



The value of the “Migration and Development” nexus, and migration out of choice vs. migration out of necessity

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1. The Migration and Development Nexus

Wilbur Zelinski, a social geographer, published in the early 1970s his *mobility transition model*. In this model he develops the idea that the modernisation process that societies are going through, leads to a changing migration pattern or at least to a changing migration propensity. Zelinski distinguishes a number of ‘stages’ and calls the evolution from one stage to another the mobility transition. Societies evolve from a very limited spatial and social mobility to more extensive and complex forms of movement. In other words, an ongoing ‘modernization’, or call it development, first leads in a stage of transition to more migration. In later stages of modernisation, the migration propensity slows down. This theory can be used to explain the so called “migration hump” or the “j-curve paradox”, and points at one of the critical links between development and migration.

“Development” became rather recently the magic word in the ongoing discussion on migration. One rationale behind it is simple: if people are leaving their countries because of a lack of development, then improved living conditions in the sending countries can slow down international migration. But is the logic behind it as simple as that? Zelinski’s model show that this can be true, but not in every stage. In a stage of early transition or transition, more “development” means more migration, because more people who previously couldn’t migrate will have the financial means to do so. In a later stage of modernisation, there is less need to migrate. Further development then means less migration, because more people will be able to choose not to migrate.

What the precise link is between both, how policy and practice relate and what can be considered as a cause and what as an effect is still not completely understood. It is not entirely clear yet how migration is influenced by development and how migration itself impacts

on development. Throughout history, migration has been very often intimately related with development: as a result of imbalances or as a force fostering development. The impact of migration on development and vice versa has varied over time. The relationship between migration and development, or the relationship between development and migration has been a topic of debate for decades.

This background paper aims to feed discussions of session 6 of which the objective is to hold an exchange of views on the “migration and development” nexus and discuss whether it makes sense linking the two policy fields, and to thereby consider on the one hand whether migration can be considered a tool for development (notably for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals), and on the other hand whether development can be considered a key issue in migration policy planning?

In discussions a distinction should be made between migration out of choice vs. migration out of necessity and it will be considered how these relate to - and impact on - the development in the countries of origin.

2. Which development?

To be able to discuss the relationship between migration and development, we first have to know what is meant by *development*. It is remarkable that in the discussion on the link between migration and development, development is often used as an implicit concept, implying the assumption that something is moving from a lower status to a higher or better one. Or more or less what Walt W. Rostow described almost half a century ago in “the stages of growth” (1964). A clear definition of what is understood by “development” is however crucial for understanding the relationship. Development theory has evolved strongly since Rostow. An operationalisation of the concept “development” is not easy, but it is clear that development as such is more than economic development. Development is much more than economic growth. Especially in relation to migration, it is important to include non-economic, less measurable factors such as increased recognition and respect for human rights and well-being, integration and social cohesion, stability, democracy, security, the environment, future prospects, etc.

The picture becomes clearer when studying the case of some countries that rely heavily on migrant remittances (remittances are the central issue of session 4). For Morocco, for example, it is estimated that more than 1 million people don't live below the absolute poverty line because of the migrant remittances. It can be discussed whether or not this is a productive use of these means, and thus leading to development, or merely consumption. If “consumption” means an investment in better food, education for the children, better and more healthy housing, health care etc., it can at least be considered as an investment in the future generation and thus an indirect investment in a more productive society. This can be called development.

Even if the economic benefits of migration for development are clear, it is important to know what the cost is. A significant change in the recent migration patterns is the feminisation of migration. This is an issue of change not so much in the relative proportion of women migrating but in the circumstance of the women migrating. While as in the past, almost half of the migration population is female, including high numbers from Asian countries for example,

they are no longer predominantly wives following their spouses. Migrant rights however are not guaranteed in all countries. One result is that countries of origin benefit from migration through remittances (as demonstrated in the balance of payments) and the working migrant woman provides her family with the necessities of life. But it is very often also a situation where children, in the absence of their mother, are raised by another member of their family, often their grandmother, while the mother, earning money abroad, is exploited and in the worst case even abused. If raped, these women can lose not only their dignity, but also their social position in their society when they return. The economic benefits are often realised at a very high social cost. The question remains: can this mix of situations be tolerated—or improved—in the name of development? Is this a sustainable development?

International organisations and national authorities generally look at economic growth and the balance of payments to judge the development impact on migration. The positive figures on the balance of payment can however mask social tragedies. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a “social balance” that measures also disruptive social effects like described above, next to the “economic balance”, in order to map the overall impact of migration related issues on the “development” of the sending societies.

