

Migration and Education Linkages: Lessons from India and Bangladesh

Overview

In development debates, education and migration are both seen as playing an integral role in development outcomes. Education is understood to have a positive impact on development, playing a transformative role in the lives of poor people by providing them with skills, autonomy, freedom and confidence. In the last decade, migration has been increasingly seen among scholars, donor governments and development organisations as holding potential benefits for development, as well as significant risks and costs. This briefing explores the linkages between migration and education in four villages in India and Bangladesh. Although migrant remittances were not widely invested in education in these contexts, education nonetheless helped shape the migration trajectories for local villagers.

Migration and education: an overview

Migration is increasingly viewed by development scholars as possessing significant development potential for sending countries — not least because migrant remittances, estimated by the World Bank to be US\$283 billion worldwide in 2008, have led to substantial investments in human and physical capital back home. In many cases, remittances have yielded increased investments in the education of migrants' children, as documented in studies in the Philippines (Yang 2004), El Salvador (Edwards and Ureta 2003), Guatemala (Adams 2006), Nepal (Thieme and Wyss 2005) and Pakistan (Mansuri 2007). However, there is a need to exercise caution about the positive correlation between remittances and education, as there is some evidence that in certain instances migration can actually create disincentives for education. For example, Mexican household surveys indicate that international migrants have a *negative* effect on the level of education of their children (McKenzie and Rapoport 2007). Mexican migrants' educational qualifications have little impact on the type of jobs most migrants can acquire in the US, and this may influence their ideas about whether educational investments are worthwhile, particularly if their children are also planning to migrate.

Thus, it would be fair to say that migrants' investments in their children's education vary according to different

social and economic contexts. A Migration DRC research project, conducted in 2006-2007 in four rural villages in India and Bangladesh with high rates of out-migration, sought to investigate migration–education linkages. The aim was not only to assess whether migrant remittances played a role in investments in children's education, but also to explore how education and migration decisions intersected. Given that many poor people in these villages are landless, or have access only to poor quality land, one would have expected to see growing investments in children's education among successful migrants, as a marker of social distinction. However, while education was typically seen as a symbol of upward social mobility in the Indian village sites, this was less so in the Bangladeshi villages, where material consumption was the dominant marker of increased social status.

Investing in education? Migration trends in rural India and Bangladesh

In both the Bangladeshi villages, Sadara and Achingaon, and the Indian study sites, Katona and Mahari, there was a complex interplay between migration trajectories and educational levels. Both Mahari in India and Achingaon in Bangladesh had a relatively poor quality of education locally — and consequently there were much lower literacy rates in these villages than in Katona and Sadara, where local schools were of a higher quality. In the less-literate villages, out-migration was more

rampant, with many people moving for seasonal and other forms of wage labour in order to help meet their basic needs. In Sadara and Katona, by contrast, there was a clear preference for white-collar professional employment, which was sometimes attained via migration to larger urban areas.

Educational level was not the only factor that mediated migration trajectories, however, as social status and prescriptive gender roles also influenced decisions to migrate. In Mahari, a mixed caste/religion village, migration patterns partly reflected social cleavages, with most migrants coming from marginalised households. In all of the villages, women were much less likely to migrate than men — and when women did move it was for shorter periods of time. In the Bangladeshi villages, the husband's role as breadwinner was seen to be particularly important, and men's migration for work was

often conceptualised as part of them fulfilling their obligation to provide for their families. Depending on their resources, connections and educational levels, men migrated seasonally for wage labour, moved in order to pursue professional or entrepreneurial goals, or — in the case of the Bangladeshi villages — migrated to more lucrative overseas labour markets. By contrast, female migrants from all four villages were usually employed as domestic workers. Some young female migrants in the Bangladeshi villages were employed in the garment export industry, while a small number of Bangladeshi women migrated overseas.

Significantly, the Migration DRC study found no strong links between migrant remittances and investments in education in any of the four villages. Remittances constituted an important element of the migration experience in all the villages, yet only in a few exceptional circumstances did people invest them in children's education. In the case of migrants who moved seasonally for agricultural or other waged labour, which was common in Mahari, remittances were relatively small and were usually spent on food or other goods needed for survival. Overseas Bangladeshi migrants from Achingaon, on the other hand, often used remittances to pay off debts incurred as part of the migration process, or invested earnings in physical capital back home, including land, houses or consumer items, such as televisions and mobile phones — all of which partly served as status symbols. Some educated professionals from Sadara and Katona did invest in their children's education, but they tended to be long-term migrants who moved with their families, rather than short-term labour migrants who sent remittances home.

Migration DRC study profile: village migration contexts

The study consisted of four village sites, Mahari and Katona in India's Jharkhand State, and Achingaon and Sadara in Bangladesh, all of which were relatively small in size and remote in location. The destinations for migrants from the four villages were diverse (see Table 1 below). International migration from the Bangladeshi villages, Achingaon and Sadara, was common, with a number of people moving to the Gulf countries or South-East Asia. Large numbers of people also migrated from the Bangladeshi villages to the capital, Dhaka, where they were employed in a range of sectors. In the Indian villages, nearly all of the out-migration was internal, with most people moving to Delhi or other distant cities or villages for agricultural or factory work and more recently for jobs in the export sector. However, these trends were unique to these villages, and can not be said to be indicative of country-wide migration patterns.

