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MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT^{* †}

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BACKGROUND

While it can be argued that development has always been part of the debate in migration-related research, it has only been in the last ten to fifteen years that migration has been seen as a phenomenon that can be manipulated or “managed” to promote development (Skeldon 2008). The debate, however, has been plagued by conceptual difficulties and misunderstanding. One misunderstanding that pre-dated current concerns was the idea that migration was caused by a lack of development: that people left poor areas or poor countries because of a lack of opportunities at home. Certainly, this idea contains an element of truth, but closer investigation revealed that it was rarely the poorest who moved and rarely the poorest countries that participated most in the global migration system. Moreover, the research revealed, first, that development in areas of origin did not slow outmigration: it often, initially at least, accelerated the outmovements. Second, the research revealed that not all the consequences of migration on areas of origin could be interpreted as negative. While the best-educated might leave a community, the migrants might send money back that could be invested to improve conditions at home. The migrants might also learn skills when in destination areas that could later be put to good use if they returned. Lastly, it was observed that migrants regularly kept in contact with their home communities and, if these ties could be channelled in certain directions, development of the home areas might be promoted. While negative consequences were still recognized, the view evolved that policy could promote the positive and reduce the negative aspects of migration. Thus, three central components emerged in the migration-development debate: remittances; brain circulation; and diaspora.

CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS

The first conceptual difficulty with any discussion of migration and development relates to the use of the word “and”. This usage gives the impression that “migration” and “development” belong in two separate “boxes”: that migration is somehow separate and distinct from development. More seriously from a policy point of view, it gives the impression that migration can be extracted and managed separately to produce certain benefits for development. While the inter-linked nature of migration and development was clearly recognized in the use of the term “nexus”, for example (Nyberg-Sørensen et al 2002), the impression conveyed is still one of two identifiable phenomena interacting rather than migration as an integral component of development itself (Skeldon 1997).

A second important conceptual difficulty relates to the word “development”. How is this to be defined? An international consensus emerged around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a “compact among nations to end human poverty” (UNDP 2003). Here, the reduction, ideally the elimination, of poverty is seen as the fundamental measure of development. Yet, in the discussions of development, and often in the debates on migration and development, economic growth is still considered to be central to any meaningful debate about development. However, the political dimension is also fundamental to any analysis of development and several other social and demographic

variables could also be added into the mix. The key point is that “development” needs to be disaggregated into specific components before any role of migration in the process can meaningfully be assessed.

Migration, too, is difficult to measure and to conceptualize. The technical details lie beyond the scope of this discussion except to emphasize that the debate on migration and development generally excludes the majority of those who move: those who move internally within countries. The preoccupation has been with those who move internationally, and particularly with those who move from the developing to the developed world. The vast majority of those who move do so within the borders of their own country (Skeldon 2006) and significant numbers of others move among poorer countries themselves.

SPECIFIC TOPICS AND KEY QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. ***The multidimensional nature of migration.*** The multidimensional aspects of linkages between migration and development should be clear from the introductory points made above. However, one of the more obvious illustrations is that virtually each one of the MDGs has implications for the movement of population. For example, poor countries do not have the resources to establish the broad coverage of education and health facilities that are required to achieve the goals on education, gender and health. Children have to travel from their villages in order to pursue all but the most basic education, quality being as, if not more, important to parents than local availability. The distribution of health facilities, too, means that people have to travel even for basic treatment. Inequalities in the distribution of services are often as important as the unbalanced distribution of employment opportunities in explaining local population movements.

2. ***Migration transitions.*** Most non-forced migration is demand-driven. People, once they know about opportunities elsewhere, and that itself is a function of education, will tend to move towards them. Hence, as countries develop, migration tends to increase. Over the longer term, as societies and economies progress through a demographic transition from higher to lower fertility and mortality, they may also move through a migration transition from net emigration to net immigration. However, this development sequence does not imply that outmigration ceases, simply that the net flow reverses. Developed economies such as the United Kingdom and the United States, for example, are major countries of emigration as well as immigration. More specifically, the United Kingdom, according to World Bank estimates, had a greater absolute number of highly-skilled emigrants outside its borders in 2000 than any other country at 1.44 million (Docquier and Marfouk 2006: 175). Other sources have estimated that some 5.5 million British citizens are abroad, representing some 9.2 per cent of the population (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006). This percentage compares with the some 10 per cent of the populations of the Philippines and Mexico, seen as “classic” countries of emigration, that are estimated to be outside their respective countries. This does not mean that the types of migrants outside the United Kingdom are the same as those from the Philippines

or Mexico but simply that migration does not cease with development: in many ways it reflects development. Poor isolated countries and areas often have low rates of migration whereas those actively participating in the global system are characterized by high levels of migration and mobility. Migration is one of the more obvious markers of globalization.

