



Indigenous Peoples and Migration: Challenges and Opportunities

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A. Introduction

In recent years, international attention to the link between migration and development has grown, reflecting an increasing recognition of the far-reaching development implications of migrant flows for both home and host communities. Migration, whether international or internal, presents both opportunities and challenges for migrants themselves, the communities from which they leave, those through which they may transit and those in which they ultimately settle. The positive and negative effects of migration can be extensive, and may endure even in cases where migrants choose to return to the communities they initially migrated from. When migration is forced, rather than voluntary, the negative ramifications are often more severe.

Increasing awareness of the significance of international migration and its link with development led the General Assembly in 2003 to recommend that a High Level Dialogue be held in 2006 to discuss the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development in order to identify appropriate ways and means to maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impacts. The General Assembly recommended that the high-level dialogue have a strong focus on policy issues, including the challenge of achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The membership of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has taken up the topic of Migration and Development at various meetings and workshops, including a special panel on the topic held during the 2005 session of IOM's governing body and a workshop on Mainstreaming Migration into Development Policy Agendas held in February 2005. The Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) also reiterated the importance of integrating migration into national, regional and global strategies for economic growth in its report released October 2005 (GCIM, 2005). In addition, the *Compendium of Recommendations on International Migration and Development: the United Nations Development Agenda and the Global Commission for International Migration Compared*, released by the United Nations in February 2006, clearly indicates that while States thus far have made a number of commitments and recommendations related to international migration, there are a number of areas where much work still remains to be done.

Although migration is a global phenomenon, it is very complex and neither its dynamics nor its consequences are the same across all population subgroups. For example, there is strong age-selectivity in migrant flows. The complexity of migrant pools, and in particular the different administrative categories in which Governments and international organizations may place them (for example those with regular and irregular status; skilled or unskilled workers; permanent

settlers or temporary migrants; student, asylum seeker or refugee), requires that a comprehensive migration policy should address the particular circumstances of all groups of migrants (GCIM, 2005).¹

Recognising the particular issues of indigenous peoples with respect to migration, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) adopted a special recommendation at its third session in 2004², noting that:

Given the large number of indigenous migrants within and beyond national borders and the particular vulnerability of indigenous women migrants, as well as the lack of adequate data and attention to their problems, the Forum recommends launching a new initiative involving various stakeholders, including the Inter-Agency Support Group, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in order to face this urgency. The Forum recommends, as a first step, the convening of a workshop on the theme “Migration of indigenous women” in order to highlight the urgency and scale of the issue, including the alarming trend of trafficking indigenous women within and across national borders, and the development of recommendations and guidelines for addressing the problems faced by indigenous migrant women. Participants to the workshop should be a selected number of members of the Forum, relevant United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes, and experts from indigenous organizations, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, Governments and academia. The objectives of the workshop should be:

- (a) To underscore the urgency and scale of the issue;
- (b) To highlight and address the lack of reliable data on the issue and to promote the systematic collection of data (of both quantitative and qualitative nature) by relevant United Nations and other intergovernmental entities, Governments, NGOs, indigenous organizations, and academia;
- (c) To review and analyse existing data;
- (d) To provide a report, including recommendations, to the Forum

This issues paper addresses selected specific challenges with respect to indigenous peoples and migration and provides a framework for discussing these issues in an Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration to be held in Geneva, Switzerland from 6-7 April 2006. Although recent discussion in the international arena has focused on international migration, because of the paucity of information on indigenous peoples and migration and the virtual absence of a framework for addressing the phenomenon, it is expected that this meeting will address issues related to both internal and international migration.

B. Determinants and consequences of global migrant flows

Although accurate information on migrant flows and stocks are difficult to obtain, it is estimated that in 2005, 191 million people in the world were international migrants and that six out of every 10 migrants live in the developed world (United Nations, 2006). The individual, family, community, national and international development implications of these numbers are undoubtedly complex and extensive.

¹ Migration in an Interconnected World, Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, p.7.

² Paragraph 12, document E/2004/43

Migration, whether internal or international, is often the result of either (or a combination of) factors that push people out of their communities of origin, and those that pull them towards destination communities. Although other factors, such as conflict or family reunification may propel migrants to move away from their origins, economic factors are often dominant. Poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities for individual and family development often drive people in search of better fortunes elsewhere. Within national borders, people may be driven from rural areas or small towns to larger cities where they hope to improve their chances. Increasingly, however, many economic migrants are drawn by opportunities outside their national borders and they turn to international migration.

Discussions on migration are often associated with negative perceptions of its consequences. Migrants, especially those with characteristics that are different from those of their receiving communities, can be viewed as outsiders and as people who usurp the opportunities of local people. Because migrants may experience language and other barriers that slow their assimilation into their new communities, their isolation may intensify, leading to social exclusion.

Despite the negative stereotypes, there are potentially strong positive effects of migration for both sending and receiving communities. Migrants tend to come from healthier and better-trained segments of sending communities, and in their destination communities migrants often serve as a ready and often cheaper source of labour, and they are often in high demand by an industrial sector that is under great pressure to cut costs and increase output. Many countries depend on migrants to fill labour needs, for example in segments of the economy in which nationals prefer not to be employed.

For sending communities, emigration may also serve to lower levels of unemployment while enabling those who do migrate to earn incomes that are higher than they would have earned in their countries of origin. Remittances from migrants from developing countries to their home communities are estimated to exceed official development assistance and are second only to the foreign direct investment (IOM, 2005).

C. Migration and indigenous peoples: many questions but few answers

Although there is a growing body of information on global levels, trends and patterns of migration, the dynamics of indigenous peoples' migration and the extent to which indigenous populations and their communities are affected by migration are not known. This information is crucial in devising migration policies that are comprehensive and that address the needs and perspectives of all segments of the population.

