

Governance for local development in small urban centres: addressing the challenges and opportunities of increasing migration and mobility

INDIA

Background

Circular migration, much of it seasonal, is now an integral part of the livelihood strategies pursued by a large number of poor people living in agriculturally marginal areas. For individual households, it may be a precursor to more permanent out-migration, or an enduring phenomenon in its own right. While the drivers of migration are complex and diverse, important ones include the lack of sufficient local employment (both farm and non-farm), land fragmentation, and better opportunities in other locations. Common destinations include urban centres and industrial parks where migrants work as street vendors, porters, labourers, industrial workers, brick-kiln workers, security guards and domestic servants. While the poor and unskilled appear to circulate closer to home, more skilled workers go farther for higher wages. Earnings and savings from migration also show tremendous variation by occupation, wage rates, expenses at the destination, contracting arrangements and debts. Some households barely manage to survive while others accumulate wealth over time, but what is clear is that most would be worse off if they were depending solely on local employment.

But poor migrants face a hostile policy and institutional environment. This is largely because migration is not properly understood at the policy level: temporary movements for work and the contribution of remittances to household budgets tend to be underestimated in national statistics. This is one of the reasons for the invisibility of temporary migrants and the neglect of rural-urban links in planning. Added to this are problems of urban and middle class prejudice which view poor rural migrants as a burden on towns and cities, without acknowledging the contribution that they make to the economy. An implicit aim of many rural development and poverty reduction programmes has been to stem migration by creating more employment locally. However this goal has remained elusive, especially in remote and poorly governed areas from where migration levels are high. The stance against migration has imposed unnecessary hardships on poor migrants who are routinely harassed by officials.

The present study will focus on small towns and document how social and economic changes have affected mobility and local development, with special attention to transformations in livelihoods, the dynamics of poverty, inter and intra-household relations (with a focus on migrant status, wealth status, gender and generation) and access to assets, including natural resources. The study will enable us to identify the challenges facing local governance systems. It will also document innovative NGO, government and donor supported project initiatives and offer recommendations for policy.

The study will address the following questions

- What are the broad kinds of labour migration; internal and international, seasonal/circular and more permanent, in the study towns by class, caste, gender and age?
- What proportion of household income is provided by each type of migration and how does this vary by the categories above?
- Which groups of people have been able to accumulate assets and skills through migration and why? Conversely which groups have been excluded from these positive outcomes and why?
- How has policy affected mobility patterns?
- How has policy affected patterns of urbanisation, remittances and the investment of remittances?
- Has decentralisation improved accountability and good governance?
- What are the economic and non-economic drivers of different kinds of migration?
- What are the economic and non-economic impacts of migration?
- How do migrants protect their own interests in their home towns?
- What is the impact of migration on non-migrants in terms of governance, economic and non-economic impacts?
- How can policy support more positive kinds of migration? In particular how can migrants who want to invest money in economic activity in their source areas be supported in terms of access to technical support, institutions, infrastructure and resources?
- How can policy reduce the costs and vulnerabilities faced by the poor in different kinds of migration? In particular what kinds of social protection will be needed for the most vulnerable migrants and their families?

Study locations:

The study will be located in three States. Two small towns will be studied in each. These will be selected on the basis of information for one or two initial key informant interviews and the researchers' own knowledge of migration patterns. The three states are

- Rajasthan – An important sending and receiving State. High levels of outmigration in the tribal belt to neighbouring industrialised states. Government highly proactive and working on mobile PDS cards in urban areas which receive large numbers of intra and inter state migrants.
- Andhra Pradesh – High levels of outmigration from drought prone districts such as Mahbubnagar and Anantapur. High levels of in-migration in urban areas and peri-urban areas with brick kilns. Government working on education for migrants' children through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in brick kiln areas which receive migrants from Orissa, DFID livelihoods projects trying to limit distress migration
- Maharashtra – Major destination for inter-state migrants, several NGO initiatives on migrant support

Work plan

The study will be completed in four stages as outlined below:

1. The first step is to finalize small teams of researchers. The Rajasthan research team will comprise Priya Deshingkar and Sushil Kumar. The Maharashtra research team will comprise Priya Deshingkar and staff from Nirman and the Andhra Pradesh research team will comprise Priya Deshingkar and Pramod Sharma or Laxman Rao.
2. Reviews of published and unpublished literature, and relevant statistical data on national and sub-regional patterns of urbanization (with specific reference to small towns) migration and remittances, and related policies and initiatives
3. A review of the historical socio-economic development, local policies and initiatives for each small urban centre
4. Fieldwork in each small town with qualitative tools, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with different interest groups (eg traders' organisations, manufacturing industries, real estate agents, fruit and vegetable wholesalers), key informants (eg local government representatives, religious leaders, NGO representatives, migrant associations representatives), in-migrant, out-migrant and non-migrant households.

The work schedule will be as follows:

- August-September 2007: literature review, final selection of small towns and preparation of fieldwork
- October-November 2007?: fieldwork (this will depend on the migration season)
- May 2008: draft report
- June 2008: team workshop (international)
- December 2008: local validation meetings, finalisation of local reports, local dissemination
- March 2009: publication of working papers in English and dissemination on IIED's website