3. **Remittances.** More has perhaps been written about remittances than any other aspect of migration and development. Less well appreciated is the fact that remittances reflect the origin of the migrants themselves and these are highly concentrated and flow back to a relatively small number of towns and villages in the countries of origin. Some 95 per cent of migrants from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom up to the late 1980s came from that district (Gardner 1995). Similarly, the majority of the migrants from Pakistan to the United Kingdom came from the mainly rural district of Mirpur in the north of that country (Ballard 1987: 24). Much of the migration from India to the Middle East has been from the southern state of Kerala (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan 2003) and migration from China has been dominated by three southern coastal provinces, Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang, and from very specific parts of those provinces. In Peru, virtually 82 per cent of households receiving remittances were found in the more developed coastal provinces rather than to the poorer Sierra, with fully 57 per cent in the capital, Metropolitan Lima (OIM 2008). Only just over 5 per cent of households receiving remittances in Peru were in the rural areas. The immediate effect is to reinforce or increase inequalities between rural and urban and among rural areas. Thus, unlike aid, or official development assistance, which can be targeted at particular groups and specifically towards the eradication of poverty, remittances are flows of an entirely different nature. They are focused on the specific areas of origin of migration that might involve neither the poorest areas nor the poorest people within those areas.

4. **The highly skilled.** The emigration of the highly skilled was, and, despite a literature to the contrary (Stark 2004; Clemens 2007) to a large extent still is, seen as negative for the countries of origin as they lose the people most likely to be able to generate development. The available data suggest that, in terms of absolute numbers, the sources of skilled migrants lie primarily in the developed world itself and in a relatively small number of middle-income developing countries in East and South Asia (Docquier and Marfouk 2006). However, assessing the loss of skilled as a proportion of the skilled workforce of any country does show that small island countries and a number of sub-Saharan countries are highly affected, and it is in these countries that a brain drain may be found. In discussions of brain drain the issue of specific place of origin of the migrants looms large. If the skilled are concentrated in the largest urban areas, then their emigration is not going to make much impact on the poor rural areas where the need may be greatest. Some 90 per cent of doctors in Haiti are supposedly concentrated in Port-au-Prince. In Ghana, 46 per cent of both private and public sector doctors are to be found in Greater Accra, a figure that rises to 69 per cent when the second city, Kumasi, is included (Nyonator and Dovlo 2005: 229). Several oft-neglected aspects of the brain drain debate remain. First, are highly skilled professionals the most appropriate personnel for the conditions where the development needs are greatest? For example, the need for health personnel with basic skills may be greater than for those trained to international standards for modern hospitals. Second, pay and conditions in developing countries may lead to a

migration from the sector, but not from the country. Although some 32,000 vacancies for nurses existed in South Africa around the beginning of the twenty-first century, some 35,000 registered nurses were found to be inactive or unemployed in the country (OECD 2004). Skill loss is not just about migration. Third, the place of training of the skilled is rarely considered, mainly because of problems of available data. While many of the skilled from a middle-income country such as India or the Philippines with long traditions of education are likely to be trained in the country of origin, the same is not the case for poorer countries of origin where institutions for advanced training do not exist. It has been estimated that some 55 per cent of those from Latin America and the Caribbean who are living in the United States were trained in the United States; even more than 40 per cent of those from China and India in the United States had been trained in that country (United Nations 2006). Over two-thirds of foreign scientists conducting research in the United States in 1999 had been trained in the United States (Johnson 2003: 6). Hence, many of the brains are refined, if not created, in countries of destination. It is also clear that, at the local level too, the children of villages in poor areas have to move to larger settlements in order to pursue their education to secondary level and beyond. Thus, training at all levels tends to occur at progressively higher levels of the settlement hierarchy, a process that is facilitated by migration.

