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Investing in rural people

Migration and transformative pathways

A rural perspective

by
David Suttie
IFAD

Rosemary Vargas-Lundius

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Abstract

Migration is a natural consequence of structural and rural transformation processes that accompany development. As agriculture and rural sectors transform, sectoral growth linkages spur the emergence and growth of urban industrial and service sectors, which in turn pull workers from rural sectors to urban areas. At the rural household level, temporary, seasonal and permanent migration have been shown to have significant benefits on income diversification, resilience and productivity-enhancing investments. As such, migration is a key contributor to – and consequence of – rural and structural transformation. At the same time, the migration process is all too often associated with multiple hardships, risks and dangers, something which is exacerbated by the generally negative view of governments towards migration, which has frequently translated into policies constraining migrants and their families.

A balanced, integrated view of rural transformation, migration, urbanization and development is needed. This implies increased support to often neglected rural sectors – in particular smallholder farming – that recognizes their role in sustainable urbanization, as well as enabling policies that foster safe and livelihood-enhancing migration.

Introduction

Background and objectives

Too often development debates have separated rural and urban agendas and priorities, frequently viewing rural and urban as being at the opposite ends of a spectrum. This traditional view does not allow a broad understanding of the nature and relationships between areas and people across the rural-urban continuum. Nor does it reflect the changing landscape – the blurring of the divide between rural and urban spaces – or the increasing interactions and interdependencies between spatially distinct areas in terms of goods, information, people, environmental services and more. As the expansion of city spaces and the growth of peri-rural areas and connecting towns increasingly make the traditional rural-urban dichotomy obsolete, a more nuanced understanding of the diversities that exist across different spaces is called for. So too is greater attention to important interdependencies between different spatial entities – in addition to the need for balanced and integrated spatial planning and policies – in order to achieve development that is sustainable and inclusive.

With this background in mind, the plight of migrants moving between different elements on the rural-urban continuum will be important to consider. This will be relevant both for the way these movements are shaping different transformations under way, as well as how different rural transformations are influencing these movements. Their impacts on the development landscape in larger towns and cities will also be important to consider. Given that three quarters of the world's migrants move within their own countries (UNDESA 2013), it is important that due attention is paid to these internal movements – at the same time as to the more politically charged issues relating to international migration – and to how they are shaping and are shaped by rural transformative processes. Crucially, conservative estimates place the number of internal migrants globally at approximately 763 million people, underlining the significance of movement within countries in shaping the demographic context (UNDESA 2013).

The world is already witnessing the effects of phenomena such as climate change and conflict on different patterns of migration. These effects are spreading throughout many developing regions and subregions, swelling the number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people in excess of 50 million globally (UNHCR 2014). It is clear that a better understanding of trends, implications and suitable responses to mobility are required. While acknowledging these wider trends, the focus of this paper shall be specifically on migration out of rural areas, how this interacts with transformative economic processes, and the impacts on rural livelihoods.

The paper shall examine the often-prevailing perspective that sees rural outmigration as a failure of rural development and a problem for urban development. It will analyse evidence and perspectives on the role of migration in promoting rural livelihoods and how this relates to an urbanizing world. More specifically, this paper shall discuss the role that migration out of rural areas can be expected to play in development and transformative processes. Against a broad global background where global, regional and national economies are more integrated than ever before, facilitating an unprecedented mobility of goods, capital and labour, the paper will focus on the rural-urban dynamics of migration and how these play into rural and structural transformation processes. While acknowledging that vast movements of people as a result of various conflicts and associated refugee crises are vital contemporary issues, they fall outside the immediate remit of the analysis, which is focused around migration and different dimensions of economic transformation.

After providing a definition of rural transformation, the paper shall set out some of the key trends influencing what is, in many cases, a changing and blurring rural-urban landscape. The third section will describe the role that migration plays under different transformative economic dynamics, while the fourth section shall outline some expected impacts on rural livelihoods. Lastly, the policy implications will be discussed.

