

Views on Development

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Migration as a tool for development policy: the need for caution

Ronald Skeldon

Prof. Ronald Skeldon is a Professorial Fellow in the Department of Geography in the School of Global Studies at the University of Sussex. From June 2009 to March 2011, he was seconded as a Senior Research Fellow to the Department for International Development (DfID), London.



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From the second half of the 1990s, migration and development emerged as a major theme in global debates, in which migration had been seen as essentially a failure of development: migrants were fleeing poverty towards wealthier nations. The evidence suggested otherwise: migration is an integral part of development and accelerates with development. Four associated generalizations can be advanced:

1. Immobile populations reflect stagnant economies and generally poor populations.
2. An increase in migration and a reduction in poverty are associated, although this does not mean that an increase in migration simply causes a reduction in poverty.
3. While the poor do move, the poorest move over shorter distances and for shorter periods of time than wealthier groups.
4. The vast majority of those who do migrate do so within the borders of their own countries: that is, they are internal migrants.

In-country migration is much more important than international migration

The thrust of these four points is that any attempt to assess the impact of migration and development, or to plan for it, needs to incorporate internal migration and not just the minority of international migrants. United Nations estimates place the number of internal migrants worldwide around 2010 at 740

million compared with 240 million international migrants. If different definitions to measure internal migration are adopted to include shorter-distance movers, estimates of over 400 million internal migrants for India and China alone can be generated. Significant linkages also exist between internal and international migrations and these, too, need to be explored before a more balanced assessment of the impact of migration on development can be made.

Two competing approaches: integrationist and instrumentalist

Different views on the linkage between migration and development exist. The classic view states that "migration increases in volume as industries and commerce develop and transport increases". Such approaches characterized most analyses in migration studies and can be termed "integrationist approaches", where migration is seen to be an integral part of a development process. Recently, a different approach has emerged, the "instrumentalist approach", in which migration can be "managed" in order to achieve specific development objectives. As such, migration becomes a "tool" of development policy.

Three strongly interrelated aspects: remittances, brain drain and diaspora

The thrust of the new migration and development debate incorporates three interrelated dimensions: remittances, brain drain and the

diaspora. It is thought that the first and last of these dimensions are to be promoted and the second to be mitigated in order to promote development. The sheer volume of remittances from the developed to the developing world was in the region of US\$325 billion in 2010. This amount had reached levels last seen before the onset of the financial crisis. It was almost three times the size of official aid and virtually as large as foreign direct investment, according to the World Bank.

The emigration of the skilled from developing countries, who may make up a significant proportion of the total number of skilled in that country, is thought likely to prejudice the development potential of the countries of origin. The diaspora, or the community of migrants living outside any country, contains some of the brightest as well as wealthiest members of that country's population who can surely be "leveraged" to achieve development back home. Hence, policies to promote productive use of remittances, to slow the exodus of the highly skilled and to tap into the diaspora and to promote their return are to be encouraged in order to promote development.

The significance of these three dimensions is certainly not to be denied. However, their real impact on development, either positively or negatively, is much more complex and nuanced than any simplistic causal relationship. In fact, the assumption that the migration may either promote or inhibit development needs to be placed in a time and space framework. At present, any relationships between migration and development tend to be viewed through an a-historical and a-spatial lens and ignore important characteristics of the process of migration. In particular, the highly localized points of origin, as well as destination, tend to be ignored.

The recipients of remittances are often the rich rather than the poor

International migrants are not randomly drawn from the populations of countries of origin but come from very specific small districts and towns and villages, emphasizing the importance of networks in maintaining and channeling migration. Most of the migration from

Bangladesh to the UK, for example, comes from the district of Sylhet: the migration from Pakistan, also to the UK, is dominated by the district of Mirpur in the north-east of the country. A similar concentration of small areas of origin can be seen in the migration from the three southern provinces of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang in China to overseas destinations in North America, Australasia and Europe.

Hence, remittances from migrants flow back to very specific locations rather than to the country of origin as a whole. In any case, the remittances are private monies being sent to the families of the migrants and it would seem ill-intentioned to tell these people for what purpose their money should be used. In any way, any such policy is thrusting the responsibility for development onto the shoulders of the migrants and away from the state.

Migrants in general and international migrants in particular do not come from the poorest in any community: moving across borders is expensive not just in terms of the costs of transportation but for all the accompanying documentation, including passport, health and police checks, and so on. Hence, not only does it seem invidious to tell migrants how their money should be spent, but those monies are flowing to wealthier groups in very specific parts of a country that are unlikely to be the most disadvantaged. Much more than remittances will be required in order to promote development.

The complexity of the brain drain: additional issues

Following the same logic of the nature of the migration process, the impact of any exodus of the skilled, or "brain drain", is going to be on very specific areas of origin, and mainly the urban areas that are among the most advantaged in any country. The counterfactual question is impossible to answer: if the skilled had not left the country, would they have gone to provide services in the most disadvantaged areas? However, sending a highly skilled doctor to remote areas where the primary needs are for the most basic care may be a misallocation of human resources.

