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Migration and inclusive urbanization

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Introduction

Perceptions of migration have changed in the last decade. Recent global declarations including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the New Urban Agenda refer primarily to large-scale movements that need to be planned and well managed. In quite some contrast, the 1994 report of the International Conference on Population and Development gives far more attention to rural-urban migration and governments' concerns with rapid urban growth and urbanisation, with an emphasis on the impact of development policies on population distribution. Large-scale movement of migrants and refugees is certainly a defining and dramatic concern for this decade and likely for decades to come. At the same time, rapid urbanisation and growing urban poverty remain critical in much of the Global South and are closely linked to socio-economic change. In this context, addressing urban poverty rather than managing migration may prove to be more effective to achieve more inclusive and sustainable urbanisation.

Urbanisation, migration and economic growth

There is a strong and persistent relationship between urbanisation and economic growth. Indeed, it is hard to find any country or region of the world where sustained economic growth has occurred without urbanisation. Many aspects of urban change in recent decades are unprecedented, and today's world's urban population is larger than the total world's population in 1960. Understanding what underpins urbanisation and how this may change in the future is the first step in order to consider the implications of urbanisation for sustainable development in its broadest sense – including social, economic and environmental dimensions and social justice.

Urbanisation is a process that is deeply influenced by the scale and nature of economic, social and political change. This, in turn varies both between and within nations and regions, and helps explain why within a global process of urbanisation there are often substantial local variations, including instances of de-urbanisation that reflect economic decline or collapse, conflict and/or environmental disasters. So while there is a growing recognition of the economic benefits of urbanisation, there is also a need to understand the context-specific factors that influence it (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014). This is especially important since economic growth alone does not necessarily result in inclusive urbanisation, and in many instances entails risks of exclusion.

In low and middle-income nations, urbanisation is driven by net rural-urban migration responding to better economic opportunities in urban areas, or by the lack of opportunities in rural home areas. People's movement reflects the spatial distribution of economic opportunities, and most of the economic growth in the past 60 years has been in urban centres. Today, around 97 percent of the world's GDP is generated by industry and services, and around 65 percent of the world's economically active population works in industry and services. Most of these activities are typically located in urban

areas, where they can benefit from economies of scale and agglomeration economies (Satterthwaite et al, 2010).

Urbanisation is often conflated with the growth of large cities. While large urban centres are rapidly emerging in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia – the two regions where urbanisation processes are most dynamic – the demographic and socio-economic significance of small urban centres is typically underestimated, partly because of variations in definitions and in administrative status. These emerging urban centres can fulfil important functions in regional development and support rural transformation processes including rural household income diversification, and strengthen food systems (Tacoli and Agergaard, 2017). Smaller urban centres are central in the emerging interest in territorial approaches to regional development (UCLG, 2016).

Urbanisation, urban growth and urban poverty

In many low and middle-income nations, urban growth has been accompanied by the rapid expansion of unplanned, underserved neighbourhoods with high concentrations of poor people. In many urbanising nations urban poverty is an important and growing problem; ‘excessive’ migration is not its source, however, and measures to curb migration can easily make both urban and rural poverty worse. A recent review of population distribution policies in the emerging economies of South Africa, Brazil, China and Russia suggests that efforts to control rural-urban migration have generally not been successful but have created serious hardship and inequalities that persist even long after concerns over rapid urbanisation have past (McGranahan and Martine, 2014).

The lack of adequate, regular incomes is an important dimension of urban poverty as urban economies are essentially cash-based. There is also evidence that low-income consumers typically spend much more for goods and services of inferior quality than wealthier groups. But income is not the only dimension of urban poverty. Around one billion urban dwellers live in overcrowded tenements or temporary shacks. These settlements are typically considered to be illegal, which means that residents do not have access to public infrastructure – roads, surface drainage, water and sanitation – and services – health, education and emergency services.

