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Migration in the development studies literature: Has it come out of its marginality?

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Research Paper No. 2006/19

Migration in the Development Studies Literature

Has It Come Out of Its Marginality?

Arjan de Haan*

February 2006

Abstract

This paper explores the role migration has played in development studies, and in debates on economic growth and poverty. It argues that, despite a recent surge of interest in international migration and remittances, research on human mobility particularly for labour within poor countries does not have the place it deserves, and that it used to have in the classical development literature. Review of the empirical literature suggests that in fact much is known about the migration–development relationship, provided we are careful with definitions, and allow for context-specificity to be a key component of analyses. Against this richness of empirical detail, the paper reviews theoretical models of migration, finding significant differences in understandings of migration and its role in shaping wellbeing, but also complementarities. This highlights the importance of interdisciplinarity, and institutional understanding of processes of economic growth. In particular, it stresses that development economics need to draw more strongly on the insights by and approaches of non-economist social sciences.

Keywords: migration, development studies, growth

JEL classification: J61, R23

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1 Introduction

About a decade, many people argued that migration was receiving insufficient attention in the development studies literature, and in policy making.¹ Much has changed since, with increasing research particularly on international migration (increasingly driven by security concerns), and a growing number of research and teaching centres and conference that focus often entirely on migration. Also, in development agencies the recognition that migration is important has been growing, and practical responses to this have been emerging.² A key question that remains, is whether and how this increased recognition of the significance of migration has entered mainstream development studies thinking, including debates on growth and poverty reduction. This question is prompted by two observations. First, despite the flourishing of migration studies, findings particularly regarding in-country migration—by far the largest proportion of total movements—often are not reflected in mainstream reports on development topics, such as the World Development Reports. While data constraints are important, they do not, in my view, provide sufficient justification for the continued lack of attention.

Second, conclusions about the role of migration in development differ hugely. Recent papers from World Bank staff show the polarization in the debate. On the one hand there is an assumption that movement of labour—as part of a well-functioning integrated labour market—would lead to the elimination of disparities and equalization of development. Pritchett (2003) stresses that there are economic, technological and demographic reasons for much larger labour mobility and migration flows across borders (than exist at present), and that ‘migration is the Millennium Development Goal plan B’ (and this is prevented by ideas and perceptions about migration).³ While most of world inequality is because of differences *across* countries, international population distribution has ‘failed’ to adjust.⁴ And in one of the first attempts to quantify the impact of migration and remittances on poverty, Adams and Page (2003) conclude that an increase of 10 per cent in a country’s share of international migrants leads to a 2 per cent decline in \$1-a-day poverty. International remittances too are shown to have a strong impact on reducing poverty. However, in words of Adams and Page, these

¹ See for example McDowell and de Haan (1997).

² Again, with much focus on international migration, and a relative neglect of national migration. See for example, Maimbo and Ratha (2005) and the discussion featured on info.worldbank.org/etools/vod/PresentationView.asp?PID=1568&EID=767. See also www.worldbank.org/socialpolicy which highlights the role of international migration for new frontiers of social policy (all accessed December 2005).

³ See also Pritchett (2004) which emphasizes the dominance of movement within countries. Pritchett, who commented on an earlier version of this paper, is currently at the World Bank but wrote his papers on migration while at the Kennedy School.

⁴ Moses and Letnes (2004) estimate through an applied equilibrium model that liberalization of international migration restrictions, resulting in a 10 per cent increase in international migration would lead to an efficiency gain of US\$774 billion—but in their own view with very problematic assumptions and other analytical shortcomings.

estimates are made with heroic assumptions regarding data, and I believe no evidence that the correlation shows causation.

On the other hand, there are both empirical and theoretical objections against the idea that migration would lead to reducing disparities in development. Ellerman's (2003) impression is that 'much of the literature is excessively optimistic about the impact of north-south migration on the South'. For example, temporary labour migration such as by *gastarbeiter* in Germany has not stimulated development in the sending regions. It is not impossible for such migration to be beneficial, but empirical evidence tends to show, for example, that the 'best and brightest' are over-represented among migrants, and migration often acts as a safety valve to relieve social pressures. The developmental impact of remittances has generally not been well established ('increased income is not increased development'). In an overview paper on the relationship between migration and inequality, Black et al. (2004) highlight that international migration carries significant risks and cost, and that it does not always reduce the inequalities as intended by the migrants. Migration and inequality exert mutual influences, the relationship depends strongly on the type of migration (as well as type of inequality), and a hierarchy of migration possibilities and opportunities and 'migration humps' exist.

What the above suggests—and polarized discussions about 'brain drain' (discussed below) suggest the same—is that the observations of Papademetriou and Martin (1991), Appleyard (1991), and Sorensen et al. (2002) a decade later, that the migration–development relationship is unsettled, still appear true, despite the increased attention to migration.

In my view, the neglect of labour migration as a central phenomenon in the development process and the polarization in the debate are linked. Many serious studies ignore the existence of migration, possibly seriously influencing the results: for example, two studies on poverty reduction in India have ignored the role of remittances, possibly underestimating the poverty reducing impact of urban-based economic growth (Ravallion and Datt 1996; Besley et al. 2004). At the same time, many of the studies that do try to incorporate migration findings do so at the cost of conceptual rigour and clarity, for example using 'stocks' rather than 'flows' of migrants, or using 'net migration' (which conceals movements of in- and out-migration, and movement to and fro by the same people), as an indicator for analysing the impact of migration on economic convergence across regions.⁵ While the political nature of the question will continue to provide blocks to reaching any forms of consensus, the disagreements are partly caused by the lack of care in defining the subject.