Irrespective of this, several other important issues exist that question any simplistic conclusion that the exodus of the skilled from the developing to the developed world is prejudicial to the development prospects of countries of origin. First, the global flows of the skilled are dominated by migrants from the devel-

oped world itself and from a relatively small number of middle-income developing countries such as China, India, the Philippines, Mexico and Egypt. The poorest countries generally do not have the facilities to produce significant numbers of the skilled. Second, this issue raises the point on place of training. Significant numbers of developing-country nationals are trained in the developed world, generally on scholarships from the developed world or from funds supplied by the families themselves. The extent to which remittances are used to fund such costs has yet to be established. Third, an exodus from a sector such as health, which is seen as the one most adversely affected by any brain drain, occurs within the country but not from the country. That is, for reasons of low pay or poor conditions and prospects, the skilled opt out of the sector but remain in the country in the private sector or even unemployed. The latter situation seems to apply to nurses in the health sector in a country like South Africa, for example.

The type of training received by people affects their migration pattern

The focus on "brain drain", it is argued here, diverts attention away from the more urgent issue of training: a training that is appropriate for a country's needs. Retention rates are more likely to be higher if candidates are recruited from poorer areas and given basic training. People who are trained to local standards can only migrate locally, whereas people who are trained to global standards will migrate globally, or at least some of them will. This is not to argue that countries should not strive to generate graduates to global standards. However, should they choose to do so, "leakage" must be expected as some choose to leave.

A question remains as to how such training should be funded and whether the developing country should meet the cost. The private sector, or even sources in the developed world, may be more appropriate as scarce public funds are channelled towards the costs of more basic education. Care must be taken that those trained to local levels are not locked into that level indefinitely, with bridging courses to higher levels available for those wishing to upgrade their qualifications.

Returning migrants need incentives to stay in their home country

The third dimension of the instrumentalist approach to migration and development

essentially brings issues of remittances and the skilled together in the diaspora: that the community of migrants outside a country can be tapped not just for finance but also for brains. Whether the skilled migrants in Europe, North America or Australasia can be encouraged to return on a longer or shorter-term basis in order to promote development is not so clear.

Unquestionably, migrants do return and unquestionably return migrants can have a significant impact on their country of origin. It would be impossible to understand modern-day Singapore or Vietnam, for example, without the roles played by, respectively, Lee Kuan Yew or Ho Chi Minh, who were both return migrants. However, they were but part of much wider and very different transformations that were revolutionary in their very different ways. More generally, migrants will only return and be effective once something to return to exists. They need effective institutions through which to apply their talents, and the simple return of the skilled is no guarantee of development success.

The positive effects of diasporas are often overestimated

In reality, diasporas are often highly factionalized and not all within them wish to support the goals of their country of origin. Some may have fled persecution and will actively seek to change the nature of home governments. All will have their own agendas that may not entirely coincide with objectives at home. However, even in the absence of such diverging opinions, the skills of those migrants who may have spent years in the temperate and well-served environments of the developed world may not be entirely appropriate to tropical or desert environments in the developing world where even basic services are lacking. Nevertheless, many in the diaspora do wish to help to promote development in origin countries, and home-town associations, or the organizations of migrants in destination countries, may be one vehicle to channel funds and expertise back home.

The evidence is not yet robust enough to support any definitive conclusion that managing the return of the skilled or utilizing the migrant associations are effective means of promoting development. Where this potential exists, it must be coordinated with both developed-country governmental and civil society specialist development organizations and agencies such as Médecins sans Frontières. In the discussions of brain drain, seldom is the

immigration to the developing world mentioned that can provide services in isolated areas to which locally-trained personnel are unwilling to go. The case of Cuban doctors in Africa and other parts of Latin America is a case in point.

Conclusions

This article has reviewed two approaches to migration and development. In the current debate, instrumentalist approaches to migration and development focusing on remittances, skilled migration and diasporas are in the ascendant. However, the point of view argued here is either that robust evidence to support the idea that migration can be man-

aged to promote development following such approaches is lacking or that our interpretations need to be modified. Further, it is argued that the integrative approach might provide a more solid basis upon which to base policy. Migration is an integral part of development. It is neither "good" nor "bad" but an inevitable consequence of the present economic, social and political transformations of our global world. Hence, migration must be seen within a matrix of broad demographic, socio-economic and political change in which it is more a consequence than a cause of such change.

The instrumentalist approaches do not seek to place migration within the economic and

political systems in which it is part. Hence, the primary focus must be on the specific development policies being implemented or proposed for implementation and what the implications of these are likely to be for migration rather than the other way round. Such an approach is more likely to provide a solid base on which to move forward than starting with migration and trying to see what that will do for development. The emphasis on the management of migration in the instrumentalist approach, in effect, puts the cart before the horse. Plan for migration rather than plan migration, with policies that are accommodationist and reactive rather than directive and proactive. ■