Living in informal settlements creates additional, non-income deprivations. These include the lack of policing, often resulting in high levels of violence and insecurity; lack of financial services and entitlement to vote, both of which usually require legal addresses and official land tenure documents; higher prices to purchase privately provided basic goods such as water and food, and services such as the use of latrines, school and health care – and also high costs of renting what is usually inadequate housing.

The health outcomes of living in informal settlements are dramatic, and especially heavy for children – the still limited number of studies show that in many instances infant and child mortality rates can be higher than in rural areas, and malnutrition and stunting among children often goes hand in hand with increasing rates of overweight and obese adults in some of the most pernicious forms of nutrition transitions (APCHR, 2002 and 2014; Kimani-Murage, 2015; Ezeh et al, 2017).

These impacts are also heavily gendered: women bear the primary responsibility for domestic and care work, and the lack or inadequate provision of basic services and unsafe environmental conditions so widespread in informal settlements disproportionately affect them. Engaging in paid work is in most cases a necessity for women in low income households, but long hours, often made worse by long journeys to work, and time-consuming reproductive activities – including care for the often sick children, preparing food in inadequate housing with limited if any dedicated cooking space (Tolossa, 2010) – take a toll in what is best described as women’s time poverty (Tacoli, 2012). The impacts of living conditions in informal settlements on urban food security and nutrition are usually overlooked – availability of affordable food in urban markets is often considered to be sufficient. Emerging research looking into the preparation and consumption of food in such neighbourhood suggests that the issue is far more complex and includes both food and non-food factors (Tacoli et al, 2013).

It is important to stress that while the poorest migrants may reside in these neighbourhoods, they are not the only ones. The growth of informal settlements – and the challenge of providing infrastructure and services to their residents – is as much a political and governance issue as a technical or financial one.

Local governments play perhaps the most important role in ensuring that urbanisation is inclusive and that its benefits are shared. While migrants are often perceived as increasing urban poverty, it is important to keep in mind that the very large proportion of the urban population of low- and middle-income nations that lacks access to adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services is made up of migrants and non-migrants alike. In part, this is because migrants are far from being a homogenous group as discussed below.

Migrants in the cities

Policies that aim to curb rural-urban migration usually equate migration with growing urban poverty on the assumption that most, if not all, migrants are rural poor who ‘transfer’ their poverty to urban contexts. This does not take into account the diversity of the people who migrate, their reasons for moving, the directions in which they move and the duration of their stay in destination areas. It also does not account for the fact that a significant share of migrants to urban centres does not come from rural areas, but from other urban centres. From a rural perspective, there is evidence that permanent migrants from rural areas are often from the wealthiest groups, moving for employment and/or education purposes. But there is also a growing proportion of impoverished rural people who lose their livelihoods due to escalating risk, including those related to climatic events, declining returns from farming and indebtedness. And it is estimated that about 70 percent of people displaced across or within national borders live in cities.

Analyses of disadvantaged groups within urban areas tend to be based on income (and/or assets), housing conditions and access to basic services. Data are in many cases disaggregated by sex, age and sometimes by ethnic origin. However, migrant status is rarely taken into account. The limited data available suggest that while there are no significant differences between migrants and non-migrants among non-poor groups, migrants are over-represented among the urban poor, and in many cities they constitute a substantial proportion of the poorest groups.

Migrants' additional disadvantages in the cities often relate to exclusion from citizenship rights and from social protection programmes. Ration cards in India, household registration in China and Vietnam are all important in ensuring access to basic services, but they are not 'mobile' and rights tend to be lost when people move. Although informal sector jobs are common among the urban poor, migrants are less likely to have access to land and capital, and have higher levels of food insecurity than non-migrants (Crush, 2012). Moreover, migrants are often committed to sending remittances to home areas to support relatives and also to repay debts, and this can be a major drain on their incomes.

