

## MIGRATION, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A FAO PERSPECTIVE

### *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

#### A. THE IMPORTANCE OF MIGRATION FOR THE WORK OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has a key role to play in migration issues as migration processes are closely related to agriculture, agricultural policy and rural development, for which FAO has a mandate within the United Nations system. Transformation processes in agriculture and rural areas influence migration patterns and migration dynamics, which in turn have significant implications for agriculture and rural development. For example,

- (a) Migration-induced changes in the population distribution —and, consequently, in the social organization and patterns of production and consumption in both sending and receiving countries and areas— can considerably affect both the supply of food and the demand for types of food produced and consumed;
- (b) In the context of missing or imperfect rural markets, such as credit and insurance markets in rural areas, migration has an important impact on household agricultural production, investment and labour allocation decisions;
- (c) Rural out-migration tends to exert a downward pressure on agricultural labour per capita. However, this does not automatically lead to reduced agricultural incomes because the loss in household labour may be, and often is, compensated by improvements in other areas, such as increased access to capital. The outcomes of migration therefore depend on the broader agro-ecological, economic, and institutional context;
- (d) Migration can significantly change the quality of human capital in rural areas, especially when outmigration of highly-skilled people is not compensated by resources, such as remittances becoming available for investment in health and education of children and youth;
- (e) Migration can have a strong influence on gender relations. For instance, in areas experiencing outmigration of men, women are increasingly becoming farm managers. This can expose them to risks, such as gender-based discrimination when they find themselves in competition with male farmers as well as opportunities, such as greater control over household resources, and improved socio-economic status;
- (f) Of much importance is also the well-being of migrants and/or refugees, who are often at an increased risk of poverty, malnutrition or hunger, and economic exploitation in the destination areas;
- (g) Cross-border migration of people is known to be a potent factor in the emergence and spread of human, crop and animal diseases, such as the spread HIV/AIDS, SARS, tuberculosis, foot-and-mouth disease, avian flu and banana wilt, with important implications for agriculture, food security, and beyond, such as international relations.

The escape from rural poverty and degraded agricultural resources has historically been an important motive for migration. Food insecurity and lack of economic opportunities in agriculture and related rural sectors, such as forestry and fisheries can lead to migration to other areas in search of employment, income, or food. This migration affects both sending and receiving areas:

- In the sending areas, it can lead to dramatic shifts in the age- and sex-composition of the population, often leading to higher dependency ratios and more female-headed households, changes in the dynamics of the labour market, and reduced ability to maintain rural infrastructure, such as roads and irrigation systems and manage agricultural resources, e.g. land and water resources.
- The receiving areas —often urban slums— may experience considerable food-security strain from the influx of migrants.

In addition, migratory movements can influence dietary patterns:

- Migrants tend to adopt new alimentary behaviours upon settling in the new environment.
- Some migrants may keep traditional food preferences and thus create demand for food imports from the countries of origin.
- Both processes could substantially change the demand for food —produced and/or imported— in receiving countries.

## B. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Migration is the critical population issue of our time, from both an analytical and a policy point of view. Therefore, management of migration needs to be forward-looking, proactive, innovative and comprehensive. In order to solve migration problems and manage migration flows successfully, tailor-made programmes must be developed and implemented that address all affected population groups —poor as well as non-poor, men as well as women, immigrants as well as host populations. The food security and poverty dimension of migration and the effects of migration flows on agriculture and rural development need to be better understood and more effectively addressed in policies and programmes.

Government and policymakers must be made aware that agriculture, when properly managed, can not only produce food but also have a positive impact on population distribution, poverty alleviation, and the environment. Given that remittances constitute a key source of development finance —especially in rural areas— it is crucially important to identify and establish policy strategies to strengthen the effectiveness and development impact of migrant remittances. In particular, there is an urgent need for:

- sound macro-economic policies, political stability and improvements in the investment climate in many parts of the developing world, in order to foster remittance flows, and
- innovative measures to improve migrants' access to the formal financial sector through mechanisms such as strengthening of financial infrastructures, promoting cost efficiency and transparency of transfer services, and increasing outreach to underserved communities.

## C. WHAT ROLE FAO CAN PLAY

By focusing on rural and peri-urban settlements, agricultural production, sustainable development of farming communities, FAO can help to:

- strengthen sustainable management of natural resources, improve food security of rural communities and foster investment in agriculture, thus helping to regulate distress rural out-migration and ease the pressure on urban centers.

- strengthen lucrative forms of rural enterprise, such as farm production, off-farm services, agribusiness, thus providing economically and socially viable rural communities.
- ensure the protection of the human rights of migrants, including their right to food, and prevent their abuse and exploitation, particularly in agriculture-related industries.
- leverage the productive use of remittances by promoting suitable frameworks for rural finance and agricultural investment.
- using an interdisciplinary perspective, i.e. combining demographic, socio-cultural and economic approaches, contribute to a better understanding and analysis of the relationship between migration and biophysical and socio-economic aspects of agriculture.
- promote coherence of rural development and migration policies, identify best practices where migration has benefited rural development.
- contribute substantively to the ongoing inter-disciplinary dialogue on migration and participate in international and inter-agency cooperation in order to effectively manage migration flows for the maximum benefit —economic, social, political— of people in both the developing and the developed world.