Defining rural transformation

To date, few attempts have been made in the development literature to define the term 'rural transformation'. For the purposes of this paper, the rural transformation referred to is envisaged as an aspirational one, where rural areas and the lives of the people who live there are transformed by enhanced livelihood opportunities. These opportunities should be widely available to all society members, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or age. Resulting enhanced livelihoods must satisfy the sustainability criteria – that is, they should demonstrate the ability to "cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Ashley and Carney 1999).

Rural transformation is thus defined herein as a societal-wide change involving enhanced resilience, productivity, profitability and sustainability of rural activities. At its centre is the movement of rural women and men out of poverty through:

- diversification of the rural economy
- shift to commercial production and trading with other towns, cities and internationally
- greater technological and innovative production methods
- decent employment opportunities for young people transitioning from education to work
- sustainable use of natural resources and
- greater participation of rural women and men in decision-making and planning processes.

Migration data and misconceptions

This paper will outline some trends of livelihood impacts of different forms of outmigration from areas approaching the rural side of the spatial continuum, based upon evidence detailed in the literature. It should be noted, however, that data scarcity on migration is problematic, particularly in the case of internal migration. The inability of official statistics

to capture migration patterns is in part due to their focus on formal economic activities and occupations. Very few surveys and censuses record seasonal work and mobility, despite the fact that there is increased recognition – and indeed a growing body of relevant microlevel studies – of the importance of seasonal mobility and informal employment for the livelihoods of rural people.

Moreover, even where quality data are available, they have often not been used properly in public debates and discourses. It is especially rare that policymakers have used migration data to challenge faulty assumptions or prejudices; more often, data have been levied to justify or harden existing policy measures that aim to deter migration (Deshingkar et al. 2012). This tendency has been particularly pronounced in discussions surrounding vulnerable or politically unpopular groups, especially migrants working in informal positions (Landau 2014).

The unfortunate consequence of these realities has been the tendency to exaggerate the negative aspects of migration. Indeed, the association of migration with frequently seen images of large numbers of refugees fleeing war-torn areas, often with tragic consequences, obscures a more complicated reality. Another common misconception relates to the extent to which rural-urban migration contributes to urban poverty and the unsustainable growth of cities. The extent to which such migration is contributing to the expansion of cities is likely far less significant than commonly assumed; UN-Habitat (2013) report that 60 per cent of the growth in urban populations is due to natural increases, with another 20 per cent a result of the reclassification of rural settlements into urban spaces. This suggests that any perceived urban overcrowding may not be attributable, in a major sense at least, to migration.

Nonetheless, the growth of urban areas and the consequent expansion of slums are often cited as reasons to curb rural to urban migration. In some cases, the blaming of migrants for the failure of urban officials to plan and implement forward-looking urban development measures has led to the harassment and forced evictions.[1] The tendency in political discussions and planning processes to exaggerate the negative effects of migration is at odds with the findings in much of the migration-related literature. Awumbila, Owusu and Teye (2014), for instance, find that, despite often living in harsh conditions, 88 per cent of migrants surveyed in their study in Ghana assessed their well-being to have improved since migrating. In Brazil, Ferré (2011) finds that internal migration reduced poverty and increased access to services and infrastructure. This finding applied both to migrants and members of the host community. Similarly, Oucho, Oucho and Ochieng' (2014) report that, despite many challenges and risks, migrants overall fare better in their urban destinations in western Kenya.

At the same time, this should not obscure the reality that migrants face hardships and specific risks. It is undeniable that many end up in low-paid jobs, if not exploitative working arrangements. Even migrants who are relatively well educated often have little choice but to accept unskilled work. Further, migrants suffer from many governments' struggles to maintain services and infrastructure. Expensive public transport systems hinder migrants' mobility, and many are forced to live in poor housing in the face of escalating living costs. Unfortunately, it is migrant women and girls who often face the most difficulties: living in poor urban neighbourhoods, they often have to compensate for a lack of services and infrastructure by working longer hours, and caring for children who are frequently ill as a result of inadequate water and sanitation (FAO, IFAD and ILO 2010). The need is for a more nuanced debate on the interconnections between migration, poverty and urbanization, recognizing differential impacts and the role of different policies in shaping the experience of migrants.