3. Who benefits?

In its presentation of the 2005 Global Economic Prospects, the World Bank analyzed who benefits from the fact that there are migrant workers in the global labour market. The picture that is drawn is generally rather positive. The countries of destination as well as the countries of origin clearly benefit from the situation. When people leave their country, they often can find a job elsewhere and send money back home. In the countries of destination, immigrants can form an answer to the shortages on the labour market. At this level, it is obviously a win-win operation. At an individual level as well, the new migrants often improve their situation and can build up a career. If there are economic losers in this story, it may be small numbers of the already settled migrants in countries of destination; the migrant population who migrated several decades ago. Those living at the edge of society are not always able to compete with the newcomers.

Documented or undocumented, skilled or unskilled, a principal motivation for migrant workers will be to increase their income. Health workers from many countries, for example, can multiply their monthly income by migrating abroad and earn, depending on what region they are going to, up to twenty times as much as at home (Stalker, 2000). Salary differentials can be a major source of attraction, but also the opportunities to develop a career can be a significant motive for professionals (Stalker, 2000). At an individual level this seems to be a win-win situation. The migrant workers improve their situation, earn more money and have better opportunities. The employer abroad just hired a motivated but relatively cheap professional.

Not all advantages are purely economic. The family left behind, the group or the village can enjoy the benefits of migration and the remittances sent back home. They can invest in better food, in better housing, in education, in health care, etcetera.

However, while it may be advantageous at an individual level, out-migration of especially highly skilled professionals may represent a considerable loss for countries of origin, especially developing countries. This is the topic generally referred to as the “brain drain” debate that will be dealt with in the session on highly skilled migration and brain drain. The countries of origin can have multiple reasons to stimulate out-migration, depending on the particularity of their social and economic situations. Highly skilled workers and professionals are needed to develop the country. But emigration can clearly have its positive side. A diaspora population also generates money transfers, savings and investments and can contribute to social goals (a special session is dedicated to discuss diaspora). And in case of high unemployment, emigration even functions as a safety valve to reduce unemployment.

4. Migration out of choice vs. migration out of necessity

The opportunity structure is not equal for all migrants. For some the borders are open, for others they aren't. Some have financial means, others don't. Some have qualifications countries are looking for, while others don't. Often the distinction is made between “economically driven” and “politically motivated” migrants, but the cases in which the underlying motives for migration are ‘purely’ political or ‘purely’ economic, are very rare. First, in a world where actions of states as well as of non-state actors such as faith-based and labour organisations, the private sector, multinationals, and political movements, and of supra-national bodies such as the UN, specialized organizations, etc., influence the well-being of nearly every individual, most migration flows are caused by a complex cocktail of social, political, economic and ethno-religious factors that are inextricably connected with each other. These factors are universally referred to as the “root causes” of migration.

Secondly, in part because of the variety and interconnection of so many of these root causes of migration, it is also difficult at times to perceive the difference between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ migration. Yet to the extent that it is indeed possible and even clear in many cases, it is absolutely fundamental—even required by international law in a growing number of cases-- to distinguish between migration out of need or obligation (forced or quasi-forced) and migration out of choice.

In general, in migration out of need or obligation, the “push” factors dominate, in particular violence, persecution, oppression, famines, natural disasters, lack of development, bleak or economic prospects and unemployment. It is important to note that these “push” factors can not only combine to force migrations, but can persist or repeat to force remigrations, as in the case of refugees, victims of human trafficking and other migrants who have returned to their countries of origin only to find the same or similar “push” factors that had motivated them to leave in the first place. These impulses to involuntary migration stand next to migration out of choice, which obviously, is freer. In migration out of choice, the “pull” factors typically play a more important role, i.e., the attraction of the area of destination, and a lot of attention is spent more on the generally unforced motivation and decision of the migrant.

Beyond the importance that international laws, conventions and organization mandates give to a growing number of situations of forced migration (e.g., identification, protection and related services for refugees, victims of human trafficking, unaccompanied migrant children,

and stateless persons), another aspect of forced migration is also gaining enormous international attention: the forced (or compelled) choice of a *certain form* of migration. For example, government and academic studies of human smuggling and trafficking, including research on patterns and victims worldwide, increasingly demonstrate that men, women and children who already feel forced to migrate (and re-migrate) by “push” factors like those described above are then forced, for lack of *legal* migration channels, into some of the most life-threatening forms of irregular migration: with criminal smugglers and human traffickers, commonly across the most dangerous sea and desert routes. The almost unique convergence of the entire range of government and civil society actors on recognising these particular movements as forced and unwanted offers great potential to shared programming that effectively decreases irregular migration of this nature.

