

Migration and Poverty

The challenge to policy makers is to facilitate the types of movement that are most likely to lead to an alleviation of poverty while protecting migrants from abuse and exploitation

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Migration and poverty: ambivalent relationships

Migration can both cause and be caused by poverty. Similarly, poverty can be alleviated as well as exacerbated by population movement. Easy generalizations are impossible to make but it is likely that the relative impact of migration on poverty, and of poverty on migration, varies by level of development of the area under consideration. In some parts of the world and under certain conditions, poverty may be a root cause of migration, whereas in other parts, under different conditions, the poor will be among the last to move. Equally, in some areas, migration may be an avenue out of poverty while in others it contributes to an extension of poverty.

The situation is made complex because both terms, “migration” and “poverty”, are difficult semantically: both are intuitively obvious but, in

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Table 1. Percentage of population below the national poverty line, 1990-2000

Country	Year	Percentage	Year	Percentage
South and South-West Asia:				
Bangladesh	1989	47.8	2000	34.0
India	1988	38.9	1999	26.1
Nepal	1985	41.4	1996	42.0
Pakistan	1991	22.1	1999	32.6
Sri Lanka	1991	33.0	1996	39.4
South-East Asia:				
Indonesia	1990	15.1	1999	18.2
Philippines	1991	45.3	2000	39.4
Thailand	1990	27.2	1999	15.9
East and North-East Asia:				
China	1990	9.4	1999	3.7
Mongolia	1992	17.0	1998	35.6
North and Central Asia:				
Armenia	1988	18.0	1999	55.0
Georgia	1988	16.0	1999	60.0
Kyrgyzstan	1988	37.0	1999	55.0
Tajikistan	1988	59.0	1999	83.0

Source: Extrapolated from graphs published in ESCAP/UNDP (2002). *ESCAP/UNDP Initiative for the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific. Millennium Development Goals: Lessons, Opportunities and Challenges* (Bangkok), which were based on ESCAP, *Growth with Equity: Policy Lessons from the Experiences of Selected Asian Countries* (ST/ESCAP/2007); ADB, Country papers prepared for the Inception Workshop on Building a Poverty Database; World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*; IMF, and World Bank, *Poverty Reduction, Growth and Debt Sustainability in Low-income CIS Countries*.

practice, have proved notoriously difficult to define and to measure accurately. In this paper, all forms of human population movement will be considered under “migration”, although “population mobility” might be a more appropriate term: that is, both internal and international migrations and both short-term circular movements as well as more permanent migration will be included in the discussion. Under “poverty”, a distinction between chronic, absolute poverty on the one hand and the more perceptual “relative deprivation” on the other will be drawn.

In the countries of Asia and the Pacific during the 1990s, poverty appears to have declined in Bangladesh, India, China, the Philippines and Thailand but increased in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and throughout the new republics of Central Asia (table 1). Little change in poverty levels in Indonesia and Nepal could be discerned over the same period. However, the figures for China, in particular,

Table 2. Official estimates of total number of foreign workers in selected Asian economies, 1996-2001

Country or area	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Taiwan Province of China		245 697	255 606	278 000	326 515	
Hong Kong, China ^a	164 300	171 000	180 600	193 700	216 790	
Japan ^b	610 000	630 000	660 000	670 000	710 000	
Republic of Korea ^b	210 494	245 399	157 689	217 384	285 506	330 194
Singapore				530 000	612 233	
Indonesia ^c	24 868	24 359	21 307	14 863	16 836	
Malaysia ^b	745 239	1 471 645	1 127 652	818 677	799 685	804 984
Philippines ^c	4 333	6 055	5 335	5 956		
Thailand ^b	1 033 863	1 125 780	1 103 546	1 089 656	1 102 612	
China ^c	80 000	82 000	83 000	85 000		60 000
Viet Nam ^c					30 000	

Source: Country papers presented at the Workshop on International Migration and Labour Market in Asia, Tokyo, Japan Institute of Labor and OECD, 4-5 February 2002.

