Long Distance Inter-state Migration of Unskilled Workers to Kerala, South India

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Centre for Socio-economic & Environmental Studies
Aim

• To understand the drivers of long distance inter-state migration within a large country like India.
Case Study Based on:

- Depth-interviews and FGDs with migrant workers and other key stakeholders
- Analysis of Secondary data and review of documents
- Inputs from earlier studies
About Kerala

- Located in the South-western tip of India
- Accommodates 2.7% of Indian population
- But only 1.2% of the land area
- Ranked 1 on HDI and rural SDI.
- Low levels of poverty - rural 9%; Urban 5%

Development experience often referred to as Kerala Model of Development
Migration in Kerala

- 2.2 million Keralites migrated to other countries and one million to other states
- Estimates of interstate migrants in Kerala - 1 - 2.5 million
- Inflow increased significantly in recent years
- Migration in 1980s and 1990s - SDIMs
- Now, LDIMs
- Most of the LDIMs are young
The Distance Factor

• May travel more distance than to cross country borders
  – Kerala – West Bengal: 2400 km; Assam : 3500 km
  – Kerala- Dubai/Abu Dhabi- 2800km
  – West Bengal/ Odisha to West Asia is also not much higher
  – Dhaka – Kolkata much lower

• Linguistic Distance- Dravidian vs. Indo Aryan

• Cultural distance is also high.
## Selected Indicators of Kerala and States of origin of LDIMs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
<th>Odisha</th>
<th>Assam</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HDI Rank (2006)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate (%)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio (2011)</td>
<td>1084</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>954</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious composition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate (2011)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy (2011)</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with toilets (%)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Push and Pull

• What compensates for the “friction of distance”?
• Push, Pull and the intervening variables
• Push and pull are complimentary – migration happens only if the reason to migrate is achieved by pull from an attractive location.
• Intervening variables: Distance and opportunities in other states
Push

• Lack of opportunities in place of origin
  – “I had nothing to do at home. Was not in a position to survive that way”.
  – “income was insufficient. We were taking loans, repaying it and again taking loan when I finally decided to move out”.
  – Limited land
  – Inadequate job opportunities in farming/agriculture labour
  – No year round employment
  – No opportunities for non-agriculture labour
  – All members in the family not required
  – Elder members take care of the work in the locality while the youngsters migrate. Or one young member stays back.
Push

- Low Wages - An Equally important factor
- Gets less than ₹150-200 in the place of origin
- But why Kerala?
- Kerala do not have million plus cities
Pull - Higher Wages

- “If I work here properly, I would earn around ₹ 15000 per month. Even in Kolkata I can earn only ₹ 6000. Regularity of work is also a problem there”
- “Here I earn ₹ 10000-15000 without much difference in working hours and cost of living”. “In villages also, we need at least ₹ 4000 for my family consisting of father, mother, myself, wife and one child”
- Higher wages in Kerala – Not a recent phenomenon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>142.63</td>
<td>159.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>284.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>345.14</td>
<td>335.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>133.69</td>
<td>173.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odisha</td>
<td>123.57</td>
<td>165.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>202.35</td>
<td>198.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>196.65</td>
<td>227.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>123.92</td>
<td>134.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-India</td>
<td>149.32</td>
<td>182.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pull: Opportunities for employment created by:

- Economic growth from late 1980s
  - Kerala: Per capita SDP-  84000 ($1400)
  - 34000 in Assam;  46000 in Odisha and  55000 in WB
  - Change in structure of the economy- Tertiary sector increased its share from 42% in 1987-88 to over 60%.
  - Construction sector also showed improvement
  - Agriculture at the receiving end
  - Created opportunities in the non-agriculture sector- An attraction for migrants who wanted to shift from agriculture
Pull: Opportunities for employment created by:

• Change in the age structure of population
  – Share of young workforce (20-34) – 50% in 1991 to 38% in 2011
  – Decline numerically also – 7.9 million to 7.7 million

• Out migration and Emigration
  – Created shortage of labour – unskilled and semi-skilled
  – Remittances pushed up the wages further
  – Increase in consumption and construction

• But Kerala has unemployment- More of educated
Pull: Fast Pace of Urbanisation

• No. 2 among major states in urbanisation—26% in 1991 to 48% in 2011.
• 31% in India; 14% in Assam; 17% in Odisha and 32% in WB
• Migrants work in rural areas also:
  – Different settlement pattern
  – Rural urban continuum
  – Physical infrastructure and social amenities in villages
  – Employment opportunities and better living conditions in rural areas
Network

• “When people having nothing to do in the villages, seeing a living example of a person in the village who has earned money by working in Kerala”
• “When we come, we know nothing. So we call up people already here and ask them to find job for us”
• “sometimes when I come back from my village, two or three villagers come with me”
• Bengal-Gujarat-Kerala-Gujarat
Other Drivers

• “We were told that we can trust employers in Kerala on wages” - Overall work environment
• “I am planning to bring more youngsters from my village who will work initially as helper but can later become mason like me” – Possibilities of skill upgradation
• “I had to leave my Village in Odisha because of some religious tension there”

• Difference between early LDIMs and recent LDIMs-
Other Drivers

• “Going to Dubai is very difficult as many certificates have to be produced. It will cost us ₹100000” ( $1700 approx)

• To and fro journey to Kochi costs only ₹1400- Wages for 3 days of work in Kerala.

• Entry barriers of potential destination countries facilitating inter-state long distance migration
Job Guarantee scheme and Welfare Fund

- **MGNREGS** - a policy response aimed at arresting migration flows –
  - Low MGNREGS wages (< 155) compared to Kerala wages
  - Much higher opportunities than the guaranteed 100 days

- **Migrant Welfare Fund of Kerala**
  - Did not create interest among migrants
  - Low awareness

- Both seems to be not affecting migrant flow.
The Case of SDIMs from Tamil Nadu

• Physical, linguistic and cultural distance is short
• Have been in Kerala for long
• Developed a strong network
• Yet many had returned when new LDIMs came in
• Reasons include
  – “can extract more labour from the new migrants”
  – “Need to pay less than what is offered to Tamil labour
  – Increase in employment opportunities and wages in Tamil Nadu
  – Welfare schemes at the state of origin
  – But there was pull from the state of origin also
THANK YOU