrees of some children's agency, independent motives and organization of migration. A study in rural Burkina Faso found that the majority of adolescent migration seemed self-motivated, and in half the cases adolescents financed the transport (TdH 2003). Phetsiriseng (2003) reports a similar picture for Laos, and Iversen (2006:11) writes on India: "The evidence from Mandya suggests that boys 12–14 regularly made labour migration decisions independently of their parents, and often without consent or even informing parents about their departure". A study of 4,500 cocoa farms in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, found that around one per cent of farmers employed cross-border or domestic migrant children (IITA 2002). An intermediary was involved in recruiting 30–40 per cent of the child workers, but the bulk of recruitment was by other workers, children making contacts themselves or by the farmer directly. In the cases of recruitment by intermediaries, none of the children reported their parents being paid or being forced against their will to leave home, and most claimed to know the recruiter.

This issue is connected to a strong theorization of childhood as a "safe life stage" as dependents of adults. Childhood is supposed to properly consist of school and play, not work—and, definitely not migration away from the family. The study in Burkina Faso (TdH 2003) asked adults about this and found varied responses—from those defining childhood as under 10 years of age (based on ideas about capacity for self-reflection), under 15 years of age (about decision making), or older adolescence (person unmarried). Around 40 per cent of adults felt 10–14 year olds should do the same tasks as adults. Migrant children in Ghana and the Gambia cite "strong expectations in family systems that children should start 'giving back' to their parents as soon as they are able, usually by their early teens" (Chant and Jones 2005:191).

¹⁶ The United Nations Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was adopted in 2000. Also known as the Palermo Protocol, it defines trafficking in children (under 18 years old) as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, even if this does not involve any fraudulent means such as violence, deception or coercion.

Although economic factors may act as a backdrop, the actual motives for children migrating independently can be more complex. Some of the reasons for migration given by independent migrant children in domestic work in Manila were predictable, such as family poverty and earning money to buy consumer goods; however, a high percentage (30 per cent) said that they were working to help pay for their education (Camacho 1999). Similar arguments are made by Giani (2006) for Bangladesh, by Hashim (2005) for Ghana and Anarfi et al. (2005) in other countries. Among 10–18-year-old independent migrants from rural Mali, Castle and Diarra (2003) found that while there were economic reasons for migrating, there were also social and cultural reasons, which took on the characteristics of “rites of passage”. Girls migrated to earn money to buy articles for their marriage, while boys wanted to be able to buy articles to increase their status. Many cited positive experiences of migration, being well treated by their employers, meeting their migratory objectives, improving their linguistic abilities, and particularly in contexts without schooling, the means to experience different worlds.

In some cases, children migrated independently because of health and other problems. Ansell and van Blerk (2004) found that in communities with high rates of HIV, children migrated to work and to care for sick relatives. Some experienced multiple moves. As mentioned before, the role of migration to diversify incomes and address household risks is well recognized, and children’s independent migration may be a part of this. Akresh (2004) connects income shocks to child fostering in West Africa, where some three-quarters of fostered children have both parents surviving, and another tenth have one parent.

Stites et al. (2007) found that in Uganda, children migrated, and often lived and worked on the streets because of domestic abuse, hunger and being abandoned by families. Some abandoned children kept believing, in some cases even after two years, that family members would return to collect them. Sometimes adults organized the migration before abandoning the children or before the children left the family. Conticini and Hulme (2006) found that in Bangladesh domestic abuse was a factor for children’s independent migration. This relates to issues of children’s agency discussed above. Many of the risks that migrant children face are better understood in the context of social reactions and harmful legal structures when children act autonomously in their own interest.

4. Migration, Poverty and Social Policy

The paper has discussed the different perspectives on migration in development thinking. This partly reflects different conditions under which migration occurs, but partly also underlying assumptions of desirability of migration, and different perceptions of the rights of migrants as citizens. This section looks at the implications of what is known about migration and poverty for broader development debates, in particular as they are articulated in PRSPs, and the recent social policy discourse (UNRISD 2006).

Even a decade ago, migration received scant attention in the broader development literature (de Haan 1999; de Haan and Rogaly 2002). This has changed considerably, with recent years seeing several high-level intergovernmental discussions on international migration and development.¹⁷ China, for example, has moved from restricting population movement toward facilitating labour mobility, and starting to address unintended consequences that accompany the movements of 100–200 million people. But even now, there remains a sedentary bias in development perceptions, with policy documents frequently ignoring migration, or defining it as a problem. And where migration does enter public or academic debates, simplified images of migration often predominate, ignoring complex gendered and age patterns, and ignoring agencies of men, women, and children.¹⁸ And importantly, internal migration continues to get little attention, even

¹⁷ See www.migrationdevelopment.org/index.php?id=8, accessed in November 2007.

