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GENDER, MIGRATION, REMITTANCES AND DEVELOPMENT

UN-INSTRAW



Gender, Migration, Remittances and Development

Women have been for the most part invisible in the treatment of migration and the issue of international migration is largely absent from many of the key women's rights agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the Beijing Platform for Action.

Women have always been present in migratory flows, traditionally as spouses, daughters, or dependents of male migrants. Nowadays women are increasingly migrating as the main economic providers for their households – meaning that they migrate autonomously as breadwinners - a contribution that has served to increase their visibility within migratory flows. Women currently constitute 49.6% of global migratory flows, though the proportion varies significantly by country and can be as high as 70% to 80% in some cases.

This feminization of migration has also produced specifically female forms of migration - such as the commercialized migration of domestic workers and care-givers, the migration and trafficking of women for the sex industry, and the organized migration of women for marriage. In migrating, women are often making a conscious decision to place their families' well-being above their own happiness and their need to be with their loved ones.

The global demand for migrant labour now prioritizes women's specific skills and traditional roles, such that: a) paid domestic work is increasingly performed by women who leave their own countries, communities and often their families; b) domestic service draws not only women from poor socio-economic classes but also women of relatively high status in their own countries; and c) the development of service-based economies in post-industrial nations favours the international migration of women workers. In the developed world, the combination of women's increased participation in the labour force and the failure to develop family-friendly labour policies and child, elderly, and disabled care options have lead to a strong demand for migrant women workers. Migrant women are thus a central support system for women's freedom in the developed world – and they make a contribution that is under-recognized and under-valued.

Gender identities are characterized by fluidity, movement and transformation. Because of transnational migration, ideas about traditional and appropriate gender roles are rapidly shifting, and newly-defined masculinities and femininities are evolving as a result of migration.

One of UN-INSTRAW's priority research areas is gender, migration and remittances, through which we aim to highlight the increasingly influential role that women migrants play in the maintenance of their households and the development of their families and communities – both in countries of origin and destination. We promote the inclusion of a gender perspective in research, analysis and policy-making in relation to migration and remittances.

Remittances have become the most important stabilizing economic force for many developing countries. According to World Bank estimates, in 2004 developing countries received US\$126 billion in remittances, twice the amount of official development assistance (ODA). This volume has increased consistently over the last decade, and projections show that it will continue to increase. Although remittances are private money they contribute not only to the survival and well-being of households in the developing world, but have also become an essential tool for poverty-reduction and the achievement of the MDGs.

Although there is growing interest in the potential contribution of remittances to poverty-reduction and community development, reflected in the formulation of policies and programmes to maximize their potential, there is a significant gap in understanding and action related to the gender dimensions of remittances. UN-INSTRAW considers that a critical review of research, policies and programmes on remittances from a gender perspective is essential to ensuring their effective contribution to development.

RESEARCH STUDIES

In response to this need, UN-INSTRAW initiated a series of case studies with the aim of analyzing the gender dimensions of the sending, use and impact of remittances. Specifically, this research programme seeks to increase knowledge and understanding through a gender analysis in three broad areas:

- The contribution of women migrants to the development of their countries and their communities of origin, and the relevance of that contribution to poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- How the migration of women is affecting gender roles, power relations and decision-making processes in households and communities of origin; and
- Policies and programmes aimed at increasing the development potential of remittances that include gender perspectives and women's contribution, needs and priorities.

Methodology

UN-INSTRAW has developed a methodology for research on remittances and their development potential from a gender perspective.

This methodology was tested through a case study conducted in the Dominican Republic, and is now being utilized in case studies in Albania, Colombia, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal, and Southern Africa. The methodology will be refined and enriched each time it is utilized in subsequent case studies.

The methodology focuses on qualitative research, capturing discussions, attitudes, perceptions, and motivation. In this research participatory observation techniques will be used as well as open interviews and group discussions. Specific tools have been developed in order to interview all those involved in the sending and utilization of remittances: migrants, recipients, migrant organizations, development organizations, local leaders, authorities and key informants etc..

A complimentary quantitative methodology is also being designed in order to supplement the qualitative research with concrete statistics on remittances (amounts, frequency, channels utilized etc.)