1. Awumbila, Owusu and Teye (2014) cite examples of forced evictions of migrants in Harare, Zimbabwe, and Dhaka, Bangladesh (2007) as responses to the failures of city authorities, similar to experiences revealed by their research in Ghana, where migrants were also repeatedly harassed by city authorities.

Realistically, migration comprises different groups of people who move to different locations for varying lengths of time – most frequently within their own country or subregion – in order to support and enhance their livelihoods. Frequently, this plays a key role in supporting rural livelihoods and communities. For example, USAID (2015) find that migration is a cornerstone of upward economic mobility, with labour migration playing a key role in building the diversification and resilience of rural households. Thus far, attempts to recognize and address this complicated reality at policy level have been insufficient. This is reflected in the frequency of policies to curtail migration. For instance, the proportion of low- and middle-income countries with policies to stem migration rose from 51 per cent in 1996 to 73 per cent in 2005 (IIED 2010). There is a critical need for amplified and concerted efforts to present a more realistic picture of the role of migration, so that the positive role it plays in adaptation to change and in supporting livelihoods – especially rural ones – is finally acknowledged.

Context, trends and issues

Increasing proportions of people living in cities

It has been well documented that the proportion of people living in larger towns and cities is increasing worldwide, in many cases at unprecedented rates, and particularly so in many developing and emerging regions and countries. Today, around 3.9 billion people live in settlements classified as urban, equivalent to 54 per cent of the world's population.[2] This figure is expected to reach 66 per cent by 2050. For comparison, in 1950, just 30 per cent of the world's population was urban.

The reality of increased proportions of people living in larger towns and cities is generally observable throughout much of the developing world. That being said, there are significant regional heterogeneities worth taking into account. In much of Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, over 80 per cent of people are already living in urban areas, while Africa and Asia still remain comparatively rural. In Africa, about 40 per cent of the population is currently classified as urban, projected to rise to 56 per cent by 2050. In Asia, the proportion is around 48 per cent today, expected to reach 64 per cent by 2050.

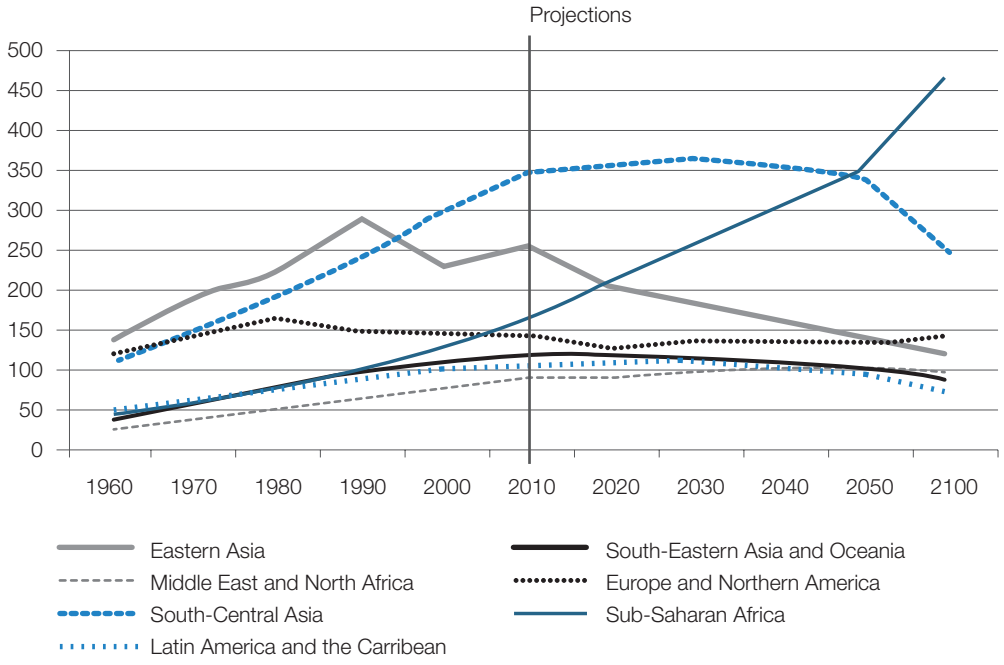
At the same time, the pace of urbanization should not be overstated. Rates of urbanization and urban population growth have slowed in most regions, while the population growth of many of the world's largest urban cities has been slower than predicted (Satterthwaite, McGranahan and Tacoli 2010). The view that rapid urbanization is progressing unabated throughout the developing world is contested, with some evidence that the pace is slowing and is not replicated across all countries, or indeed all urban areas (Potts 2012). Thus, while urbanization is undoubtedly progressing throughout the world and has important implications for the development landscape, caution is needed when discussing the speed and nature of this process. Equally, it should not always be assumed that rural-urban migration is the dominant form of internal mobility. Rural-rural and urban-urban typologies of migration are also observed in societies with different structural dynamics. In societies which are classified as being predominantly rural, the most common movements are often rural to rural, while in the highly urbanized countries found in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, most movements are classed as urban to urban (Lucas 2014).