¹⁸ Recent attention to environmental refugees as a result of climate change is an example, as analysed and criticized effectively in a recent paper commissioned by the World Bank’s social development department (Raleigh et al. 2008).

though this is quantitatively more important, especially for poorer groups who seldom manage to move abroad.

An important arena for development debate since the late 1990s has been the PRSPs, envisaged as “comprehensive” development strategies, involving debt relief and an increased focus on poverty reduction. It was probably inevitable that many reviews were commissioned to consider whether particular elements of development were sufficiently incorporated. A review by Black (2004:13) on how PRSPs dealt with migration found limited reference and content: “At present, PRSPs show considerable ambivalence toward migration, with the subject either not mentioned at all, or seen as contributing to population growth, urban squalor, the breakdown of traditional family structures, crime, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, land degradation and/or rural poverty”.

The review showed that seven PRSPs in Africa did not mention migration at all, and in 10 other countries the associated anti-poverty strategies did not refer to migration, while in some cases policy responses aimed to reduce migration. Most strikingly from a poverty-reduction point of view, but reflecting a long tradition of sedentary bias and fears of uncontrolled masses flooding cities, migration is usually seen as negative. Only a few documents refer to the benefits of migration—such as boosting incomes among the poor—or mention the negative impact of restrictive measures, such as on remittances. Exceptions include PRSPs for the Cape Verde, Mauritania and Senegal, which suggest strategies to promote remittances, engage emigrants in national development, or to shift toward urban jobs promotion rather than reducing rural-urban migration.

China demonstrates many of the features of a more positive view on migration. As mentioned, international migrants have clearly played an enormous role (Zhu 2006). The Chinese government has had a clear strategy to maintain close links with its diaspora, especially in Southeast Asia, and is currently attracting Chinese abroad, including students, to return, as an integral part of its development strategy. With respect to national migration, China’s experience of moving away from the old dualistic and controlled migration to much freer flows is of great importance. Again, it is key to have a good understanding of the policies that have accompanied this: the gradual reform of the *hukou* (household registration) system and local experimentation with alternatives; training programmes, sometimes with international support; successful programmes of resettlement that have been seen to reduce poverty; and a strong belief that development is accompanied by population mobility.¹⁹

But such positive or supportive approaches remain the exception rather than the rule. Even in recent social policy literature, which promotes pro-active social policies after years of seeing it as something residual within neoliberalism and structural adjustment,²⁰ and which emphasises links between economic and social policies,²¹ few references are made to migration, arguably reflecting the ambiguous position of migration in policy perceptions.²²

Clearly social policy on migration should be both protective and supportive. But at best, current thinking is focused on the protective issues, mainly in terms of social policies that compensate for the failures of markets (in terms of safety nets), as distinct from how social policies enable migrants to contribute to development. Of course, as can be seen in international migration literature, social policies are often a core mechanism of exclusion, and migrants are often depicted as abusers of social systems. In areas of destinations, migrants are often excluded from

¹⁹ Cai Fang 2007; Holdaway 2007. Inevitably, many policy issues remain, for example the impact of migration on children left behind, as discussed in Jingzhong et al. (2005) for mid-west China.

²⁰ Mkandawire 2004; UNRISD 2006; de Haan 2007.

²¹ Kanbur (2007); Wood and Gough (2006) draw lessons from the social policy literature from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

²² However, migration and livelihoods was a theme of a session of the 2005 social policy conference in Arusha: see Hall (2005) on international migrants from Ecuador, Yeates (2005) on the global care chain formed by international migrants, and Azam (2005) on policies in Pakistan and the Philippines.

access to many public provisions, and people on the move often have to struggle to carry over previously accumulated benefits. Non-state actors—such as families, churches, migrant organizations and the private sector—often make up for the failure of state policies (Hall 2005).

An important aspect of this is that children are denied access to social services because they, or their parents, are irregular migrants. Research in the United States suggests that having one irregular migrant parent increases the chances of a child living in poverty by three times, and having two irregular migrant parents increases it by seven times (Kanaiaupuni 2000). The Council of Europe has noted the marked variation across governments in the treatment of migrant children in accessing even very basic services in health and education (Council of Europe 2003). Research in developing countries on these issues is lacking. However, a study in South Africa found that 70 per cent of Somali refugee children were not registered in schools (GCIM 2005). Without doubt, similar disadvantages exist for children of migrants within national borders, where access to services in places of destination is limited.