INSTRAW launched the results of their case study on the gender dimensions of remittances in the Dominican Republic in September 2006. The objective of this study was to contribute to efforts aimed at maximizing the potential of remittances in developing countries through the integration of a gender perspective in the study of the flows, uses and socio-economic impact of remittances within recipient households and communities. The study analyzed gender dynamics and the impact of remittances on households in Vicente Noble, a community in the southwest of the Dominican Republic. The major conclusions of this first study are that:

- Dominican migration to Spain is highly feminized – 85% of Dominicans with legal residence in Spain are women, and many of these women are heads of households as a result of single parenthood;
- This feminization of migration is a result of economic crisis, particularly of the agricultural sector, which has raised significant obstacles' to men's ability to maintain employment and provide for their households;
- Male unemployment and high rates of female headship have forced women to seek alternative sources of income, of which migration has become the most lucrative and sustainable;

In terms of remittances, the study revealed specifically that:

- 54% of remittances received in the Dominican Republic (through official channels) are sent by women;
- When a Dominican woman migrated to Spain, in 90% of cases she left her household in the charge of another woman (in general a mother or a sister);
- In 80% of cases, women migrants sent their remittances to other women – in order to be spent on household necessities and family well-being;
- Both productive and reproductive activities in the recipient community are almost exclusively carried out by women - there has been no participation of men in reproductive tasks, even when they are left in charge of the household;
- In adopting their new role as economic providers for the household, women have gained a certain autonomy and have increased their negotiating power within the household;
- In the hands of women, remittances tend to be channelled towards family well-being, including basic needs, household improvements, health and education;
- Remittances sent by women are contributing to increasing girls' access to higher education;
- Only a small percentage of recipient families – about 5% - have used the income for productive activities, which have been limited to opening general stores, beauty salons, or small communications centres. In 70% of cases these businesses are run by women;
- One particularly significant finding of the study is that 100% of the migrant women who returned from Spain set up their own business;

These conclusions helped to establish certain areas that require further research and analysis - with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the actors involved and maximizing the potential of remittances to contribute to household well-being and community development.

In addition to the initial Dominican case study, UN-INSTRAW is carrying out additional case studies in the following countries:

Colombia - This project is being undertaken in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and a number of organizations that have joined together to form Alianza País. UN-INSTRAW's participation consists in providing the methodology for the research, undertaking the field work in Madrid, and the analysis of data acquired from the research. The case study results will be released in early 2007.

Philippines – UN-INSTRAW has received funding from the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) to carry out a project on the gender dimensions of migration and remittances between the Philippines and Italy. The project began in September 2006, with the aim of: analyzing the impact of remittances sent by migrants (women or men) on the recipient households, supporting training activities with migrant organizations aimed at improving the living conditions of migrants in Italy; increasing the participation of Filipino migrants in the rural development of their communities of origin, and increasing their knowledge on alternatives means for sending remittances.

Guatemala – UN-INSTRAW has received partial funding from UNFPA to carry out a case study in Guatemala, with the objective of expanding on information on the gender dimensions of the sending and utilization of remittances and their impact on gender roles within recipient households and communities. The project will also generate training workshops with migrant associations, NGOs, academics, international cooperation agencies, United Nations agencies and financial institutions, in order to strengthen the gender perspective in programmes focusing on remittances and development.

Southern Africa – UN-INSTRAW has also received partial funding from UNFPA to carry out a case study in the Southern African region in collaboration with the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). The objective of the project is to assess the impact of remittances sent by migrants from South Africa to their communities of origin, as well as migrants' access to financial and other services in South Africa.

Albania, the Dominican Republic, Lesotho, Morocco, the Philippines, and Senegal – In collaboration with UNDP, UN-INSTRAW will be carrying out case studies on the gender dimensions of remittances in these six countries with the aim of enhancing gender-responsive local development by promoting options in the utilization of remittances for sustainable livelihoods and building social capital

Proposals for similar case studies on the gender dimensions of remittances in Ecuador, Ireland, and Norway have also been prepared and presented to various donors. Proposal for regional case studies on the gender dimension of remittances in the Caribbean and the Maghreb region are being developed, as is a proposal on Bolivian women migrants in Argentina.

NEXT STEPS

Many questions still need to be answered:

- How are gender roles affected by the migration of women and their new role as economic providers?
- Are women empowered by migration?
- Are women acquiring new responsibilities in addition to their traditional roles?
- Are girls acquiring household responsibilities before coming of age?

- How do families and children cope with women's migration?
- How are transnational families and relationships evolving?
- Are diasporas participating in the development of their countries of origin?
- To what extent do remittances contribute to household poverty alleviation and/or community development?

The main objective of UN-INSTRAW's research on gender, remittances and development is to effect a change in policy, programming and projects that seek to harness the development potential of remittances so that they take women's participation, contribution, needs and priorities into account. The results of UN-INSTRAW's initial research activities will thus be used to formulate policy recommendations and capacity-building materials on the gender dimensions of remittances that will enable policy-makers and development practitioners to place women's and gender issues at the centre of the international migration agenda.

A Guide for Public Policy, Programmes and Projects

INSTRAW's research on gender and remittances will produce specific guidelines, tools and other instruments that will address the integration of a gender perspective in policies and programmes that link remittances and development.

Once a sufficient number of case studies have been completed a comparative analysis will be prepared highlighting lessons learned and making concrete recommendations for strengthening projects, programmes and public policies.