Sizeable youth populations entering labour markets

Youthful age demographics will shape the development landscape in many developing countries in the decades ahead. Children under the age of 15 account for around a quarter of the population in developing countries (UNDESA 2013), while young people[3] comprise up to one fifth of the population in many of these countries (Proctor and Lucchesi 2012).

2. Unless otherwise stated, figures for global and regional urban and rural populations are drawn from UNDESA (2014).
3. Defined by the United Nations as people aged 15-24.

Figure 1: Youth population trends by region



Source: Proctor and Lucchesi (2012).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is particularly challenging, with 330 million young people projected to enter the labour market over the next 15 years (Losch, Fréguin-Gresh and White 2012). An estimated 195 million of these will live in rural areas and rely on rural labour markets for jobs (ibid). Given this context, it is noteworthy that young people are more likely to make the decision to migrate than older adults, other factors being equal (UN-Habitat 2010).

In addition to the obvious challenges that arise as large youth cohorts enter labour markets, their increasing share in nations' working age populations also brings the potential for a demographic dividend. From a rural perspective, the energy and dynamism of youth can potentially make a significant contribution to supporting – and being architects of – innovations in production, marketing and natural resource use. These innovations will be the cornerstones of transformative processes which would surely be accompanied by movements of people from rural to urban areas. However, this is conditional upon suitable policies, institutions and investments being in place.

The social dimensions of rural transformations – in particular, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women – will shape employment opportunities for young women and men. For instance, under traditional gender norms in many rural societies, gender differences in access to household resources – in particular land – have key implications for employment and migration decisions among young people. Thus, in northern Tanzania, where daughters are expected to contribute unpaid labour to family farms, but cannot inherit the land, growing numbers of young women are being attracted by employment opportunities in urban centres and tourist resorts, relatively far away from their rural homes

(Tacoli and Mabala 2010). In contrast, young men – as a result of their land rights – are more likely to move smaller distances and for shorter periods of time, returning home during the farming season. The impacts of these gender imbalances on movement patterns – and the extent to which specific gender inequalities persist – will have potentially notable social and economic implications for rural communities in the decades ahead.

Rising prices and interest in agriculture

Against this background, higher food and commodity prices potentially change the dynamics under which many rural people do business. Since the mid-2000s, commodity prices have risen at a rate not seen in decades (see figure 2). This presents new opportunities for countries which rely to a large degree on exports of primary commodities, as is the case for many low-income African countries. It is also creating new opportunities for small-scale producers to expand into commercial operations – opportunities that are further strengthened by more integrated value chains and improving rural-urban connectivity in some areas. In contrast, for the large proportion of producers who are net food buyers, particularly in Africa, as well as for low-income urban households, higher food prices increase their vulnerability to food insecurity (Jayne et al. 2010).

