



Synthesis Report: Internal Migration and Urbanization

- Summary -

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Summary

There is a need for more effective assessments of the significance of internal migration for development and poverty alleviation. Conservative estimates indicate that there are at least 763 million internal migrants in the world, which is more than three times the number of international migrants. Based on research reports in specific countries, this synthesis report provides some examples of the benefits and challenges of internal migration, as well as policies that could maximize its positive impact on migrants' well-being and economic development.

The following are the main arguments of the report. (i) The drivers of internal and international migration are essentially the same, based on strategies in search of improved well-being. Internal and international migration contribute to poverty alleviation, although to various degrees. (ii) Despite the obvious similarities in causes of international and internal migration, the effects, costs, and policies related to them differ. The two phenomena should be studied separately, although without making such an absolute distinction between them as traditionally has been the case. (iii) The current emphasis on the benefits gained from international migration is not reason enough for ignoring the positive effects of internal migration. (iv) The negative perceptions of internal migration may partly be due to the difficulty in gathering and processing ample and useful statistics related to internal migration. These shortcomings must be addressed, while supporting the beneficial effects that internal migration has on poverty alleviation.

Changing realities, like globalization and economic clusters, are outdating earlier notions of migration based on the concept of "nations." Likewise, the rural-urban paradigm is becoming increasingly blurred through the creation of mega towns and phenomena like urban agriculture and out-localization of manufacturing to rural areas.

To identify and understand effective measures for addressing internal migration, it is essential to understand its heterogeneous nature and magnitude. Such an endeavor involves raising awareness and effectiveness at various levels of government, and engaging employers' organizations and labor unions, as well as civil society organizations. To monitor and evaluate the impacts of internal migration on human well-being, more data are needed. The methods currently used to collect and apply these data generally must be honed in a more effective manner. There is a great need for impartial and accurate examinations of the benefits and shortcomings related to internal migration, especially its importance for poverty alleviation and development.

People move with the intention to improve their own and their dependents' well-being. This is a pursuit to satisfy a wide range of needs, like access to health care, social security, food, water, healthy nutrition, leisure, education, decision making, freedom of speech and worship, and above all employment and sufficient income. A strict dichotomy between urban and rural areas cannot be maintained.

Examples from Bangladesh, China, and India indicate that governmental strategies to alleviate poverty need to place more emphasis on raising the skill levels of rural and urban populations. Investment in human capital in rural and urban areas is expected to increase general productivity and well-being. Studies of construction workers in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal emphasize the importance of internal migration

for the buildup of human capital. Migrants tend to focus on the education of their children, who generally receive better schooling than the children of non-migrants. Remittances from international and internal migrants generally raise the well-being of households. Indian data indicate that remittances from internal migrants are smaller than those of international migrants. But since internal migrants often come from poorer strata than international migrants, internal migrants' remittances often have a stronger impact on poverty alleviation, especially among the poorest of the poor.

In some countries, internal migration is significantly accelerated by environmental degradation. Viable solutions to environmental problems must be inclusive, considering rural and urban areas as an integrated entity where the movement of people seeking better opportunities must be harnessed and supported. Another phenomenon is that in some countries a large segment of internal migrants is constituted by internally displaced persons (IDPs), whose security, well-being, and social inclusion are essential for the establishment of sustainable peace and development. As the case of Colombia exemplifies, IDPs present various challenges to the recipient communities, but at the same time, if adequately supported, IDPs can make important contributions to their communities.

Like in all other aspects of human existence, gender roles are of great importance. Several examples illustrate that men and women migrate for different reasons and face different barriers to participating in the workforce and benefiting from social services and inclusion. At the same time, internal migration may contribute to increased gender equality, reinforced by new opportunities and an improved economy. This situation is demonstrated by studies of the garment industry in Bangladesh, which employs many women workers.

Generally, internal migration is connected to other phenomena, like overcrowding in urban areas, with consequences such as growing slums, shrinking natural resources, a growing informal sector, increasing pressure on social services, rising crime, and so forth. However, such shortcomings are countered by findings indicating that internal migration generates remittances that benefit rural and urban areas, and contributes to improved health care and education. Not the least, testimonies from internal migrants generally agree that the decision to migrate has enhanced their well-being.

Most internal migrants initially find employment in the informal sector, a segment of a nation's economy that often is perceived as a blind alley locking people into a culture of poverty. However, examples from Ghana, India, and Bangladesh indicate that even the informal sector tends to alleviate poverty and, if adequate and appropriate policies are adopted, it may become an engine for development.

Certain phases of a nation's development tend to be characterized by high levels of internal migration, as demonstrated by current trends in countries like China, India, and Bangladesh. In countries such as Kazakhstan and Ukraine, internal migration has been affected by the transition from a centralized, planned economy to a market economy. These nations are addressing antiquated laws and customs that hinder free movement of people from one area to another.

It cannot be denied that increased mobility causes predicaments and hazards, but comprehensive data collection and unbiased and multifaceted research may contribute to the realization that internal migration supports poverty alleviation and development. Labor migration is a response to spatial inequalities in economic opportunities. Instead of erecting barriers to movement, integrated regional,

rural, and urban development strategies should be promoted. Accordingly, accurate measurements of internal migration are recommended, to adhere to essential, standardized criteria. A more comprehensive implementation of such recommendations would contribute significantly to progress in internal migration research and demonstrate how internal migration can support poverty alleviation and general well-being.

Migration is an element of human existence that always will be with us. The phenomenon adapts to changing realities, such as globalization and the buildup of economic clusters. Despite fears of the growing impact of migration on destination communities, the challenges and benefits of migration should be assessed in a dispassionate manner, considering the wider human and economic development perspective.