There is a possible further reason for the continued marginalization of migration: the relative lack of labour market or employment analysis in development (poverty) studies

⁵ Cashin and Sahay (1996). There is a continued debate the question whether and why rates of labour migration are low in India, see for example Munshi and Rosenzweig (2005).

and policies.⁶ Islam (2004) for example argues that ‘rigorous analysis of the role of employment in the linkage between economic growth and poverty reduction appears to be missing’. The Millennium Development Goals include no meaningful reference to labour or employment, and certainly compared to the attention that has been paid to poverty data, employment data has been mostly neglected. While discussion of the absence of labour market or employment analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, it seems safe to assume that if labour markets and employment are not regularly included in poverty analysis, migration is even less likely to feature in that analysis.

To explore the questions about the role of migration in development studies, and the growth and poverty debates in particular, this paper does two things. The first section argues that in fact we do know quite a bit about the migration–development relationship, provided we are careful with definitions, and allow for context-specificity to be a key component of our knowledge arsenal. The second part will go back to theoretical models around migration—and in their early incarnations how they were placed in mainstream development thinking—to try to understand why the movement of labour seems to be so badly represented in mainstream development thinking. The concluding section suggests what conditions need to be fulfilled for migration studies to become a more integral part of development thinking.

2 Migration, development, poverty reduction: what do we know?

On the basis of earlier review, joint work with Rogaly,⁷ as well as a review of a recent multi-donor research project on pro-poor growth,⁸ this section highlights what we *do* know about migration, and how it links to development. A key part of the argument will be around context specificity. The problem in the migration–development question is not, I argue, that we cannot establish links. However, links are context dependent, complex, multi-sectoral, assessments depend on indicator of well-being chosen, and different effects possibly off-set each other. This section divides the migration–development relationship into a range of interactions, increasingly difficult to assess. It should be stressed that the different aspects interact, making quantitative assessments problematic.

2.1 Who migrates? And who doesn’t?

Part of the answer to the question of migration–development lies in the answer to the question: who migrates? Characteristics of migrants reflect labour demand structures, and suggest specific way migration affects livelihoods of families, gender, social and

⁶ Discussion of this subject here is largely based on recent discussions with representatives of WIEGO, ‘Informal Labour Markets and Pro-Poor Growth’, 21-23 March 2005.

⁷ de Haan (1999); de Haan and Rogaly (2002).

⁸ de Haan (2005). Many of the case studies in this research programme provided much information about migration, and the synthesis work asked the question about the role of processes of growth and particularly increasing inequality.

economic relations. Labour migration is usually by young able-bodied people. They are often men, but by no means exclusively—gender patterns of migration relate to a range of political, economic and social conditions. Migrants are often not from the poorest region, usually not the poorest in the areas of origin, and often slightly better educated or skilled. Further, migration patterns are structured by social divides, such as caste in India, religion, or ethnicity in Vietnam. Evidence on land-ownership as determinant or correlates of migration typically varies strongly, and can change over time. Comparisons of incomes show a mixed and varied picture, with migrants often not far behind the average or non-migrants in areas of destination, making up over time—but an important finding that the diversity of migrants is at least as large as among the non-migrant population.⁹

Different migrants also may have different motives.¹⁰ For some it is an accumulation strategy. For the poorest it tends to be a survival strategy, often availing of the least-remunerating opportunities, and evidence exists that migration may reinforce exploitative structures like debt-bondage relationships.¹¹ Savings for dowries is an important motive for female migrants in western Africa, and in other cases too migration may be linked to a particular period in the life cycle. Thus, there are important variations, and the characteristics depend on economic, political as well as cultural circumstances—changing over time, partly under the influence of migration itself.

An important general finding—for understanding migration–development links—is around the importance of networks, and migration streams. Due to the segmentation of migration streams (and how they ‘mature’ over time), migrants tend to come from specific areas, and they are not necessarily the poorest from rural areas—particularly not when the migratory jobs are relatively attractive and have higher returns. People who are better off may pave the way for migrants with fewer resources.¹²

There is some evidence that the poorest, least skilled, least physically capable and without networks tend to migrate less. However, the types of migration the poorest engage in is also least likely to be captured in surveys and census, as may be the case in Vietnam and China where formal registration may determine being captured in surveys, but also in India where for example rural–rural migration is likely to be under-recorded (see, for example, Rogaly et al. 2002). Moreover, as indicated above, for the poorest

⁹ de Haan and Dubey (2002), with NSS data for India, and review of evidence from elsewhere including the UK.

¹⁰ As research on Ghana shows, while half of the population may be categorised as migrant, reasons are very diverse, and only a small part of this is directly related to motives to find work (Litchfield and Waddington 2003). In India the largest proportion of migration (particularly short-distance) as registered in the census may be for marriage; most women move to the house of their husband, and move outside their village of birth.

¹¹ See Mosse et al. (2002) for detailed anthropological study of western India.

¹² The edited volume by de Haan and Rogaly (2002) highlights, for various contexts of migration, the importance of social networks, and how social norms co-determine structures of migration, i.e. who migrates, under what circumstances, and potential benefits.

migration often comes as an extreme survival strategy, suggesting that *when* they migrate, this is likely to be less beneficial than the migration by the better off.

2.2 Push and pull

Pull factors are widely relevant in explaining national as well as international migration movements (as discussed below, central elements of the classic Todaro models remain undisputed). Though there are some doubts about the responsiveness of migrants from poorer areas, and evidence of existence of a ‘migration hump’ (Martin 2005), most experience indicates that migrants do move in reaction to newly developing opportunities. For example, recent panel data analysis using a standard international migration model found robust ‘pull effects’, of improvements of mean income in host countries.¹³

There is more controversy about the relationship between migration and development in the catchment areas. Earlier migration models identified the less-developed areas as likely candidates for migration. Crisis in areas of origin tends to be associated with increased migration, as the increased migration from Ecuador at the end of the 1990s indicates.¹⁴ Many development specialists have argued for rural development to reduce migration pressures. But empirical studies (see, for example, Mosse et al. 2002) show very diverse picture of reasons for out-migration. People from the poorest areas often do not have access to the most rewarding activities (e.g. Mallee 1996 for China), in urban areas (Skeldon 1997b) or abroad, though they may migrate to activities nearby, for seasonal agricultural and less rewarding work (e.g. Connell et al. 1976, for Indian villages).