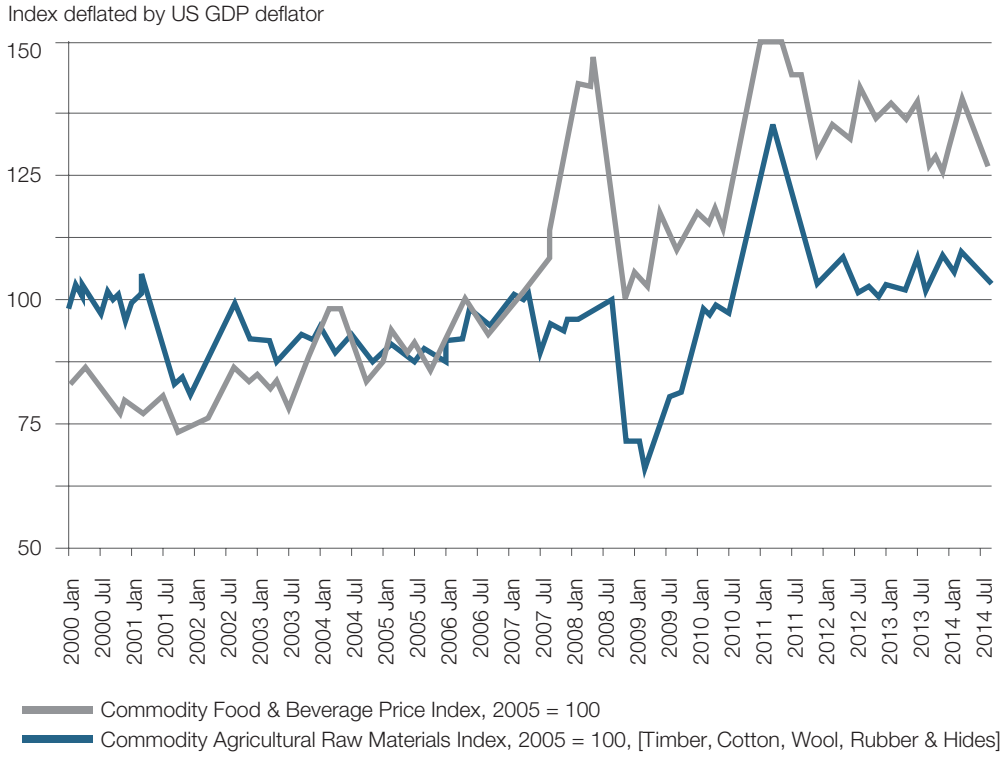
In general, the interest among policymakers, private businesses and philanthropic organizations in agriculture and smallholder farming in particular appears to be higher than has been the case during the preceding decades. Higher commodity prices and the associated international food price crisis in the late 2000s, along with projected increases in income and demand for agricultural products, are driving this resurgent interest. The increasing awareness among consumers of issues surrounding healthy food and sustainability is also potentially widening the demand for smallholder products.

In this context, it is notable that the trend of increasing involvement of private entities – both multinational and national – in food value chains is creating new forms of interaction with smallholders. In some cases, mutually beneficial partnerships – often involving farmer cooperatives or producer organizations – are boosting smallholder businesses. On the other hand, it is not hard to find distressing examples of private corporations engaging with rural people in ways that are not equitable, mutually beneficial or sustainable. Finding ways to manage these risks and leverage opportunities will be an important part of the rural transformation agenda.

Demand for rural products in an urbanizing landscape

A more urbanized world potentially opens up transformative economic opportunities for rural areas. For example, rural sectors will need to play a central role in delivering a range of private and public goods to meet the growing needs for food, as well as energy, environmental services and green jobs. Notably, new food production challenges are drawing attention to agriculture – specifically, the need to increase global food production by around 60 per cent by 2050, while diminishing agriculture's environmental footprint. Some of the most vital goods and services for an increasingly urban world come from rural areas. As value chains become increasingly integrated and rural connectivity improves, the scope and profitability of business opportunities in rural sectors are expected to widen. If these opportunities

Figure 2: Commodity price indices



Source: IMF data (extracted 22 September, 2014).

are captured by enabling policies and investments, this could be expected to dampen the incidence of certain push pressures on migration, while potentially opening up opportunities for rural people to commute to cities to exploit new and expanding markets.