^a Including an estimate of foreign domestic workers only; there are no stock figures for the highly skilled.

^b Including estimates of undocumented workers.

^c Estimate of foreign experts only, primarily professionals, the highly skilled and teachers.

need to be taken with a great deal of caution. It is known that the restructuring has brought about the loss of large numbers of jobs in the state sector, a trend that can only continue after that country's accession to the World Trade Organization. For example, some 26 million workers have been laid off from state enterprises since 1998 and the real rate of unemployment in 2002 may be in excess of 20 per cent in some sectors.¹

Uncertain though many of the estimates of unemployment and poverty may be, these pale in comparison with the difficulties inherent in the measurement of migration. Available data on international migration suggest that population movement is likely to have increased from all the economies under consideration (table 2). However, in several cases these figures either omit or severely underestimate the number of undocumented migrants. Any estimates of the numbers of undocumented migrants are likely to be suspect to some degree, simply by the nature of the phenomenon. These may be based on the number of apprehensions on attempted entry or on arrests in country, with assumptions made on the number of those eluding the official net. For some countries, the number of undocumented migrants is substantial. For example,

some 2.1 million illegal entrants to Malaysia were apprehended between 1992 and 2000 (Hugo, 2002:4) and estimates of the stock of undocumented migrants in that country before the 1997 financial crisis ranged up to 1.43 million (ILO, 1998). The vast majority of these migrants came from neighbouring Indonesia.

Even more difficult is the estimation of the number of internal migrants. Data for the number of movers in Thailand, where poverty levels declined markedly during the 1990s, even taking into account the impact of the 1997 financial crisis, suggest that migration might actually have slowed in the 1990s. Preliminary figures from the 2000 census indicate that the proportion of the population which had moved in the five years before the census was lower than in 1990, or 13.9 per cent in 2000 compared with 16.8 in 1990 (Thailand, 2002). To draw the conclusion that a relative reduction in mobility might be conducive to a reduction in poverty would be deceptive, if not just wrong. First, it is well recognized that the population census only captures a part of total population movement, omitting most circulation and short-term migration. Studies in Thailand, following the 1990 census, showed that a change in the reference period used to define a "migration" from the three months of the census to one month in the National Migration Survey of Thailand increased the numbers of migrants by over one fifth (Chamratrithirong and others, 1995). Second, and more critically, it is known that the number of poor in Thailand increased from 6.8 million at the beginning of 1997 to 7.9 million at the end of 1998. These figures represent an increase in the proportion of the total population classified as poor from 11.4 to 12.9 per cent (UNDP, 1999:129). Nevertheless, it would also be deceptive to conclude that the increase in poverty as a result of the financial crisis had caused the observed decline in five-year migration. A more likely hypothesis is that the crisis stimulated an increase in precisely the types of mobility that censuses and general surveys are least able to measure: that is, in short-term mobility as people moved to seek alternatives to loss of jobs in the urban sector or loss of markets in the rural sector. Mobility could, in those years, have increased rather than decreased and been more a survival strategy than a pathway towards better opportunity.

Thus, any attempt to draw clear relationships from existing data between volume and patterns of migration on the one hand, and poverty on the other, is likely to be problematic. This paper can only seek to raise in very broad relief the likely scenarios that are the result of poverty influencing migration and vice versa. Many of the points raised below are to be considered hypotheses requiring rigorous testing rather than statements of fact. Our empirical base and the ambivalent nature of the relationships between migration and poverty do not yet allow a more complete analysis.