Crucially, much evidence shows that development in areas of origin usually goes hand-in-hand with migration. Expectations that rural development will decrease out-migration may be unjustified (though it is likely to change the conditions of migration and composition of migrants); ‘poverty reduction is not in itself a migration-reducing strategy’ (Sorensen et al. 2002). For example, in the Punjab, the Green Revolution occurred simultaneously with both high rates of out-migration as well as in-migration from poorer Indian states, and in China the development of rural enterprises appeared to increase rates of out-migration (except amongst the more educated peasants; Liang and White 1997). According to Skeldon (1997a), it is impossible to envisage development without migration, and migration *is* development; for example, while Japan was urbanizing emigration was increasing.

¹³ Mayda (2005). Further factors affecting migration rates inequality in origin and destination, geographical, cultural, and demographic factors, and migration policies. The theoretical model referred to is from Clark, Hatton and Williamson, on US immigrants.

¹⁴ Hall (2005). I thank one of the anonymous referees for emphasizing the links between macroeconomic factors and international migration, while my paper focuses mainly on more micro factors.

2.3 Effects of migration

Evidence on effects of migration is controversial; the emphasis above on the closed interlinkage between development and migration already foreshadowed this. With respect to international migration and receiving countries, the consensus seems that immigration has improved economic welfare, including raising tax revenue¹⁵—given restrictive immigration policies this is unsurprising as receiving countries allow mainly people with skills for which there is an excess demand in the labour market. Most research, at aggregate levels, seems to contradict the popular belief that immigration contributes to unemployment, or substantial decreases in wages in host societies,¹⁶ though there is of course micro-evidence that employers can attract migrants to reduce wages and bargaining powers of local workers.¹⁷

Much less clarity exists about the effect of migration on development of areas of origin, including in agriculture, even though this is perhaps the most relevant question for development studies and policies.¹⁸ Very few studies trace the effects of migration and remittances on villages of origin, even in areas with long traditions of out-migration.¹⁹ Leaving the question regarding remittances till the next sub-section, we find much contradictory evidence and expectations. There is evidence that migrants contribute to building of schools or other community activities (Russell et al. 1990). For example, migration can help to alleviate unemployment (Ghosh 1992). At the same time, out-migration can lead to a shortage of labour in some contexts,²⁰ perhaps particularly the more skilled and, almost inevitably, entrepreneurial parts of the population. Field studies in villages of migrant origin in Jiangsu, Anhui, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces in China, where out-migration was caused by land scarcity and rising costs of agriculture, showed a shortage of labour caused by migration. Supporting Ellerman's concern, while remittances benefit families, they did not contribute to village development or the establishment and maintenance of village services including those for facilitating agricultural development (Croll and Ping 1997). The World Bank Poverty Assessment for El Salvador highlights that remittances are important for raising household incomes (and stimulating demand for goods).²¹ But in assessing impact, the Assessment stresses,

¹⁵ A study in the UK on the impact of immigration on public finances showed a growing contribution (amounting to 10 percent by 2003-04), at a substantially higher rate than the UK-born population, and a greater net contributor (Sriskandarajah et al. 2005).

¹⁶ For example, for the UK, Glover et al. (2001); this may be partly due to the fact that migration tends to occur in areas and sectors with labour scarcities.

¹⁷ For example, for western India, Breman (1985), and Rogaly et al (2002) for eastern India.

¹⁸ Much emphasis has been on the integration of migrants, and the impact on host communities. A recent issue of *International Migration Review* (Fall 2004) for example on conceptual development in international migration studies does not pay any attention to the impact on sending areas.

¹⁹ de Haan (2002) makes an initial attempt to do this for villages in western Bihar, which has a long tradition of out-migration, which is reflected in cultural expressions too.

²⁰ In the labour-scarce west Africa environment, absence of able-bodied men was keenly felt and led to a 'labour gap', women were working longer and harder in the compound's communal fields, and had less time to work their own land (David 1995).

²¹ In other contexts, the possibility of inflationary impact has been emphasized; Amjad (1989).

the counterfactual is important too: families might have increased their labour supply in local markets if migration opportunities and remittances did not exist.²²

Not much is known, it seems, about the role of migrants and remittances on enhancing efficiency in agriculture. In England in the eighteenth century, and possibly elsewhere in Europe, migrants appear to have played important innovatory roles (Thirsk 1991). Lakshmanasamy's (1990) literature review concludes that migration and remittances modernise the rural sector, both directly and indirectly, through their impact on the production-increasing technological and institutional changes in the agricultural sector.²³ Nevertheless, the positive impacts are contingent, and depend on many factors like seasonality of movement, educational levels, length of time spent away, assets, and social structures and institutions allowing women and others to pursue activities previously reserved for men and household heads.

For decades, there has been a particular concern about 'brain drain' (usually international migration by the better skilled, but equally important within countries). Recent analysis has started to look at the complexity of the issues involved, though hampered by data availability and quality. Docquier and Rapoport (2004) highlight that international migration has become increasingly selective. Detrimental effects could include increased international inequality, particularly if migrants are disconnected from those left behind. Beneficial effects could include remittances, return migration, creation of trade and business networks, and incentive effects on human capital formation at home. Cross-country analysis indicates limited evidence that return migration is significant among high skilled, or that they contribute to technology diffusion. They find positive benefits of prospect of migration on human capital formation and GDP growth—leading to a conclusion that 'brain drain should not induce developing countries to reduce education expenditures'. However, and crucially, effects are different for different countries, bigger countries with a smaller proportion of migrants experience larger gains.