Further, different forms of urbanization and structural transformation have varying effects on levels and patterns of demand for food and agricultural products – an important variable in shaping rural economic opportunities and therefore livelihood and migration decisions. Structural transformation is defined as the reallocation of economic activity, which accompanies the process of modern economic growth, occurring across three broad sectors – agriculture, manufacturing and services – with the latter two growing in prominence. In countries where urbanization is being driven by structural transformations – i.e. where expanding agricultural productivity and associated multiplier growth effects[4] in emerging non-farm sectors are driving increased incomes – there will be a rising demand for high-value products, such as fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy products. Where this occurs, gendered impacts will potentially be of policy interest; women tend to be the main producers of vegetables[5] and fruit in many countries, yet evidence suggests that, in many cases, a growing demand prompts men to take over these crops (FAO, IFAD and ILO 2010). In turn, impacts on intra-household income distribution will influence the welfare of children (FAO 2011). On the other hand, in countries

4. These multiplier effects are described by Haggblade et al. (2007).
5. For example, in The Gambia, vegetable production is regarded as a women's business; women cultivate, market their produce, control the income, and take all related decisions. It is the preferred income source for most rural women, because it is owned by them and is (or can be) year-round (IFAD 2012).

where urbanization has not been accompanied by structural transformation and where large proportions of the urban population have incomes that do not easily allow them to meet their basic nutritional requirements, the demand for agricultural products is likely to change much less (Satterthwaite, McGranahan and Tacoli 2010).

Moreover, in some countries, past policies have shaped the demand for food in a way that will be difficult to reverse. For example, policies that have encouraged food imports, aiming to satisfy the demand of urban consumers for affordable food rather than to support the livelihoods of rural producers, has led to a situation where consumers have become accustomed to imported grains at the expense of local varieties. As a result, locally produced grains tend to suffer from a bad image in cities, often for reasons not related to quality (Demont 2013).

Crucially, whether income growth is broad-based shall be a key determinant of the extent and nature of changes in the demand for agricultural products. In the developing countries of Asia, the middle class already comprises more than half of the population (Chun 2010). However, in Africa the picture is less clear. As described by Jayne et al. (2014), despite many reports finding evidence of a rising middle class, this is disputed by recent work such as that of Gollin et al. (2013) and Potts (2013), which point to income growth being relatively narrow. In countries where growth is pro-poor, it can reasonably be expected that demand for agricultural products will expand, in line with Engel's Law. On the other hand, if the fruits of growth are benefiting mostly the high-income groups of a society, the impact on the demand for agricultural products is likely to be more limited. Under this scenario, there may be more need for migration as a coping strategy among poor rural households, though where urban service and manufacturing sectors are not yet providing large numbers of jobs, the income-earning potential of this strategy will tend to be more limited.

The role of migration in transformative processes

Structural transformation and migration

Development economics concepts – along with historical evidence – indicate a positive causal relationship between structural transformation and migration. The reallocation of economic activity and resultant declining share of labour devoted to agriculture is normally accompanied by a movement of labour from rural to urban areas.

Importantly, the catalyst of this transformation is increased productivity in smallholder agriculture – a change which kick-starts wider transformations throughout rural sectors, eventually leading to broader economy-wide changes. Specifically, and as described in the literature (see Timmer 2005; World Bank 2007; Hazell et al. 2007; Byerlee et al 2009; de Janvery and Sadoulet 2010; and Ellis 2013), increases in the incomes of small-scale rural producers tend to result in expenditure patterns that promote growth in the rural non-farm economy by providing markets for local consumption goods, and input provision and marketing services for agriculture. Consequently, a virtuous cycle is set in motion, in which rising incomes in smallholder farming are sequentially followed by rapid growth in the non-farm sector, driven by the expanding demand for higher-value non-farm products. At this point, policies linking agriculture and other rural sectors with urban areas and improved transport infrastructure provide opportunities for further rural income growth, and increase the availability of affordable food and other key rural goods in cities. Subsequently, as Engel's Law[6] takes hold, labour gradually shifts out of agriculture into industrial and service sectors, generally leading to increased levels of migration among rural residents.