The link between social policy and migration goes deeper than those important areas of exclusion alone. Social policy plays a key part on defining citizenship (Mamdani 2005): not only can citizenship (or “permanent residency”) define access to social services, social policy in turn also defines citizenship, and the gender and age components of that citizenship: delivery of social services almost by definition defines eligibility in terms of nationality or residency—even within national borders. Education, health, social security, affirmative action—all these policies are deeply political projects, with implications for principles of solidarity, and who can or cannot contest the content and quality of state provisions.²³

The political nature of social policy is evident in terms of cross-border migrants, but is no less important internally. As mentioned, migration within China is restricted through the registration system, effectively making rural migrants second-class citizens in urban areas—even though their economic contribution is increasingly recognized, restrictions are gradually being removed, and local governments are starting to enable migrants’ access to services. Cross-state border migrants in India can effectively be foreigners in their own country, and the federal character of the Nigerian state similarly turns people from other states into “outsiders”.

Thus, migration continues to challenge development thinking, and raises particular questions in social policy. Answers to these questions should be context-specific and take account of the diverse nature of migration and groups involved, and one should never underestimate their deeply political nature. A key priority for future social policy research lies in highlighting the mechanisms through which social policy can enhance access by discriminated migrant groups, and indeed include them as citizens. In the social policy literature, there is a strong emphasis on highlighting win-win situations of addressing equity and efficiency—there is a clear need to extend this to a discussion on migrants.

5. Conclusion

This paper has described the complexity of analysing migration and poverty. It has highlighted general themes within a very broad literature, on a very diverse topic, with the intention of trying to locate gaps in knowledge. Much is known about the motives of migrants and their contexts, especially if viewing them as a largely homogenous mass. But less is known once the focus is shifted on to poor households specifically, and on intra-household processes, in terms of gender and generations. Empirical findings about linkages between migration and poverty differ greatly, and there is a sense—although difficult to prove at this stage—that there may be a causal link between the simplifying theoretical assumptions and conflicting empirical results.

²³ Christiansen et al. (2008) show how definitions of children and families used by international agencies matter for, and can conflict with, local realities.

Most analysts tend to agree that migration emerges out of differences in opportunity, and that workers respond to opportunities generally (though there will be degrees of integration of labour markets—one of the problems of migration studies is that they focus on migrants and less on the wider environment). “Migration optimists” argue that where migration does not lead to reduction in disparities, this tends to be due to barriers for migrants, such as international borders or labour market inefficiencies. “Migration pessimists” emphasize that there is very little empirical evidence that shows that migration does in fact lead to reduction in disparities.

The conclusions of the optimists and pessimists are not necessarily incompatible. Migration has different impacts in different contexts. For example, evidence on remittances shows that context matters greatly in both the amount remitted and its use. This may be key to whether migration reduces disparities, as the very conditions in which remittances could lead to development, were the reasons migrants left in the first place. Migration should be seen within a larger strategy of poverty reduction, not as an optimistic “solution” nor as a pessimistic “problem”. Unfortunately current gaps in knowledge—including in social policy literature—do not help find the right balance.

For example, the effects of temporary worker schemes on development at origin have been framed mainly in terms of remittances or brain drain. This leaves the problem of what children and others left behind do in cases where significant proportions of the population of prime productive age have migrated, and it raises questions around what sustainable social policy can mean when production and tax collection occurs elsewhere.

Debates on remittances sometimes suggest that private flows can be seen as substitutes for public investment in quality services. This fails to recognize that children’s development and other social policies have the characteristics of public goods. An important dimension of equity is across generations, but there are no public finance mechanisms to ensure that all children, with or without migrant parents, have a fair share in increased global wealth from migration. Current debates around brain drain hardly capture these issues, such as the possibility of linking inflows of international aid and regional fiscal transfers to outflows of human capital.

There is insufficient appreciation that children affect, and are affected by, migration through their roles within families and communities. The problem is partly structural, rooted in definitions of childhood around learning and play that ignore children’s socioeconomic contributions and evolving capacities. On the one hand, migration can sometimes infringe and endanger the enjoyment of children’s rights, but on the other hand, ignoring poor children’s early responsibilities, lack of opportunities, aspirations and agency could oversimplify their reality. A balance needs to be located somewhere between ignoring independent child migrants (often the current situation), adopting a rescue mentality (partly linked to assuming that children who move independently are always trafficked) and treating children like adult migrants (without recognizing the distinctiveness of childhood). One of the biggest challenges in this is an over-focus on movement per se as a cause of children’s vulnerabilities, at the expense of underlying socioeconomic disadvantages (that influence why and which children migrate independently, and their socioeconomic exclusion at destination).

Social policy vis-à-vis migrants is a double-edged sword. There are practical ways in which social policies can protect and support migrants, and help labour markets and workers adjust under processes of increased migration. At the same time, social policies define citizenship, produce forms of inclusion, and hence inevitably exclusion. The key question is for social policies toward migration to be sensitive to its processes, complex nature and structure, distinctiveness of particular groups, and its inherent political nature.

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