Poverty as a root cause of migration

Migration is often seen simply as a flight from poverty: there are no opportunities available locally so people migrate in order to survive. Flight from a devastating famine would appear to be the classic example of this type of relationship, well illustrated by pictures in the media of emaciated people who have walked great distances to reach feeding stations run by international agencies and charities. Unequivocally, such cases exist but these are generally restricted to the poorest parts of the world, and primarily to parts of sub-Saharan Africa. In Asia, such cases, although still found in pockets across that vast area, have become less common given the rapid economic development over the last half of the twentieth century. Examples within living memory include the “Great Hunger” in China, 1959-1960, when millions moved in desperate attempts to find food, although millions more were prevented from moving by the authorities. The real impact of this last great famine in China on population migration has yet to be reported, although general discussions are included in Becker (1996) and Banister (1987). Other, more limited but more recent examples can be found in South Asia such as Orissa in India in 2001.

The survival migration of the poorest is likely to be mainly local, or regional at most, and primarily within country. In apparent contradiction to the logic of survival migration, the general finding of most studies of migration in non-disaster situations is that it is not the poorest who move but those with access to some resources, no matter how meagre these might appear. Migration always involves some costs of transportation and the abandonment of many of the few possessions the poor might have. The poorest of the poor cannot afford either risk or movement and the majority starves in situ. Even in the “Great Famine in Ireland 1845-1850”, it was rarely the poorest who emigrated to North America. The more able-bodied among them could perhaps reach the United Kingdom but many of the rest perished. Emigration rates from the hardest-hit counties were often significantly less than from those counties not so affected (see Miller, 1985).

In a different continent in a different era, the majority of those who fled from China to Hong Kong, China, after the victory of the communist forces in 1949 might have had a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” (the definition of a refugee) but over half claimed that they had moved for “economic reasons” (Hambro, 1955). They were not among the poorest in China at the time. This discussion is not to deny that poverty is an important cause of migration but to suggest that there are other factors at work. Except in particular areas and at particular times, it is not absolute poverty as such that is significant in accounting for migration but whether people feel that they are poor.

Migration as the result of poverty

Poverty as the root cause of migration and migration as the result of poverty might suggest the same thing but there are significant differences. Migration as the result of poverty shifts the focus to the issue of feeling poor: relative rather than absolute deprivation. Migration, either of outsiders into a community, or of natives going outside their community, establishes linkages between origins and destinations. These linkages spread knowledge about conditions in a wider world that can transform communities from conditions of “subsistence affluence” (Sahlins, 1974) to those of relative deprivation without any significant real change in the quantity of subsistence in the community. What changes is the less tangible quality of life when the number of potential migrants increases as a consequence of community members beginning to judge their own conditions relative to those of people living elsewhere. Thus, migration creates the conditions that lead to people feeling themselves to be poor, which in turn leads to further migration as they move in order to satisfy new-found aspirations. This process is perhaps at the root of most migration, giving the impression that poverty is the driving force but in reality is the product of a desire to better oneself against new standards rather than the result of absolute deprivation. Migration is thus both the creator and the product of poverty.

Most of those who can respond to the information coming into any community are the more innovative, the better-off and the better educated even if these qualities themselves are relative. In an isolated rural community, for example, the better educated might be those with just the most basic primary education among the many with no formal education at all. Migrants need not always, or even generally, respond to information coming into a community: they may be selected by labour recruiters or other representatives of an expansionary urban-based group. Again, recruiters are unlikely to select the weakest or poorest members of any group. Migrants are either a selected or self-selected group within any population. Thus, the general conclusion is that migrants from any community, and particularly the initial migrants, are among the most innovative and dynamic members of that community (see Skeldon, 1990). Whether their loss can contribute to poverty creation will be considered in a later section.

Migration as a cause of poverty

Nevertheless, there are ways in which migration can lead directly to an increase in the number of absolute poor. The clearest way is through forced relocation without adequate planning and support. In many cases, the forced

relocation is essentially the product of development, mainly through the creation of lakes and reservoirs that are the result of the construction of dams, although displacement for roads and urban expansion is also important. For example, worldwide, it is estimated that between 90 and 100 million people were involuntarily displaced by infrastructural development projects during the last decade of the twentieth century (Cernea and McDowell, 2000:2). In India alone, some 20 million people are estimated to have been displaced over about 40 years, the majority of whom became impoverished (Cernea, 2000:12) while in China over a similar period, well over 30 million were displaced (Meikle and Zhu, 2000:128). The Three Gorges Project, currently under construction on the Yangtze, is estimated to displace well over a million people.