Most analysis of migration is very temporary, focusing on the top of the migration hump. Impacts, however, can be long-term, and fortunes can reverse. One important example of this is the likelihood that migration opportunities decline. There is some literature on the effects of this. On the one hand, areas of origin function as a safety valve, as seen in Indonesia during 1997 and many transition countries.²⁴ Other assessments, for example on the effect of changing South African policies on migrant communities in Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland are less positive. Chirwa (1997: 650) gives a generally optimistic view about the effects of oscillating labour migration in the region, and describes the reasons for success and failure in the use of returns from

²² Quoted in the OPPG study on El Salvador, Marquez (2004).

²³ Lakshmanasamy (1990) which quotes Eames' findings that 12 per cent of the respondents' remittances were used to buy bullocks and to aid agriculture; Oberai and Singh showed that a significant proportion of remittances were used for agricultural production; and Brammer described how immigrants to Dinajpur introduced double cropping.

²⁴ For example, the OPPG case study on Romania, Georghiu et al. (2004).

migration: the ‘social, economic, as well as political disruptions caused by this process are just too great for the weak economies and fragile political structures of the labour-supplying countries and local communities to effectively handle’. Leliveld (1997) describes the effects of declining migration on households in rural Swaziland: employment possibilities in Swaziland are limited, and relatively young households, with few working members, and a weak economic position are among the most vulnerable in this context. Also, there is a considerable literature on the negative effects of sudden barriers to international migration, such as during the Gulf War which had an enormous impact on sending countries.²⁵

2.4 Remittances: amounts and impact

Central in much of the thinking on impact of migration has been the question of remittances, one of the new development mantras, in the words of Kapur (2004). Economic theories tend to have rather different interpretations of remittances (insurance, bequest), as they have of migration more generally. It is generally recognized that data are difficult to interpret. Where restrictions on transfers exist official data are likely to imply underreporting (in-kind transfers and gifts are also significant). In an increasing number of household surveys remittances are captured (though in expenditure surveys remittances will be implicit), allowing in my view more analysis than often assumed.²⁶

There is a large amount of literature on remittances—conclusions about both amounts and uses differ.²⁷ I focus here on internal migration, the more difficult question. Reardon’s overview of the importance of the rural non-farm income in Africa (covering 25 case studies) is helpful to give an idea of magnitude, and how this differs across locations. This showed that on average 45 per cent of total rural income was non-farm, differing between 22 and 93 per cent. In areas not close to major cities, migration earnings constituted 20 per cent of total non-farm earnings, whereas it was as high as 75 per cent in areas close to major cities.²⁸

More recent studies exist, including Ellis and Freeman’s (2004) livelihood study in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. They stress that reduction of dependence on agriculture is a key way out of poverty. In Tanzania, for example, about half of household income is derived from agriculture (less so for the better off) and of the other half 36 per cent was non-farm income, 11 per cent was wages, and a mere 4 per cent

²⁵ Connell and Wang (1992); Addleton (1991). According to a recent paper by Azam (2005), 9/11 did *not* result in a reduction of migration from Pakistan.

²⁶ See for example information on migration highlighted in the OPPG case study on Ghana (McKay et al. 2004); and Litchfield and Waddington (2003). Data gathered through support of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute now provide insight for five sending and three receiving countries (see also Anarfi 2005).

²⁷ For example, Adepoju and Mbugua (1997: 54) note that African migrants often remit up to 60 per cent of their incomes, though Findley (1997: 130) in the same volume quotes research showing that migrants remit between 5 and 15 per cent of their income.

²⁸ Reardon (1997). I am not aware of existing regional overviews elsewhere.

was transfers (slightly higher for lower income groups). A similar small importance of transfers, and also higher for lower incomes, was found in Uganda (Ellis and Bahgiwa 2003). So roughly, across Africa about a quarter of total rural incomes may be derived from migration, but with wide variations, greatly depending on locations, and with different importance for different socioeconomic groups.²⁹

Apart from the uncertainty in estimates of remittances, assessments of impact need to be sensitive to the complexity in which this is embedded. First, they need to take account of the fact that this counts only successful migration, and there is a possibility that many migrants have *not* remitted despite having invested heavily. Second, data on remittances need to take account of reverse flows (Lipton 1980; Findley 1997), of initial investment, but also for example food from villages of origin to cities. Third, as highlighted already in the discussion on brain drain, from a home country public policy perspective remittances need to be off-set against the (public) investment in education and other forms of publicly funded investments.³⁰

Evaluation of impact of remittances seems to have shifted since the 1970s, when there was much stress on the ‘conspicuous consumption’ of migrants and their relatives, towards more positive views, focusing, for example, upon the conditions needed to secure the investment of remittances, and internationally the emphasis of increasing remittances and how they have far outstripped official aid. Authors that have emphasized the lack of productive investment include Oberai and Singh who concluded that only six per cent of remittances flowing into the Indian Punjab were used for productive investment (though remittances did improve distribution of income).³¹ On the other hand, literature that emphasizes productive investments include Papademetriou and Martin (1991) and various publications by Adams (1991, 1996: 149-70, 1998). Durand et al. (1996a, 1996b) show income from migration stimulates economic activity, both directly and indirectly, and that it leads to significantly higher levels of employment, investment, and income. Finally, it needs pointing out that even very small amounts of remittances can be vital for poor people, including their food security.³²

Thus, levels of remittances vary widely—depending on various factors such as accessibility of the home village, employment opportunities, costs of living, ease of remitting, and the ‘orientation’ of the migrant—and estimates are usually unreliable.