In many cases, poorer migrants also tend to settle in neighbourhoods that are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards as the need to secure access to employment opportunities, combined with limited availability of land, means that while these settlements can be in relatively central locations they are typically unsuitable for residential use if not downright dangerous – which is why they are available. Exposure to environmental hazards is exacerbated by the lack of basic infrastructure and services.

Migrant women in the cities

Women, not unlike migrants, are not a homogenous group and several factors cross-cut with gender to determine their disadvantages. However, gender is an important dimension of migrants' vulnerability in the cities. While the numbers of women migrating to urban centres has increased in recent decades, following a long period of male-dominated rural-urban movement, regional variations defy generalisations. Gender-selective movement is determined by better employment opportunities in urban areas, but also by discrimination against women in accessing rural land and inheritances and, among younger women, by abusive family relations. Combining farming with care responsibilities can be difficult for women headed households, and this helps explain the much higher prevalence of this type of households among migrants in very diverse contexts (Tacoli and Chant, 2013).

Women are also a high proportion of workers in export-oriented manufacturing and domestic services, and the development of these sectors in the past few decades also explains gender-selective movement. With changes in the global economy and the growing automation of manufacturing, this pull factor may well decline and in the process impact on the composition of migrant flows.

The disadvantages faced by migrant women in the cities are multiple. On the one hand, as workers in gender-segmented labour markets they are likely to find employment in low-paid occupations, including the informal sector, manufacturing and domestic service. All these sectors tend to employ migrant female workers. As residents of informal settlements, they face the same issues of combining productive and reproductive responsibilities in contexts where inadequate and expensive accommodation, limited access to infrastructure and services, exposure to environmental hazards and high rates of crime and violence. Additionally, lack of support from relatives and of access to public support services significantly increases the vulnerability of recent migrants.

Conclusion: migration and inclusive urbanisation

Blaming urban poverty on migrants is not realistic, as not all migrants are poor. In many cities, however, migrants are a large proportion of the urban poor with whom they share income and non-income disadvantages, including difficulties in finding adequate housing and accessing services. At the same time, like the majority of the urban poor, they work long hours in low-paid, insecure and unsafe jobs and are exposed to a wide range of environmental hazards because of the lack of basic infrastructure in most low-income and informal settlements.

Cities and municipal governments have a huge importance in addressing the needs of their residents. But in many cases, they lack resources and capacity, and perhaps most importantly political will. There is also an underestimated lack of information on who lives in informal low-income settlements; more accurate data, including migrant status, is clearly a priority since in many cases migrants are a considerable share of those groups. One key disadvantage for migrants is the lack of registration in the destination area. But lack of full civic rights is in many instances linked to the place where people live, rather than to their migrant status.

It is also difficult to understand migrant-specific policies in isolation from the wider context of economic growth models and their social and political corollaries. Widespread evictions of low-income households are increasingly commonplace in cities of the Global South that aspire to a status of 'world city', with prestige projects funded by international investors and inhabited by predominantly middle-income residents. In this framing, the status of migrants – even after several decades – contributes to the marginalisation of low-income residents of informal settlements (Bhan, 2014).

Inclusive urbanisation that addresses the needs of diverse low-income groups, be they migrants or long-term residents, remains elusive in many fast-growing cities of the Global South. There are however several examples of initiatives and programmes to reduce urban poverty that build on the capacities of the residents of low-income settlements to work with local governments in providing the necessary but generally missing information. One example is that of enumerations conducted by local grassroots organisations (Karanja, 2010; Farouk and Owusu, 2012). These include temporary residents, people sharing accommodation and all those who are typically 'invisible' in official censuses and surveys – that is, a large proportion of migrants. Collaboration between organisations of residents of low-income urban settlements and local governments is also essential in the long term with regards to the provision of adequate and affordable housing and basic services to reduce deprivation (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2014). Overall, however, perhaps the most important element of successfully managing fast-growing cities is ensuring full citizenship rights to all groups. This is often a key disadvantage for migrants; but it is also a root cause of the marginalisation of many low-income groups.

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