Perhaps the key difference separating forced population displacement due to development policy from other types of migration is that the numbers moving and the timing of the movements are known. Thus, if poverty is indeed the result of the forced migration it is the fault of inadequate planning rather than of the movement itself. There is no necessary reason that the migration must lead to an extension of poverty although this often appears to be the result. There can be little excuse for a lack of adequate reconstruction and this particular relationship between migration and poverty appears to be one that is ideally suited to effective policy intervention.

A more difficult dimension of migration leading to an extension of poverty relates to the loss of innovative and educated community members: in essence, a “brain drain” whether at national or village levels. It has proven singularly difficult to demonstrate empirically a fall in macrolevel economic indicators in the face of a marked exodus of the educated at the national level. Equally, the evidence for a decline in either agricultural production or productivity upon rural-to-urban migration at the village level is elusive. Much of the difficulty is derived from the fact that much of the migration may be circular in nature. Both the educated at the national level, and workers moving from village to town, either return at a later stage, or move to extend the resource base of their families by incorporating new resources elsewhere.

The so-called “brain drain” argument is difficult to sustain at the macrolevel in East Asia. Tens of thousands of students left Japan; the Republic of Korea; Taiwan Province of China; and Hong Kong, China for study overseas from the 1960s at precisely the time that these economies began to grow rapidly (Skeldon, 1997a:108-115). It is difficult to see that these economies could have grown even faster than they did if the students had stayed home. Over time, increasing numbers returned and there clearly was a “brain gain” rather than a brain drain in these economies. This scenario, however, need not

necessarily apply more generally. The loss of relatively small numbers of the educated from marginal economies such as many in sub-Saharan Africa may indeed contribute to slower or even declining growth. Ghana, for example, has lost 60 per cent of the doctors trained in the 1980s and a total of about 60,000 highly skilled workers are reputed to have fled African economies during the last half of the 1980s (Harris, 2002:87). The loss of large numbers of Russian technicians may also be a significant factor in the rising poverty observed in the Central Asian republics. While the assessment of the impact of the loss of the highly educated and skilled needs to be carried out on a region-by-region basis, a critical factor will always be whether there is something for the educated to return to in their economies of origin. Where there is little to return to, a brain drain is more likely to occur, but where origin economies are more dynamic, a brain gain may be the result.

At the local level, assessments of the impact of outmigration on production are equally problematic although few studies support the idea that there is a negative impact on farm production (Simmons, 1984:171). An assessment in China has shown that the loss of labour due to outmigration can have a negative impact on income from cropping but has no impact on crop yields (de Brauw and others, 2001). Where the impacts become intense in marginal areas and migration develops to such an extent that the reproductive capacity of a village is eroded, leading to ageing and declining populations, then pockets of deprivation may emerge even in the most developed societies. For example, the severely depopulating areas (*kaso*) in Japan present a challenge to policy makers to supply adequate services to ageing populations. Agricultural income in these areas was 70 per cent of the national average in the mid-1990s and they covered almost half of the total land area of the country but represented only 6.3 per cent of the total population (Skeldon, 2001:46). In poorer economies, those left behind may be those most likely to experience “chronic poverty” (Kothari, 2002) with poverty thus a residual of migration.

