



BRIEF 2

MOBILITY, MIGRATION, AND RURAL-URBAN CHANGES

Each year millions of people in low-income countries uproot themselves from rural homes to take their chances in a new setting. But who are these migrants? Where do they go and why? What becomes of individuals and families when they move?

Recent studies in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Vietnam provide insights into the reasons for migration and how migration can play a part in a household's strategy to escape poverty. They indicate an urgent need for policymakers to understand that migration and mobility need not be threats. On the contrary, migration can offer opportunities for economic growth and livelihood security.



FINDINGS

1 Migration is a fundamental part of rural livelihood strategies and rural transformation—not simply a way to escape rural areas.

Individuals and families have long used migration as a strategy to improve their welfare in the face of change. But a permanent move from rural to large urban areas is only one of many ways rural residents incorporate migration into their lives.

Many rural migrants actually stay in rural areas. A study of generational change and migration in rural Mindanao, the Philippines, conducted a series of surveys over a 20-year period. The study found that a large proportion of children of the original respondents did not move to urban areas but remained in

rural locales. Sixty-two percent of men and 44 percent of women stayed in their parents' home or their parents' village. Another 14 percent of men and 17 percent of women went to other rural areas.

At the same time, of those who moved to urban and peri-urban areas in the Philippines, many (46 percent) went to smaller cities and towns, not major metropolitan areas. Only a bit more than half (54 percent) migrated to major metropolitan areas in the region or elsewhere in the Philippines.

2 There are different forms of migration, and each can contribute to successful rural development as households diversify their livelihood strategies across space and sectors.

Seasonal and temporary migration can be more immediately important to livelihoods than permanent migration. In Vietnam and Bangladesh, as in many other low-income nations, many rural residents migrate in the low season to neighboring intermediate cities to find jobs in construction or as rickshaw drivers, for example. This strategy diversifies income sources and makes up for lost income from agricultural work.

Better roads and transportation networks encourage this more cyclical, less-permanent migration by shortening the time it takes to get to urban centers. With improved roads, residents of

Nhat in the Red River Delta of Vietnam, for instance, have widened their job search to cities and towns once considered too far. Greater mobility of labor has also benefited factories in recently established industrial zones in the region, since they can now draw from a larger pool of job seekers.

Improved transport can also improve the transfer of remittances. Transportation becomes faster and more reliable, potentially reducing the cost and increasing the frequency of sending money home.

3 Destinations and reasons for moving vary by gender and education.

Different types of individuals migrate to different destinations, as experiences in rural Mindanao illustrate. There men who migrate to other rural areas do so primarily to take up farming. Women move primarily for marriage. These rural-to-rural migrants, as well as those who stay in their home villages, tend to be less educated than those who move to urban and peri-urban areas.

For their part, cities and their surrounding areas attract better-educated individuals, partly because young people move to those areas precisely to further their education and partly because they offer more attractive work opportunities for those who have been to school.

4 Permanent migrants to urban areas appear to form separate streams. Some are attracted to or “pulled” by urban opportunities—and are likely to have qualifications and contacts to succeed. Others are “pushed” by failing prospects in the countryside—they may face a bleak future in the city, too.

Permanent migration from rural areas is not inevitably a “brain drain” that needs to be stopped. If migrants find better jobs in urban areas and send remittances home to their families, migration can improve the welfare of those in the city, as well as those who stay behind.

But positive outcomes are not assured. A review of migration in Bangladesh suggested that, as elsewhere, individuals and households vary in their ability to succeed, largely because of education and contacts. In the Philippines, for instance, women tend to be better educated than men. Female migrants to the city then tend to be more “successful” than males. Over half of female migrants to urban areas enter sales, professional, or managerial jobs. The majority of male migrants, however, end up in lower-income jobs, like manual labor or transportation.

In addition to education, family networks influence migrants’ success. In the Philippines, the decision to move usually involves family consultation. First-time migrants to peri-urban and urban

areas often move for schooling. Others may migrate to look for work, even if they do not already have a job secured. They may go by themselves, but their parents finance them, and they live with relatives. In Vietnam, too, rural dwellers often use kinship networks to find jobs.

But many migrants from the countryside lack education and urban contacts. They find themselves pushed by a desperate rural life to seek their fortune elsewhere—but, lacking qualifications or connections, they face an uncertain future in the city.

Given this diversity among migrants, it is not surprising that outcomes are diverse as well. Clearly some will succeed, while others remain unable to attain their dreams. The differential success of these migrants may increase inequality in the rural areas due to differences in remittances sent home. Education, gender, destination, and family networks all seem to be part of the differences in migrants’ stories.

POLICY INSIGHTS

Migration can take many forms, reflecting the unique circumstances and objectives of the individual or household. Well-designed policies and investments that promote rural dynamism and rural-urban mobility can support migration as a positive choice—rather than undermine its viability as part of a household’s strategy to improve well-being.

Governments should pursue policies that:

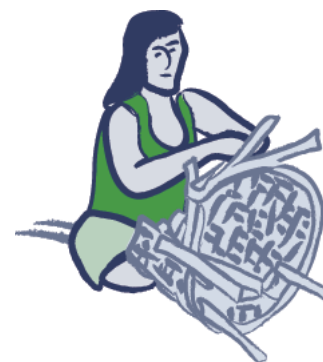
- support mobility—especially improved transport and communication networks, education, and job training and matching;
- recognize the dependence and integration of small towns and intermediate cities with surrounding rural areas; and
- strengthen regional economies and thereby relieve pressure on larger metropolitan areas as destinations.

Text written by James Garrett based on the following background papers:

Garrett, James and Shyamal Chowdhury. 2004. *Urban-Rural Links and Transformation in Bangladesh: A Review of the Issues*. CARE Discussion Paper. Dhaka: CARE.

Quisumbing, Agnes and Scott McNiven. 2005. *Migration and the Rural-Urban Continuum: Evidence from the Rural Philippines*. FCND Discussion Paper No. 197. Washington, D.C.: IFPRI.

Thanh, Hoang Xuan, Dang Nguyen Anh, and Cecilia Tacoli. 2005. *Livelihood Diversification and Rural-Urban Linkages in Vietnam’s Red River Delta*. Rural-Urban Series Working Paper No. 11. London: IIED, and FCND Discussion Paper No. 193. Washington, D.C.: IFPRI.



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