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THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Demystifying the link between migration and development informs policy

Migratory flows are shaped by the type of development path

Few issues attract as much attention in today's international and domestic policy debates as migration, particularly international migration. In particular, there is increasing concern over the large numbers of international migrants and refugees. One heated debate concerns whether migration flows from origin countries will diminish as these countries develop. Most people would believe this to be the case; if true, it would be straightforward for high-income countries to contribute to reducing migratory flows through official development assistance.

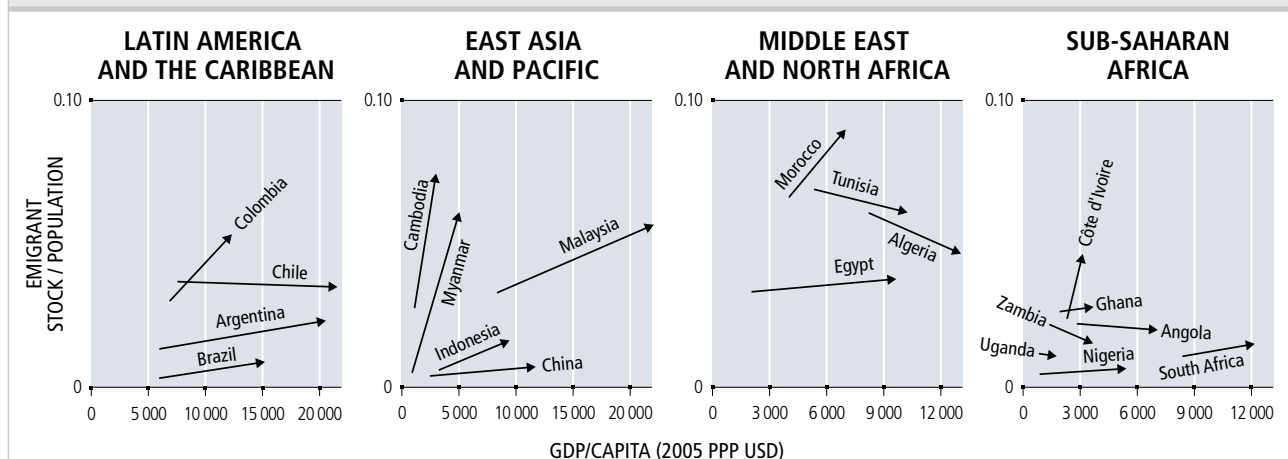
However, two recent papers (Clemens, 2014; Clemens and Postel, 2018) find that economic development in low-income countries typically increases emigration, and that the capacity of development assistance to deter migration is small at best. Only when countries reach upper-middle-income status does emigration tend to decline. Indeed, the notion that better economic opportunities at home will reduce the incentive to migrate ignores what happens when development occurs:

KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Development is more likely to increase rather than reduce emigration from countries at lower levels of income, but this is not always the case.
- ▶ Internal and international emigration are linked and their levels and patterns will depend on the development path followed by countries.
- ▶ A territorial development approach that focuses on developing small cities and towns and their links to rural areas makes rural migration a choice, not a necessity.

aspirations change, education levels improve, and financial constraints become less binding, making migration more affordable. The net impact of these factors on emigration will vary substantially by country, as seen in Figure 1, which shows the impact of growing gross domestic product (GDP) per capita

FIGURE 1. Change in emigrant stock relative to national population as GDP per capita increases – evolution from 1990 to 2013



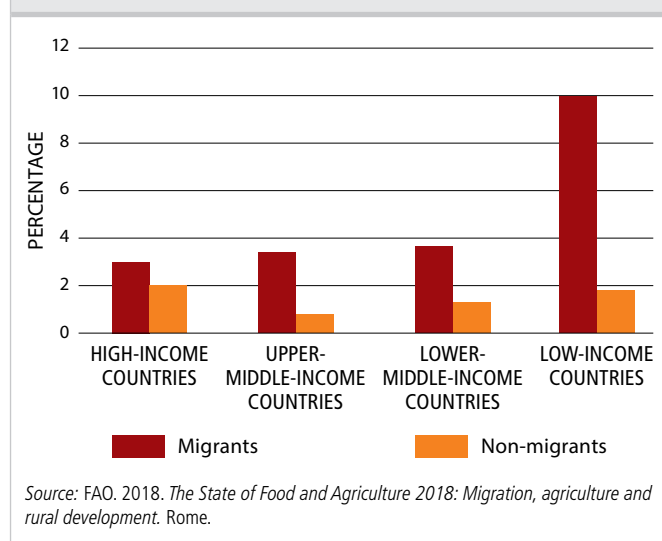
Source: Gross domestic product per capita (GDP/capita) from World Development Indicators (World Bank) and emigrant stock from UN Population Division.

on emigrant stock for countries with comparable advances in development. For some countries a large improvement in living standards leads to a minimal increase in emigration (or even a decrease, as for Chile, Algeria, Tunisia), while for others showing similar improvement (such as Colombia or Morocco) the increase is substantial. As these impacts are clearly by-products of development policy (or lack thereof), understanding them is critical to maximizing the benefits of migration.

Internal and international migration are closely interlinked

One factor closely associated with the path of development is the level and pattern of internal mobility, as it captures how an economy is transforming. A recent analysis for internal migration shows that migrants often move in several steps (“step-wise migration”): in a sample of 31 countries, at least 41 percent of males and 36 percent of females who move once will move a second time or more (Cattaneo and Robinson, forthcoming). Furthermore, there is a strong association between internal and international migration that must be kept in mind. Based on data from 138 countries from a Gallup World Poll, Figure 2 presents the share of individuals who

FIGURE 2. Share of internal migrants and non-migrants planning to migrate internationally in the following 12 months by country income group, 2013



plan to migrate internationally within the next 12 months among those who have already undertaken internal migration within the last five years (referred to as migrants), and those who have not (non-migrants). The share is clearly higher for internal migrants than for non-migrants, particularly in low-income countries.

Furthermore, for low-income countries, the share of internal migrants planning to migrate internationally within the following 12 months is higher in urban than in rural areas. Rural–urban gaps in terms of income and access to services, and the easier access encountered in urban areas to information about opportunities, may lead potential migrants in rural areas to move first to an urban centre and then to plan a move abroad. Social ties to places of origin may also weaken after an initial migration, therefore making it easier to decide to migrate a second time, whether internally or internationally.

Promoting development in and around rural areas must be a pillar of development strategies

Low-income countries undergo the above changes while also facing the unavoidable process of structural transformation, in which labour moves out of agriculture into more productive sectors. The challenge here for policy-makers is to make rural migration a choice and not a necessity. This requires providing attractive alternative opportunities for prospective rural migrants where they reside. In addition, migration should be facilitated for those individuals who still want to take advantage of the opportunities that it offers.

A territorial development approach that focuses on rural–urban linkages, for example, can have an impact on the speed and magnitude of emigration. Indeed, improving basic infrastructure and services in small cities, towns and surrounding rural areas, and creating better links between them, are key steps in ensuring a more inclusive structural transformation. Generating employment in the non-farm economy and providing services (such as education, health, communication and leisure facilities) in small cities and towns – which are more evenly distributed over a territory and in proximity to rural areas – can reduce rates of out-migration to overburdened larger cities, and consequently reduce rates of international out-migration as well. More research is needed, however, to assess how and where a territorial development approach as described here may or may not work to make rural migration a choice.

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