Finally, in this section, the question is whether migration concentrates the poor in destination areas, and primarily in the largest metropolitan centres of the developing world. Even if it is not the poorest who migrate from the villages, relative to city people in destination areas they are often poor and their concentration may be a drag on development. Here again, the evidence to support the apparent logic of this statement is far from conclusive. There is little evidence to suggest that migrants are overrepresented among the urban poor, with migrants tending to have higher labour force participation rates than native-born in cities in the developing world. This statement should certainly not imply that the living conditions of all migrants in towns are satisfactory or

that they do not appear among the ranks of the urban poor. Many of the occupations filled by migrants, and particularly those undertaken by poorly educated migrant women, are badly paid, insecure and often require work under appalling conditions. However, given that migration is generally not the principal component of urban growth in the developing world (natural increase is usually more important), and that migrants have higher rates of employment than the local urban-born, the principal causes of urban poverty are to be found in the metropolitan regions themselves rather than in migration to them.

Poverty alleviated by migration

Implicit in much of the discussion thus far has been an underlying assumption that the relationship between migration and poverty should in some way be negative: either that migration was the result of deprivation or that migration leads to the impoverishment of certain areas. While these statements cannot be discounted in every case, there is a lack of empirical data to support them as general conclusions. The weight of the evidence provides support for a very different conclusion: that the movement of population can be a significant factor for the alleviation of poverty. The principal reason lies in the nature of the migration process itself. Migrants rarely move simply from A to B but their movement is a complex system of circulation between two, or among several, destinations. Also, migrants are rarely individuals operating in a social vacuum but are meshed into family, household and community networks. Migrants, rather than individual income maximizers, can be conceptualized as existing within a communal risk-minimizing strategy. Such an interpretation falls within the so-called “new home economics” approach to theories of migration (see, for example, Massey and others, 1993; Stark, 1991).

Migration can therefore be seen as a system linking origins and destinations in which flow not just people, but also money and goods. The incorporation of new destinations broadens the resource base of a household, perhaps allowing a more optimal deployment of labour as those underemployed during the slack part of the agricultural cycle can find work on a plantation or in town. Gender differences can become important. In areas where males undertake most of the agricultural work, as in Latin America, for example, women can be released from rural households to access off-farm activities in town, and vice versa in areas where women dominate labour input into agriculture as in much of Africa. The diversification of resource base, labour input and gender role can all act to alleviate poverty where households are dependent upon a single resource at one location. In such diversification,

however, there is always the possibility of the exploitation of migrants at destinations and the social disruption that can ensue upon separation of family members. These negative consequences need to be balanced against possible improvement in status of migrants who may acquire skills or pursue education at destinations. Here, in particular, there appear significant gender issues as women, by absenting themselves even temporarily from patriarchal structures, can improve their status (Hondagneu-Sotelo,1994).Temporary absences of men, by thrusting the women left behind into positions of responsibility to run the households, can also elevate their status and, indirectly or directly, reduce the incidence of deprivation.

Where the migration is essentially circular in nature, it is likely to be a support for the communities of origin but when migrants begin to spend longer away from home, over the long term, the outmigration may eventually act to undermine the demographic and economic viability of the community. The resultant transformation need not necessarily imply an extension of poverty as more capital-intensive forms of economy may emerge. Even when migrants spend longer at destinations, they rarely cut off relations with their areas of origin: they go back at regular intervals and they send goods and money to relatives in their home country, village or town which introduces the critical issue of remittances.

Like so many components of migration and poverty, remittances are notoriously difficult to measure accurately. Unless specialized surveys are undertaken, estimates of the amounts of money and goods remitted by internal migrants within a country are impossible to make. While there are estimates of the volume of flows remitted by international migrants, it is recognized that these capture only those that flow through official channels: much is transmitted through informal channels through relatives or when the migrants return. What is indisputable is that the volume and importance of these flows are vast. In 1990, it was estimated that the observable volume of global remittances was \$US 71.1 billion per annum, making it second only to oil in terms of value in international trade (Russell, 1992). Considering the global flows from developed to less developed countries only, the volume probably doubled from about \$US30 billion in the late 1980s to more than \$US60 billion a decade later (Martin and Widgren, 2002).