²⁹ For research in India, see Deshingkar and Start (2003). Also Deshingkar and Anderson (2004) and Deshingkar (2005) for more general overviews that stress the role of migration in development. Comments by and discussions with John Farrington, ODI, have been very helpful in drafting this part of the paper.

³⁰ To take an example close to home: given that my education in the Netherlands may have cost the tax payer about \$100,000, it would take me (who falls in the category of not remitting, and probably receiving net transfers from the home country) a long time before my remittances would become a *net* gain.

³¹ Oberai and Singh (1980) for India; Islam (1991) for Bangladesh; and Roberts (1997) for Mexico and China.

³² David (1995). Knowles and Anker (1981) noted that remittances are more important for poorer than richer households in Kenya, even if the rich received more.

Evidence on the way remittances are used also shows diversity, and can be modelled in rather different ways. There is no doubt that remittances can have negative and positive consequences—evidence suggests that the way remittances are used depends on the form of migration, the characteristics of the migrants and those who stay behind, and conditions for use of remittances and returning migrants. This finally points to one of the complexities of understanding impact of migration: the conditions that make remittances be helpful for development or poverty reduction are generally the same conditions that made migrants leave in the first place.³³

2.5 Inequality back on the agenda: and what do we know about migration?

The reappearance of inequality in the development debate should give some new impetus to the research on migration, as it already has with respect to international migration. As emphasized by Pritchett, migration has to have an impact on migration, and have to reduce overall income inequality. However, assessments of this, too are very varied, and are very dependent on unit and indicator of analysis (Black et al. 2004).

The multi-donor research programme ‘Operationalizing Pro-Poor Growth’³⁴ highlights a key dilemma in assessing migration: while it generally helps to reduce poverty and increase income of the poor, migration and remittances also lead to increased inequality within countries. A similar theme was highlighted in Indian Village Studies project in the 1970s, which showed that rural–urban migration did not tend to equalise incomes, *between* or *within* regions, for a range of reasons: the selective nature of migration, providing higher returns to the better off and better educated, prevents equalization within areas of origin; there are costs and barriers and associated with migration, including access to information about opportunities, which tends to steer the gains of migration to the rich; absence of the most productive household members leads to a lowering of labour-intensity; the volume of net remittances was usually low; and return migrants are likely to be the old, sick, and unsuccessful, and skills brought back unlikely to be of much help (Lipton 1982). Islam (1991) concluded that the negative effects of migration to the Gulf from villages in Chittagong in Bangladesh outweighed positive ones: land became concentrated in the hand of migrant families, who turned into non-farmers, which contributed to a decrease in production. Land prices went up, and so did the cost of labour, though not so high as to lead to labour saving in agriculture.

But here too, generalizations appear meaningless. Some forms of migration lead to equalising income within regions, though not necessarily between sending and receiving regions. In some cases migration increases income inequality, in some cases it lowers it, this relationship may change over time as has been shown in Mexico for example. The unit of analysis matters, too, as increased male income does not necessarily translate

³³ The proportion of Taiwanese and Korean science PhDs trained in the US that *returned* to their home country increased significantly with the impressive growth in their home countries (quoted in Docquier and Rapoport 2004: 21).

³⁴ This was a joint research programme of the British, German and French donor organizations, and the World Bank; see <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY>.

into increased well-being of women. While in some cases migration and remittances have led to development, in other cases it has not. A key issue appears to be not migration itself but the condition under which people leave and conditions for development generally which determine the impact of migration.

2.6 Concluding

There is a point to the annoying complexity or diversity highlighted above (still only a very selective overview of the literature): it appears to me that the value of generalising about migrants, migration, and its impact is very limited. Possibly, the number of people who move is as large as those who do not, and the conditions under which they do move are as diverse as the conditions under which people stay where they are. Few straightforward conclusions or easy generalizations emerge, though some conclusions can be drawn.

First, most analysts probably tend to agree that migration emerges out of differences in opportunity, and that workers and labour markets generally are responsive to opportunities (though there will be degrees of integration of labour markets—one of the problems of migration studies is that they focus on migrants and less on the wider environment). The ‘migration optimists’ tend to argue that where migration does not lead to reduction in disparities, this tends to be due to barriers for migrants, such as international borders. The ‘migration pessimist’ emphasize that there is very little empirical evidence that shows that migration does in fact lead to reduction in disparities. Importantly, migration will have different impacts in different contexts. While the classic Harris-Todaro models was not wrong in terms of predicting a transfer of labour from rural to urban areas, it may have been optimistic, at least implicitly, about the speed with which this would occur, and almost certainly wrong in the assumption that the migration process amounts to a lottery.

The evidence on remittances also shows that context matters greatly, in both their amount and use. I think that on balance the literature supports Ellerman’s view, that the migration optimists tend to ignore the evidence on first-round effects looking for second- and third-order effects, and I have stressed that an assessment of impact of migration and remittances need to be seen in context of wider environment in which migration operates, and address contradictory and off-setting factors. The optimist and pessimist conclusions are not necessarily incompatible: the point is that conditions and context seem crucial for the chances that migration and remittances end up stimulating development in areas of origin. This may be of key relevance for the chances that migration leads to a reduction in disparities, as the same absent conditions that would make remittances lead to development were the reasons migrants left in the first place.

3 Theorizing migration: what good has this done?

Against this review of the empirical complexity of characteristics, causes and consequences of migration, this second part of the paper will review the models in which migration has been analysed. Like the empirical description, this will highlight a

diversity in and controversy over approaches, and will tentatively answer the question how different approaches make it more or less likely that migration can be understood as an integral and often central part of development processes, and what the policy implications of the different approaches are.

