

Migration and Gender in Asia

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Basic Premise

- Gender is a socially constructed relationship between man and woman
- In such socially constructed relations, men and women occupy different social places
- Moreover, in relation to men, women occupy an unequal and disadvantaged position
- Migration enables people to move out of their traditionally determined social places and start afresh.
- Successful migration may lead to accumulation of wealth, transfer of knowledge, skills and ideas
- Women's participation in migration can lead to economic and social empowerment of women. This, in turn, can lead to more equitable relationships between genders.

Total stock of migrants and percentage of women

- In 2005, 190 million people were living outside their countries of origin
- 49.6% of them were women
- Asia is the second largest region, Europe being the first
- However, proportion of women is lowest in Asia, at 44.7%
- Of course, women's participation in temporary migration within Asia is increasing at a faster rate.

Salient Features

- Most labour migrations of recent times are of a temporary nature
- Gulf countries are not the only employers of men and women migrant workers
- Some of the East and South East Asian countries have emerged as major players
- Up until 1980 mostly men participated
- Since then, some gender specific jobs have emerged which have created scope for large scale female migration.

Focus on Migration of Women from and within Asia

- Typical migration of women as dependent spouses of male migrants
- Independent migration of women as labour
- Independent migration of women as students and professionals
- International marriage migration
- This paper focuses on second type; temporary contract migration

Major Labour Sending and Receiving Countries in Asia

- **Sending:** India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam
- **Receiving:** Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan

Percentage of Women Migrants in Some Selected Countries

Country	%age women	year
Philippines	60	2006
Indonesia	83	2006
Laos	50	2007
Cambodia	73	2006
Myanmar	55	2006
Sri Lanka	52	2007
Bangladesh	6	2007
Nepal	< 1	2007
India	.05	2007
Pakistan	.04	2007

Point to be noted

- There are several sending states in South-east Asia
- Among South Asia only 1 country is a major sending country

Types of Employment

- Professionals: Doctors, Engineers, Nurses, Entertainers
- Skilled/Semi-Skilled: Manufacturing workers
- Unskilled: Domestic workers, cleaners
- The paper concentrates on semi-skilled and unskilled workers

Work Conditions

- Wages of semi- and low skilled workers are low
- Women are paid less than men for similar work
- Some countries have provision for overtime
- Compared to men, women experience longer working hours
- Women work as domestic workers, in isolation
- Neither men nor women have access to collective bargaining
- Domestic work is not covered by labour law
- A section of women are physically and sexually abused

Some Noteworthy Findings

Household Survey

- In Sri Lanka, children of remittance receiving families have higher birth weight
- In El Salvador and Sri Lanka remittance receiving families have lower drop out rates for school going aged children
- Families with women migrants spent more on private tuition than non migrant families, thus ensuring better education (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)
- When it comes to remittances sent by women, children's education, healthcare and nutrition are major areas of investment

Poverty and Migration

- At a larger spectrum, we know that 6% of the cut in poverty in Bangladesh is due to remittances – 2006
- Poverty head count reduced 11% in Nepal between 1995 and 2004.
- Research also shows that families spoil a section of the remittances
- Women migrants send larger portion of their income in remittances than men

Gender Implications: State Policies

- Labour recruitment policies of receiving states reinforce traditional gendered division of labour
- Women predominantly participated in the care giving sector
- Policies of sending countries are varied
- Some follow restrictive policies; these reinforce traditional patriarchal values, that in order to protect family honour, female movement should be restricted.
- Such policies have resulted in the growth of irregular female migration and trafficking.
- States usually work as agents of patriarchy

Changes in gendered roles

- Women's participation in international labour market put many of them in main bread earner's role.
- In the country of destination women need to take independent decisions outside their families support mechanisms.
- In many women this instills better negotiating capacity
- Again, such independent capacity sometime leads to conflict within the family upon return
- Usually better negotiating skills result in better power sharing within the family
- Occasionally families do disintegrate

Some Roles Never Change

- Studies on left behind families show in married households when men migrate women sometime take over the roles of their male counterparts
- When women migrate, husbands rarely take up gender specific household maintenance tasks.
- Some husbands were found to be more careful about children's education
- In majority cases extended family took over
- Philippines: example of transnational motherhood

Recommendations

- All kinds of restrictions on female migration should be removed immediately: men and women should be given equal rights to choose to migrate or not.
- To ensure decent work conditions for both men and women, 1990 UN Convention and relevant ILO conventions should be ratified by all sending countries
- Civil societies of sending countries should create pressure on their governments to put migration on the agenda for different regional fora and also to convince the receiving countries to ratify.

Recommendations, continued

- Upcoming global forum should push for recognition of domestic work as wage labour and attempt to bring it under the labour laws of receiving countries
- Social identity of women migrants should be respected. Social space of the migrant workers both men and women should be protected through ensuring strict working hours, better access to communicate with family, family reunification, holidays and recreation. All these should be placed in the negotiating table in bilateral and multilateral fora.

Recommendations, Continued

- Female labour migration is complex. Pre-departure training for female migrant workers should be made mandatory in all labour sending countries.
- Philippines and Sri Lanka developed institutions to better govern female migration. Institutional mechanisms for experience sharing and learning from each other should be in place. SAARC, ASEAN, etc. could be such forum.

Recommendations, continued.

- To lift women up from low end care giving to professional workers, other sending countries can learn from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and India about how to lift the standards of their training centers for health care workers.
- Women migrants send home larger portion of their income than men. Women migrants deserve to be rewarded both nationally and internationally for their contributions.
- To sustain women's economic empowerment, gender segregated investment tools are required.

Thank you very much

Questions Please?