In Asia, the Philippines is the country of emigration par excellence with some 7 million Filipinos from a resident population of 78.7 million in mid-1992 living or working overseas. In 2000 alone, more than 800,000 workers were deployed overseas with more than \$US6 billion in foreign

exchange remitted back to the Philippines (Go, 2002). Remittances from overseas workers are also important for many other labour exporters such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. For the Pakistan of the mid-1980s, they represented about 9 per cent of GDP and were “an important factor in allowing Pakistan to sustain the highest growth on the South Asian subcontinent through most of the 1970s and 1980s” (Addleton, 1992:123). In the state of Kerala in the 1990s, remittances accounted for 21 per cent of state income (Kannan and Hari, 2002:200). Even Viet Nam, a relatively recent entrant into regional and global labour markets, had around 300,000 workers overseas in 2000, who were remitting some \$US 1.25 billion annually (Nguyen, 2002).

Although the important dimension of foreign exchange earnings is missing in remittances from internal migrants, these, too, are significant for communities of origin. The data from the National Migration Survey of Thailand showed that over one quarter of outmigrants had sent money or goods back to their households of origin during the 12 months prior to the survey (Osaki, 2002). The data also showed that the proportion remitting tended to increase with time spent away from home and that one third of those who had been away for more than 10 years were still sending money back home. Given that the number of internal migrants in any country vastly exceeds any numbers going overseas, the volume of money sent back to the rural sector from cities in the developing world is likely to be significant, even if amounts sent by overseas migrants are likely to be greater on a per capita basis simply because, on average, they earn more. In China, studies suggest that households that send out internal migrants are able to increase the per capita income of those left behind by between 14 and 30 per cent (de Brauw and others, 2001:20).

More important than the actual amounts, however, are the uses to which the monies are put and the impact that the remittances are likely to have on the areas of origin of migration. Perhaps *the* critical issue in the migration and poverty equation is whether remittances can help to alleviate poverty. One perspective is that remittances tend to be used for conspicuous consumption rather than investment: for house construction or the sponsoring of weddings, and the like, rather than improvements that are likely to lead to increasing agricultural productivity. A common use of remittances, nevertheless, is also to pay for the education of the next generation and that does appear to be a clear investment strategy.

However, a clear distinction between investment and consumption may be difficult to maintain in the context of the use of remittances. Expenditure on

house construction, for example, can stimulate local building enterprise, thus generating employment and trade in materials. Even something as apparent an example of conspicuous consumption as wedding feasts generates demand for local foods, supports local musicians, and so on. Thus, there are important indirect effects of remittance money in the villages. The general conclusion from studies of the use of remittances is that migrants tend to use their wealth wisely and the benefits appear to more than counterbalance costs (see, for example, Gunatilleke, 1986).

More difficult to assess is the impact of remittances on inequality. Given that those who move tend to be from the wealthier families in any community, the remittances logically flow back to those families, exacerbating or at least reinforcing existing inequalities. Poverty can be measured by the proportion of wealth controlled by the various quintiles in any population and if the upper 20 per cent are increasing their “share” as a result of migration, and the lowest fifth decreasing their share, it could be argued that migration was indeed contributing to the intensification of poverty in a society. Yet again, the evidence is contradictory. In Pakistan, although inequalities increased between migrant and non-migrant households, the distribution of remittances appears to have spread benefits to a greater range of groups and areas that could effectively “undermine the centre” of traditional power (Addleton, 1992). Migration flows do tend to be generated out of specific “niches” or areas of origin. Hence, certain microregions may benefit relative to those areas that send relatively few migrants, increasing regional as well as social inequalities (Seddon and others, 2002). Nevertheless, data from Thailand show that though the per capita amount of remittances to poor households may be much less than to wealthier families, they have a much greater relative impact and help to alleviate poverty (Osaki, 2002). Thus, migration may help to reduce absolute poverty among some while simultaneously acting to increase feelings of relative deprivation among others. Overall, people may be better fed as a result of migration but the feelings of deprivation may generate resentment. Migration has been shown to be a significant component in the development of particular social and revolutionary movements, a theme that remains under-researched (Skeldon, 1987). The results of those movements have led in the past to destruction that has extended poverty on a massive scale.