3.1 Job lottery, individual motives, but only during ‘transition’

While earlier theories of migration tried to explain volumes of migration, e.g., by reference to distance, probably the most important theoretical starting point for migration studies since the 1960s has been the model by Harris and Todaro (1970) in the *American Economic Review* (also Todaro 1969). In this, a prospective migrant is expected to weigh the difference between the expected earnings from formal sector urban employment, an initial period of informal sector employment, and the expected earnings in the village. While criticised by many, empirical analyses have shown that the model has certain predictive value. Lucas,³⁵ Hatton and Williamson (1992), and Larson and Mundlak (1997), all in one way or another have reaffirmed the validity of the model. More recently, Lucas (2002) provides a theoretical model of rural–urban migration based on Todaro-Harris, emphasising the increasing skill levels in urban areas, and widening gap with agricultural workers.

It may be worth pausing at this dualistic model (two or three sector), and the role that dualistic thinking has had in the development studies literature. While its historical origins have been traced to the colonial Dutch economist Boeke (Breman 1980), the dualistic model draws heavily on the surplus-labour model developed by Lewis.³⁶ With a strong focus on modernization and agricultural transformation (perhaps foreshadowing the undue emphasis on ‘formal’ employment),³⁷ Lewis predicted non-agricultural employment to increase without real wages rising initially, until surplus labour was absorbed. Well-functioning labour markets were thought to be key to this process of transformation. This provides some clue to the question why the Todaro and Lewis type of migration and labour market analysis has had limited value for the development debate. While it may help in analysing labour market developments in processes of structural (rural–urban, industrial) transformation, a priori it seems of limited value outside the contexts of such structural transformations. This seems important for four, related, sets of reasons.

First, the segmented market models emphasized by Todaro and others have apparent relevance in describing empirical realities that show clearly diverging wage rates in those different sectors.³⁸ But it may have contributed to *ignoring* forms of migration

³⁵ Quoted in Ghatak et al. (1996).

³⁶ Lewis (1954: 400-49). Also Fei and Ranis (1964) and Ranis (2003) for a discussion of the critiques and usefulness of the dualism concept.

³⁷ Kuznets model too incorporated labour mobility as key factor in processes of rising inequality in this structural transformation. See also, Zelinsky’s transition model that linked modernization to changes in patterns of migration (Skeldon 1997a: 31).

³⁸ See for example the Vietnam study in the OPPG research programme (Bonschab and Klump 2004).

that are at least as important as those related to ‘modernization’, particularly (intrasectoral) rural-rural migration which according to various observers constitutes quantitatively most important form of migration in countries like India.

Second, it appears to have led to a conceptualization of labour markets that is restricted to, or at least focusing on, moves out of agriculture,³⁹ reducing the relevance of it to discussions in Africa for example, at least the parts where urbanization has remained low, for periods where return to rural areas have dominated, and when movements within the agricultural or rural sector have been predominant.⁴⁰

Third, the conceptualization as clearly differentiated markets makes it difficult to take account of connections of labour markets to for example product or output markets which tends to be of central importance for small traders and producers.⁴¹

Finally, while the 1960s theories were situated in discussions of structural changes, focus of Todaro-type of analysis has been on individual incentives (and remittances): this makes it suitable for inclusion in individualistic types of poverty analysis that have prevailed, but has arguable removed it from its origin in debates on economic and societal transformations.⁴²

3.2 Beyond individual motives, but beyond ‘rationality’?

At least two sets of theoretical innovations—partly related, both known under the term new economics of migration—have taken migration studies beyond the individual incentives central to the Todaro type of models: one that has taken households rather than individuals as unit of analysis, the other which has focused on migration as overcoming market imperfections.

A fairly recent development in the migration literature has been the emphasis on family and family strategies as crucial elements in migration decisions. Whereas the Todaro model focuses on the individuals as rational actors, the ‘new economics of migration’ emphasize the family as unit of analysis: ‘even though the entities that engage in migration are often individual agents, there is more to labour migration than an individualistic optimizing behaviour. Migration by one person can be due to, fully

³⁹ This is often reflected in confusing terminology around ‘mobility’, which can refer to sectoral mobility *in terms of* sectoral change, and not just human mobility.

⁴⁰ See the paper on Africa as part of the World Bank ‘stock take’ of labour market issues (Fox et al. 2004) which argues: ‘many of the commonly used labor market concepts such as a job, employment and unemployment, participation, wage, earnings, etc. are difficult to apply in Africa.’

⁴¹ Jennifer Leavy (personal communication and her doctoral research on Northern Province, Zambia) highlights both the inter-related nature of different types of markets, and the ways markets are embedded in personal relations.

⁴² According to Rodgers (1996), the classic development literature of Arthur Lewis and Gunnar Myrdal was rich in institutional detail; Rodgers’ article in 1996 and the volume he and others brought together provides a range of research priorities around labour institutions, in macro- and micro-economics, labour market structure, mobilization of labour, wage setting institutions, and agrarian systems.

consistent with, or undertaken by a group of persons, such as the family' (Stark 1991: 3). The family is conceptualised as a coalition vis-à-vis the rest of the world, family members share costs of and rewards of migration. Migration is seen as a form of portfolio diversification by families, in which they enter into chosen contractual arrangements, and remittances exemplify the 'intertemporal contractual arrangement' between migrant and family, with families investing in migrants, migrants in families, and both expecting returns from that.⁴³

Subsequent economic models to explain remittance behaviour have been of two types (de la Brière et al. 1997). First, building on the work of Rosenzweig and others, models focus on insurance contracts between the migrant and the household left behind, as a means of coping with household risk, and on migration and remittances as a form of portfolio diversification (options to receive remittances are weighed against the returns from local sources of income). The second type of model builds on literature around bequest motive: remittances as investments in household assets that the migrant will later inherit, which is supported by analysis of difference in remittance behaviour between men and women (caused by gender-differentiated inheritance rules).