5. *The diaspora.* Given that many of the best and brightest, as well as wealthiest, members of any country or community live outside their natal areas, the diaspora, or community of those living outside, has been seen as a resource that can be tapped or “leveraged” for the development of home areas (Kuznetsov 2006). Unquestionably, diaspora groups such as the Overseas Chinese or the Viet Kieu have played and continue to play a significant role in the development of China and Vietnam respectively. However, in both these cases, we are dealing with strong “developmental” states and there is something for overseas migrants to either invest in, or return to, if they so choose, as many have, to participate in the current rapid economic growth. It is unreasonable to expect overseas migrants to participate in failed states and economies of origin and, on their own, to be able to promote development in home areas. They need to work within some effective structures if they are to have an impact on their countries of origin. It must always be remembered that not all in the diaspora need work for the best interest of governments in home areas and may actively seek to undermine political structures at home. The “Janus face” of diasporas is discussed in Kapur (2007). The diaspora is highly heterogeneous and a temptation exists to essentialize it into a homogeneous entity that seeks to work for the development of country of origin.

6. *International labour migration.* More specifically, the question of promoting international labour mobility exists. There seems little question that promoting the freer movement of workers will indeed increase the volume of remittances. Estimates have suggested that if developed economies took in an additional number of labour migrants equivalent to just 3 per cent of their labour force, through GATS mode 4, for example, annual gains in remittances of US\$150 billion might result, almost a doubling of the present official volume (Winters et al 2002). Nevertheless, as suggested above, remittances cannot be seen as a panacea for development, even if they clearly can play a role in reducing poverty. It has been estimated that the massive labour migration from the

state of Kerala in southern India to the Gulf States contributed to a 12 per cent reduction in poverty in that state. Convincing evidence of the impact of remittances on poverty alleviation is also available from Latin America (see the essays in Özden and Schiff 2006, for example). Yet, despite the volume of remittances received by Kerala, that state has not experienced a parallel increase in economic growth, actually declining in rank by gross state domestic product between 1980 and 1998. Remittances may improve human capital but, in doing so, may lock certain populations into dependence upon further migration. In the Gulf States and throughout much of East and Southeast Asia, labour migration is the norm, with migrants not allowed to settle in destination economies. This means that states are hosting temporary populations with no rights to long-term residence, let alone citizenship. The rights of migrants, not just to entitlement to fair wages and working conditions and access to basic services, but also to bring their families, emerge as major issues. In the developed economies of North America, Australasia and Europe, with their more developed rights legislation, the issue of admitting temporary workers as opposed to prospective citizens raises fundamental and sensitive questions that are not easy to resolve. As these economies are essentially democracies with open political systems, the voices of specific citizen interest groups are often raised against immigrants, and immigration has become a major political issue in some destination societies.

DISCUSSION

The above points should have made clear the multidimensional nature of migration and development, a topic not helped by a certain lack of conceptual clarity as to what the basic terms actually mean. How are the terms “migration” and “development” to be defined, exactly? What is clear is that migration is a significant phenomenon that appears to grow as economies develop. Whether it continues to grow as populations age remains to be seen. The one universal generalization that can be made about migration is that the majority of those who move are young adults. As labour force growth slows in the developed world, the demand for imported workers is likely to grow. However, as populations in source areas also develop and age, the number of young adults in these populations begins to slow, which ultimately should give rise to fewer migrants. This process has not yet spread evenly across the world and the number of young adults in many areas is still growing as a result of persistent high fertility. Nevertheless, the trend towards lower fertility is a universal, if variable, process. For example, the demographic giant China is currently facing labour shortages of over 2 million in southern coastal regions owing both to slow growth in labour force, the result of prior population policy, and to the emergence of alternative opportunities inland for previous migrants to the coast (Wang et al 2005).

The central question revolves round whether migration can be “managed” in order to achieve some development goal. Given the multidimensional nature of migration, it seems unlikely that it can be easily manipulated, increased, decreased or changed in direction to suit certain desired policy objectives. The history of internal migration policy is one of failure over all but the immediate short term (Skeldon 1990). The existence of

international borders does introduce a filter that can act to control migration but, even here, a “gap” between stated policy objectives and outcomes appears to be growing (Cornelius et al 2004). However, the whole emphasis on “management” and influencing migration may be misplaced. Rather, policy makers should be examining the development policies they wish to implement and then calculate what the implications of such implementation for migration might be. In a way, a “migration impact statement” for development policies is being advocated. In this way, migration is not seen as being separate from development. Quite the reverse, migration is seen as an integral part of the outcome of the implementation of development policy. Thus, development policy becomes the driver to be managed and migration the outcome, rather than the other way round. Certainly, it can still be recognized that the migration itself can have both foreseen and unforeseen consequences for development. Nevertheless, the shift in emphasis of the explicans from migration to development is significant with migration then the explicandum. Migration is primarily a consequence of development, no matter how defined, and migration policy becomes essentially accommodationist rather than directive. In this way, a greater coherence between migration and development policies is more likely to be achieved.

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