As observed by the Global Commission on International Migration (2005), many of the large scale, mainly unwanted and hard-to-manage migration flows are the result of a lack of sustainable development, a result of some of the problems of the migration sending countries. Many people hardly have any alternative. However it is interesting to consider, and would be important to research, how this migration may actually contribute – in the long run- to the necessary structural changes (economic, social, and political) which will result in a society with less disruptive migration patterns.

5. Does it make sense to integrate migration in development policies?

Large scale migration is a fact and, as stated above, is to a large extent the result of a lack of sustainable development. There is an almost symbiotic relationship between migration and development.

Much of the policy debate on the issue however, focuses on one side of the causal linkages, namely the impacts of migration on development, closing the eyes for the impact of development on migration. There is on a national as well as on a supra national level need for an encompassing migration policy that involves all stakeholders and takes the mutual effects of policy measures in areas as foreign affairs, trade policy, agricultural policy, integration policy, security policy etc. on migration into account; not only the effects of a development policy. Now, migration is taken as a given, and policy decisions are taken on an ad hoc basis. Migrant remittances are growing steadily, so there is a renewed interest of governments and international organizations. The policy debate and exploration of best practice remain centred on the mechanisms, institutional arrangements and agreements that could maximize positive development impacts of remittances and other private diaspora resources, and minimize risks.

From a development perspective, however, a much broader approach is necessary. Policy analysts should also be asking questions like how is globalization and the attendant integration of markets affecting economic growth, development, and the growth of the labour markets in sending countries. Are decent jobs being created? How are these evolutions in turn affecting migration trends and flows? Are these processes favourable to development defined in terms of healthy economic growth and the capacity to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other goals like a quality public service (education, health care,

social protection etc.)? What will or can be the impact of factors like climate change and the demographic evolution? ... There is still a lack of knowledge and of policy coherence on national as well as on supra-national level. This is a topic that is dealt with in a separate session on identifying ways to enhance policy coherence and coordination.

6. Some thoughts on the larger context

Many facts are important in a further discussion of the nexus migration and development. Ten of them are listed below.

1. The world population is steadily growing, particularly in the South, and consequently also the (potential) migrant population.
2. It is not clear whether or not local labour markets in the developing countries will be capable of absorbing all newcomers.
3. The field of action is a globalised, worldwide and layered labour market where supply and demand meet in the formal as well as in the informal sectors.
4. There are unequal power relations between the actors (countries, companies) in the North and in the South.
5. There is a supply of many different types of (potential) migrants in sending countries, but legislation in the receiving countries at best reflects only the demand of their economies and leaves only limited legal possibilities to enter.
6. Many countries are sending as well as receiving countries.
7. Not only the economic dimension of migration and development is important but also the social dimension, the political dimension and the environmental dimension, among others
8. Also the normative dimension is important in the debate, with concepts like basic human rights, individual freedom and freedom of choice on the one hand, and on the other hand concepts like obligations and social duties.
9. In analyzing the mutual effects of migration and development, it is necessary to look at different levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro). Positive effects on one level can go hand in hand with negative effects on another.
10. The structural changes that can lead in the long run to less migration will in many societies, depending on the level of "modernization", lead to more migration.

7. Questions that could be addressed in the session in view of obtaining also some action oriented results

1. An exchange of views on the migration and development nexus and in concrete looking to identify:
 - A. examples of how development policies can impact on migration
 - B. suggestions of how migration might be integrated into policies that touch upon aspects of development (whether this is with respect to trade, demography, environment, employment, etc.)

- C. conditions under which migration and development policies can reinforce each other and lead to positive economic and social outcomes for sending countries and for migrants.
2. What specific programmes exist or could be launched by governments and/or non governmental entities (CSOs, private sector etc) and/or specialised agencies such as the ILO:
- A. to improve situations to reduce the number of migrants who migrate—and re-migrate- out of necessity, including refugees and victims of human trafficking?
- B. to help reduce the number of migrants who may feel forced to resort to the worst forms of migration, such as human smuggling and trafficking?
- C. to support the right not to migrate by helping migrants to remain instead and become positive factors for development in their country of origin?
3. What is the impact of feminisation of migration on development in the country of origin? What should be done to improve the circumstances of migrant women?

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