Using household rather than individuals as the central unit of analysis appears appropriate, for a number of reasons. First, it sits much more comfortably with much sociological and anthropological (and livelihoods) analysis—like Krokfors' (1995: 54-64) concept of multi-active households, the emphasis in families investing in education for migration to the formal urban sector (Adepoju and Mbugua 1997: 54), or van Velsen's (1959) analysis of urban migrants' awareness of the temporary nature of their urban existence—though of course with less emphasis on context specific and cultural factors determining household forms and interactions, and possibly biased towards the unitary household model criticised by feminist authors.⁴⁴ Second, it is much better placed to take account of the fact that much if not most migration is 'circular'—i.e. constituting continued interactions with areas of origins rather than a one-way and one-off move—taking it out of the (implicit) emphasis on 'transition' in the rural-urban model of Todaro. Third, in principle it appears that a focus on households makes it easier to incorporate findings into the dominant form of poverty analysis, with its focus on households, albeit with an inevitable sedentary bias.

However, while its unit of analysis is more promising than that of the individual in the job lottery, the new economics remains firmly grounded in a functionalistic and individualistic economic framework. Migration is seen primarily in terms of economic

⁴³ Dustmann (1997) presents a life cycle model to compare the decisions of a migrant about consumption and time abroad under certainty and uncertainty in the host and home countries.

⁴⁴ But see de la Brière et al. (1997), which emphasizes heterogeneity in explaining remittances, differences between male and female Dominican migrants to the US, and the differences in inheritance rules to explain this. The same theme has been studied Filipino/a migrants, with the surprising conclusion that men send more money back than women, by Semyonov and Gorodzeisky (2005).

function (contractual arrangements) within the household,⁴⁵ without much attention to the ‘non-economic’ factors that drive such decisions, or the cultural determinant of household forms themselves, despite the fact that household forms and composition are key to structuring migration processes (and vice versa).⁴⁶ Further, migration is seen as solutions to market failures, such as the absence of access to insurance or for example to investment in education: while rightly broadening the focus from the simple job-wage consideration in the Todaro model, this emphasizes a functionality of migration that can provide only a very partial explanation of movements of people, and has little to say about the multiple and bi-directional links of migration and remittances to broader processes of development.

3.3 The structuration of migration

For a broader understanding of migration and how it links to development processes we have to move largely, it seems, outside the economics literature. Alternative conceptualizations are manifold, of course, and here I stress merely the literature that emphasizes the social institutions structuring migration, and the critical literature that has linked migration to capitalist and colonial development.⁴⁷

There is a great amount of literature that emphasizes the way migration and social and other institutions are linked.⁴⁸ Complementing migration models like Todaro’s this emphasizes the continuity, in terms of social institutions, that marks migration processes, and sees migration decisions as part of continuing efforts, consistent with traditional values (though sometimes seen as ‘unravelling social fabric’)⁴⁹ to solve recurrent problems, often but not only related to resource scarcity. Migration processes are seen as embedded in social relations.⁵⁰ Gender analysis has of course contributed greatly, as indicated above in the discussion on household models of migration, not only in understanding differentiated motivations for and impacts of migration, but also more broadly in the way migration processes are structured, emphasising power and

⁴⁵ Stark’s (1980) analysis of the role of urban-rural remittances in rural development sets out how migration by-passes credit and insurance markets, facilitating surplus accumulation and diversification of income sources.

⁴⁶ This is a theme I tried to develop further with respect to Africa, in a background paper for the SPA report in 1999 (de Haan 1999); drawing inter alia on Findley (1997). Much earlier, Epstein’s (1973) South Indian research developed the concept of a ‘share families’, units that live separately but have agreed to share the responsibility for their incomes as well as their expenditure, emphasising that the way family structures have evolved differs across economic classes.

⁴⁷ Theories of structuration are usually associated with the work of Giddens (1979, 1984), emphasizing the importance of both human agency and social structure (<http://www.theory.org.uk/giddens2.htm>) and used in migration research for example in Chant and Radcliffe (1992) and de Haan (1994).

⁴⁸ This was one of the key themes of de Haan and Rogaly (2002).

⁴⁹ Adepoju, in the introduction to his edited volume on family, population and development in Africa, stated: ‘[m]igration is eroding day-to-day mutual support among family members...’ (Adepoju 1997: 23). Others have suggested that the negative effects might have been overstated; for example Read in Malawi in 1942 and Watson in Zambia in 1958.

⁵⁰ Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993); Rogaly (1997, 1998).

exploitation: 'gender is an essential tool for unpicking the migration process'.⁵¹ Finally, research focusing on migrant networks has played a very important role in helping to see movements of people as part, not only of 'traditions of migration' and interpreted in a 'cumulative migration theory',⁵² but also wider processes of social and economic development.⁵³

It seems that most of the literature that has made the migration–development links central to analyses, has been from critical and Marxist perspectives. Southern African academics in particular have been engaged in continued debate about migration and its relations with apartheid, uneven capitalist development, and rural change. Partly in the context of urbanization and the informal sector (Safa 1982, Breman 1996), but also with focus on movement of migrant workers within rural areas (Breman 1985, Mansell Prothero and Chapman 1985), and building on historical analysis (Breman 1990), these critical studies explicitly challenged the individualistic assumptions underlying models like Todaro's, and have described migration as an inevitable part of transition towards or development of capitalism. Similarly, international migration and remittances have been conceptualised in the context of advantages for global capital and richer nations.⁵⁴

Particularly Marxist models can be criticised for focusing exclusively on economic factors (of exploitation). It is clear that the same questions are relevant as with respect to neo-classical models, that migration processes can be understood adequately only as the outcome of interaction of a diversity of factors, including social-cultural influences as well as economic forces, gendered norms and rules, and how migration in turn alters these, and in the interaction of structures and agency. One of the keys to understand migration process and integrate findings into broader development debates is to draw on a diversity of disciplines.