The final issue related to migration as a factor in the alleviation of poverty, and one that returns the debate to the macrolevel, emerges from the nature of the migrants arriving at destinations, both domestic and international. It has been emphasized that migrants tend to be among the more innovative and better-educated members of any population. A small number of migrants are traders and entrepreneurs who are the brokers of economic exchange

generating not only wealth for themselves but employment for locals at origins and destinations that can help to generate prosperity. Entrepreneurship, often associated with particular ethnic groups, the Chinese or the Jews, for example, is perhaps more a function of situations and linkages that are the result of migration than of particular ethnic characteristics. Entrepreneurs are the minority among the migrants, the “essential outsiders” (Chirot and Reid, 1997) who generate capital accumulation. Migration, both internal and international, is thus an integral part of the whole process of economic development which must underlie any attempt to alleviate poverty.

Conclusion: policy dilemmas

This discussion should have revealed the complexity of the relationship between migration and poverty. In most areas migration appears, on balance, to bring an improved probability of survival and often an alleviation of poverty. At the same time, exploitation and disruption can be an integral part of the transformations associated with the population movement. Amid the uncertainty of outcome, several policy-relevant propositions can be advanced. First, constant attention needs to be directed towards the protection of migrants, both male and female. Second, migration is not a new phenomenon even if there are certain novel aspects about the current situation: it has characterized all societies at all times. Thus, migration is not suddenly going to stop and cease being a characteristic. Governments need to learn to plan for it and attempts to control population movements within countries have invariably met with a distinct lack of success over anything but the immediate short term. Attempts to control movements across international borders have met with greater success but at huge cost both financially and often socially and politically. The issues of border control remain beyond the limits of this paper but policy makers need to address whether the restriction of movement is in the best interests of their own population as well as the populations of origin areas.

The weight of the evidence is that mobility enhances economic growth and improves the lot of most, but not all, of the population. Generally, spatially static populations are likely to be economically stagnant populations. A paper presented by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the Earth Summit 2002 argued that if the European Union, Canada, Japan and the United States allowed migrants to make up just 4 per cent of their labour force, the returns to origin areas could be in the region of \$US 160-200 billion a year, a sum far greater than any potential debt relief (cited in *The Guardian*, 26 August 2002). Migration may not be able to eradicate all types of poverty, and may even exacerbate some, but the alternative of

attempting to limit or restrict migration is likely to be much less productive. The words of John Kenneth Galbraith appear to capture the essence of the whole relationship:

Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps to break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good? (cited in Harris, 2002:119)

However, it is important to recognize that migration can involve costs, economic and social, as well as benefits. The challenge to policy makers is to facilitate the types of movement that are most likely to lead to an alleviation of poverty while protecting migrants from abuse and exploitation. This paper has attempted to draw attention to the range of possible outcomes. It is likely that the relationship between migration and poverty will be different in the dynamic economies of East Asia, for example, than in the more stagnant economies of sub-Saharan Africa. Within regions and within countries, there will also be variations. There can be no universal policy recommendation just as there is no single and simple interrelationship between migration and poverty. While accepting a variety of outcomes, this writer stands by a generalization made earlier in the pages of this journal that “policies that accept the wider mobility of the population are likely to accord with policies that will enhance the well-being of greater numbers of people” (Skeldon, 1997b:3). More recent work of others appears to advocate similar approaches (see, for example, de Haan, 2002 and Kothari, 2002), yet the immediate challenge remains the need to incorporate an appreciation of the potentially positive role of migration in poverty reduction programmes.

Endnote

1. Data cited in *Migration News*, May and July issues, 2002.

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