A number of questions can be asked with few satisfactory answers.

With respect to understanding the concept of indigenous migration, for example, under what conditions do indigenous populations migrate? Do indigenous peoples fall under the standard administrative classification of migrants or are there other categories that need to be considered? Do indigenous peoples have the opportunities to move that are often available to non-indigenous peoples? Are the traditional pull and push factors as relevant to indigenous populations as they are to non-indigenous groups or are indigenous peoples, given the value they often place on their

land and community, less likely to move? When indigenous peoples do migrate, what unique circumstances do they face and how do these differ depending on the motive for migration? How do the unique language, and cultural identities of indigenous peoples and their strong attachment to community values and land affect their status as migrants? How do more vulnerable groups of women, youth and children fare in the context of indigenous migration?

Indigenous women may be among the most vulnerable in the context of migration. Indigenous women may experience particular difficulties integrating into destination communities or due to changes in valued traditional institutional structures in communities of origin associated with migration. In addition, indigenous populations have often suffered the consequences of forced migration because of encroachment on their lands or territories. When indigenous territories become the destination of migrants, who are often in search of land and other pristine resources, the impact on indigenous communities can be significant.

How do the families, households and indigenous peoples' communities affected by an inflow of migrants deal with this situation? What are the effects of immigration, with its attendant disruption of local indigenous production patterns and lifestyles on families? What examples of successful and positive immigration of non-indigenous populations into indigenous communities are there, and under what circumstances have they occurred?

D. Constraints to analyzing issues related to indigenous peoples and migration

Efforts to address the many migration and development issues among indigenous peoples are constrained by several factors. Perhaps foremost among these is the lack of relevant data. There is a serious dearth of data with respect to indigenous peoples and migration and there is a pressing need to begin to address this gap. While data on migration are often disaggregated by sex and age, it is virtually impossible to obtain information on the migration of indigenous peoples within or outside national borders. This shortage of information constrains the development of meaningful and comprehensive policy.

A second obstacle to understanding issues relating to indigenous issues and migration is the absence of a recognized framework within which to discuss issues related to indigenous peoples' migration and the migration of non-indigenous peoples into indigenous communities. For example, the relevance and importance of issues that are often discussed in relation to international migration, such as voluntary and involuntary migration, remittances, return flows, temporary migration, and the like, need to be specifically evaluated within the context of indigenous peoples. There has, for example, been considerable discussion in the recent literature about the positive effect of migrant remittances on sending communities. How applicable are these benefits to indigenous communities? Are remittances easily transferable between indigenous migrants and their sending communities, or are there unique obstacles not common under other circumstances?

E. Understanding indigenous peoples and migration: first steps

In identifying and highlighting key issues and data needs with respect to indigenous peoples and migration, it is useful to examine the following four areas and highlight some of the attributes of

indigenous peoples that necessitate a specific consideration of this group. These areas will guide deliberations during the *Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration*.

1. Indigenous peoples as voluntary migrants

A principal issue in this regard is to ascertain the main reasons why indigenous peoples migrate on a voluntary basis, and what impact this has on the individuals who migrate, the communities they leave behind, specifically on men, women, youth, children. It is important, in this regard, to also address how indigenous peoples fare at their destinations. A primary need is that for data collection tools to capture this information.

2. Indigenous peoples as forced migrants and displaced peoples

Many indigenous communities have encountered displacement or forced migration occasioned by land dispossession or natural disaster. It is useful to identify the circumstances under which such displacement/forced migration occurs and the impact that this has on indigenous communities. Forced migration in non-indigenous populations is often the result of similar triggers – conflict, war, or natural disaster. However, the effects of such situations are likely to differ in indigenous populations, for example due to the absence of adequate government or international support for those displaced or because sizeable proportions of the population may already be living in vulnerable conditions. What are the consequences of such migration for indigenous households and communities? What forms of data can be collected to capture this information?

3. Impact of migration of indigenous peoples on indigenous communities

Perhaps the most important development consequence of migration in indigenous communities is the effect on home communities. How do households and communities deal with the emigration of their members? How is migration viewed within indigenous communities? How do women, men, and children fare when key family members migrate temporarily or permanently? How are remittances transferred and who benefits?

4. Impact of migration of non-indigenous populations on indigenous communities

This is undoubtedly the most contentious area with respect to indigenous peoples and migration. It is nevertheless an important aspect, requiring attention. If indigenous communities are to survive, the impact of the movement of non-indigenous populations into indigenous territories needs to be addressed with a view to determining effective survival mechanisms. While indigenous communities may not have the abilities to regulate immigration that nation states do, they are subject to many of the challenges that the inflow of immigrant populations can present, including pressure on limited resources and breakdown of traditional values and culture. In addition, migration into indigenous peoples' communities is often associated with the threat of loss of control over natural resources. It is important, in this context, to examine the social, economic and cultural effects of temporary and permanent migrant labour flows associated with business development, especially exploration of petroleum, natural gas, agriculture, water resources and logging as well as other economic ventures.

In discussing these four areas during the *Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration*, participants, including indigenous experts, substantive experts, and international organizations and agencies will attempt to address the above questions and to arrive at key conclusions and recommendations regarding ways the UN System, other international, regional and national organizations and indigenous communities can collaborate more effectively on issues relating to the nexus between indigenous peoples and migration, including an identification of the areas for future exploration and/or collaboration. Successful strategies will require involvement of all relevant stakeholders and commitment to achieving a better understanding of indigenous issues and migration and to making the appropriate data available.

IOM will host the expert workshop at its Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland on April 6-7, 2006.