Table 1: Migration destinations from village sites

Note: 'M' denotes male, 'F' denotes female, 'T' denotes total; percentages in brackets

Destination	Achingaon			Sadara			Mahari			Katona		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Rural-urban	52 (44)	10 (83)	62 (48)	17 (18)	—	17 (18)	31 (32)	—	31 (28)	21 (33)	17 (40)	38 (36)
Rural-rural	—	—	—	—	—	—	45 (46)	6 (40)	51 (45)	30 (48)	5 (13)	35 (33)
Rural-capital city	37 (31)	—	37 (28)	49 (52)	1 (33)	50 (52)	21 (22)	9 (60)	30 (27)	12 (19)	19 (45)	31 (30)
Middle East	28 (24)	2 (17)	30 (23)	21 (22)	1 (33)	22 (23)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other countries	1 (1)	—	1 (1)	7 (8)	1 (33)	8 (9)	—	—	—	—	1 (3)	1 (1)
Total	118	12	130	94	3	97	97	15	112	63	42	105

Child migration for work or schooling

Although investing in education was not a major expenditure stream for most of the migrants, the availability of secondary school stipends and scholarships had a significant negative impact on the probability of migration in Bangladesh. In Sadara, for instance, a large number of children received stipends and



Male villagers from Mahari — who migrate seasonally to work in the sugarcane fields of Uttar Pradesh for 8-9 months of the year — are shown here planning their next migration journey. Photo © of Nitya Rao.

scholarships. These children were more likely to complete their secondary education and move only for professional training or jobs thereafter. On the other hand, both boys and girls in the other Bangladeshi village, Achingaon, moved for a range of informal, manual and manufacturing jobs by the age of 14 or 15. This is partly related to the low quality of schooling and the conditions for continuation of the scholarships — a minimum score of 50 per cent and attendance rate of 75 per cent. In Achingaon, poverty and poor-quality schooling made children lose interest in education and develop a preference for earning incomes instead, and a number of them migrated in order to pursue work, including a relatively small number of young girls who were employed in the garment export industry.

However, it was also the case that a number of children in both India and Bangladesh migrated in order to pursue formal education or vocational training. In the Indian villages, formal education for children was highly valued. Particularly in Mahari, where the local school was felt by many residents to be of poor quality, people called upon extended kin connections, as well as their own savings, in order to finance better education for their children. Though migrant remittances to the village were relatively small and had little impact on investments in education, many children from the village moved considerable distances to pursue their education. Approximately 25 children from the village migrated to attend Christian-run boarding schools, whilst 15 attended *madrasas*, sometimes staying with distant relatives.

In the Bangladeshi villages, migration itself was often viewed as an educational experience, providing new skills, ideas and experiences. Many families based educational choices on improving their networks and gaining skills that could facilitate overseas migration, rather than on issues of educational quality *per se*. For example, many families from Achingaon opted for *madrasa* education, though widely acknowledged as being of a lower quality than other available schooling, in part because it was viewed as a first step towards migration to the Gulf for boys, and as a prerequisite to marrying an overseas labour migrant for girls. Similarly, many young men from both Bangladeshi villages left school to work in welding shops in Dhaka, as the skills they provided were also viewed as a potential gateway to overseas migration networks.

Policy implications

The findings of the Migration DRC's study reveal quite heterogeneous patterns of migration as well as differing levels of educational attainment in the four village sites. Given the existence of other studies showing a positive correlation between migrant remittances and children's education, it would be unwise to dismiss this connection completely. However, the Migration DRC's study does demonstrate that the quality of local education varies in different contexts, and this has an impact on its value. In some cases, migration for work is a more pragmatic strategy for achieving social mobility than routes achievable through local education systems — and this is particularly so in instances where the local job market for educated people is limited. Thus, policy responses must be multi-dimensional, tackling issues both of educational quality and of migrant workers' rights. Potential policy options include:

- Programmes and policies to improve schooling in rural areas, including improving facilities, providing teacher training and ensuring funding for children from poor families. These measures will ensure that rural youth have a wider array of opportunities.
- Policies to promote social protection and rights for both internal and international migrants are also necessary to ensure migrants a better return from their migration. This includes better regulation of migrant recruitment agencies, ensuring 'decent work' for migrants as defined by the ILO and ensuring that migrant workers have access to basic rights and services.

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Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty

The Migration DRC aims to promote policy approaches that will help to maximise the potential benefits of migration for poor people, whilst minimising its risks and costs. Since 2003, the Migration DRC has undertaken a programme of research, capacity-building, training and promotion of dialogue to provide the strong evidential and conceptual bases needed for such policy approaches. This knowledge base has also been shared with poor migrants, with the aim of contributing both directly and indirectly to the elimination of poverty. The Migration DRC is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development, although the views expressed in this policy briefing do not express DFID's official policy.

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Key Migration DRC outputs

Hashim, I. (2005) 'Exploring the Linkages Between Children's Independent Migration and Education: Evidence from Ghana', Migration DRC Working Paper WP-T12, Brighton: Migration DRC, University of Sussex. Available at: <http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers/WP-T12.pdf>.