4 Concluding: can migration studies come out of marginality ?

The key question for this paper is not whether there are enough studies on migration. Clearly, enormous amounts of literature have been produced, with an apparent upsurge of studies during the last few years, particularly related to international migration, but also—for example in the context of livelihoods research—on migration within countries. Neither is the key question whether we know enough about migration. Again, there is no shortage of knowledge about what drives migration, and whether migrants are able to succeed—though the review in the first part of this paper puts a strong emphasis on context specificity, and suggests that there is a specific gap with respect to

⁵¹ Wright (1995); also Sinclar (1998).

⁵² Massey et al. (1994). A recent critique of migration network analyses is Krissman (2005), which emphasizes the role of power relations of employers' demands and the middlemen involved within migration networks.

⁵³ See for example Massey (1993), regarding how international migration streams sustain themselves in cumulative fashion.

⁵⁴ For example, the historical-structural framework in Rubenstein (1992), and Kritz and Zlotnik (1992).

understanding the impact on or (more appropriately) interrelationship with broader development processes in areas of origin.

Further, the overview of theories in the previous session suggests there is as much complementarity as there are differences. Individual motives and push-pull considerations matter, as do household of which migrants are a part. Social network and institution cannot be ignored in understanding processes and outcomes of migration, and historical studies have shown clearly how migration streams were created in the interest of capital and colonial powers—and in a large number of cases the effects of these can still be observed. The problem, perhaps, is not so much in what is known about migration, but that dominant debates do not fully appreciate the importance of insights from different disciplines and traditions, and different policy implications.

The key question that remains, and which relates closely to this specific gap in the literature, is whether migration studies have become an integral part of the understanding of development processes, including growth, poverty reduction, or rural development, which, as argued, does not necessarily lead to a reduction in migration. Though the burden of proof remains, my impression is that it remains difficult to integrate an understanding of mobility, labour migration in particular, in mainstream development studies texts.

To be fair, the reasons for this are manifold, and in conclusion I suggest it is worth thinking of these barriers under the following headings or reasons (not necessarily related). First, it is important to understand the political-economy of research itself—though this would take us well beyond the scope of this study. Interest in migration is to a great extent politically driven, sometimes with a main urge to reduce migration, sometimes to revalue the contribution of migration, recently of course also in the context of security concerns. The political motivation provides a partial explanation for the emphasis on international migration, in turn possibly contributing to isolation of the study of migration from that of broader development processes.

Second, apart from the fact that generalizations about migration are difficult to arrive at, data problems and scarcity continues to hamper understanding of migration, particularly its links to development in a broader sense. Though more analysis is possible, and more data (including on national migration) available than often assumed, quantitative analysis in particular is complicated by movement of people, and for example more panel data are required than presently available in development studies.⁵⁵ Also, it is crucial to highlight the complexity of the impact of remittances on development, including possible under-recording of most vulnerable forms of migration, the counterfactual of not migrating, and off-setting gains and losses. Conversely, much migration analysis does exactly that, studying the movement of people and/or remittances, but often as isolated phenomena, rather than as integral parts of social and economic development. In particular, and perhaps reflecting the same political

⁵⁵ Exceptions include, e.g., data on Vietnam (de Brauw et al. 2004).

determination highlighted above, migration studies still tends to neglect the impact of migration on sending regions and countries.

A third point relates to the complexity of migration in the sense that, as argued above, it appears impossible and perhaps even meaningless to formulate generalizations about impacts of migration, for example on inequality, or development in areas of origin. This is not as benign as an emphasis on context specificity suggests. What this highlights is exactly the need to see migration as an integral part of wider development processes, as it appears that the conditions and policies that make migration and remittances successful (e.g. as highlighted in discussion of brain drain) appear to be general conditions that make development and growth likely (and the same issues that often made migrants leave in the first place). Processes of migration, thus, can be seen as markers of wider development processes—but only as they are understood as an integral part of those rather than (as is more common) isolated phenomena.

Fourth, and discussed in the second main part of this paper, many of the theoretical frameworks under which much migration analysis has been carried out, arguably, have hampered the understanding of migration as part of wider development processes. While household models of migration appear an appropriate extension of the models focusing on individuals (and seem to fit in well with the dominant forms of poverty analysis), highlighting the circular nature of much migration, they continue to isolate households and their migration movements from wider processes of development, under-estimating the importance of bi-directional linkages.

Anthropological literature, e.g. on southern Africa, has portrayed much richer pictures of this complexity, and it seems important to ensure that these approaches inform strongly understanding of the role of migration. Similarly, the critical migration literature has highlighted many aspects of political economy that are key to understanding migration. However, and as a fifth possible reason for the marginality of migration analysis, the predominant development debate does often not draw sufficiently on insights from these disciplines, hence unintentionally further undermining the possibility of enriching understanding of development process by migration analysis. For future research agendas, particularly (though not only) in migration and its role in development processes, it is strongly recommended that development economists look closely at anthropological and other studies.

Much of this may not come as a surprise, at present. But it may well have been a big surprise for the classical development thinkers around the 1950s, for whom labour mobility was considered a key part of processes of modernization. But in these classics, labour markets too were very important, and much of the recent development debate seems to have ignored the importance of labour markets and employment (e.g. highlighted by the absence of meaningful indicators in the MDGs). Moreover, the classics were rich in institutional details, and as argued above an institutional understanding of migration appears key to ensuring that the role of migration can be seen as part of wider development processes, and for example to heed Ellerman's warning regarding conflating remittances with development.

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