Some caution is required when suggesting that there are universal stages of development through which every country must pass. Each country faces slightly different circumstances, opportunities and challenges and will to some extent follow its own unique path. It is by no means certain that today's developing countries will follow the exact same path that was followed by today's developed countries. However, in the past, most countries passed through the stages outlined above, or something similar to them. Moreover, evidence outlined in the literature from much of Asia and Latin America during the past 40 years supports the concept of economic transformation following patterns closely resembling these pathways (HLPE 2012). This is particularly true for countries that joined the ranks of developed nations in the past five decades, such as Japan and South Korea.

Overall it is important to stress that successful transformation processes, in particular those that generate decent jobs (many of which will be concentrated in emerging industrial and service sectors), are inevitably associated with a degree of migration. For instance, in China, structural transformation has been associated with a drop in the proportion of the rural population from 80 to 55 per cent in 20 years (Collier and Dercon 2014); internal migrant labour is estimated

6. Named after the nineteenth century German statistician Ernst Engel, Engel's Law demonstrates that, up to a certain point, rising incomes create an increased demand for food. However, as incomes continue to rise, the demand for food (being virtually inelastic) is gradually replaced by the demand for non-food goods produced outside the agricultural sector.

at more than 260 million people by the National Bureau of Statistics, and this is despite the fact that the Chinese government has put policies in place to limit movement[7] (Lucas 2014). In general, it would be prudent to recognize and support the role of migration in the structural transformation process, especially as it becomes more advanced. It should also be recognized that investment in agriculture is necessary to kick-start the transformation process – as was the case in China,[8] as well as in Japan and South Korea, which invested heavily in agriculture prior to achieving industrial status.

Slow transformation and migration

In general, rural transformation and, consequently, the wider processes of structural transformation have proceeded at a much slower rate in many developing countries than might be expected in the context of increased growth rates. Underinvestment in rural infrastructure and key sectors such as agriculture, as well as alarming rural-urban gaps in education and health, are among the constraints holding back rural and structural transformation. Incomplete and unachieved structural transformation suggests that the urban growth experienced in recent decades has often not been accompanied by proportionate increases in waged jobs. As a result, in many countries, the trend of employment transfer into modern industry over the long term has been much slower than expected (IMF 2013). This has tended to constrain the opportunities available for migrants.

This scenario is particularly the case in the presence of high levels of inequality. Where income and productivity gains are not broad-based, but instead confined to a small, relatively privileged group, the expected typologies of migration are likely to be different. More specifically, under conditions of high inequality, structural transformation processes would likely be less advanced as a result of incomplete rural and agricultural transformation, while non-farm sectors would not have sufficiently grown to absorb rural migrants into waged work.

The analysis by Proctor (2014) of rural and structural transformation in Africa suggests that this scenario is prevailing in many low-income countries on the continent today. Similarly, IMF (2013) cites slower structural transformation and associated job creation as explaining the relatively disappointing progress in poverty reduction across the continent despite overall economic growth. To illustrate this point, while Mozambique has grown at a similar pace to Viet Nam, poverty has declined much faster in Viet Nam as a result of its faster structural transformation, which has moved more workers into higher-paying jobs in industry and services (IMF 2014, as cited in Proctor 2014). Consequently, in Africa, the migration of workers from rural to urban areas has not been associated with comparative levels of economic transformation or poverty reduction as that witnessed in much of South-East and East Asia.

While the pull of emerging opportunities in urban industrial and service sectors has been a key characteristic of economies undergoing transformation and development, rural-to-urban migration that is driven by significant rural-urban inequalities can be associated with a range of undesirable trends. This situation contributes to the expansion of cities which are marked by stark inequalities between a wealthy elite and rising numbers of people living in extremely poor conditions – often in slums. From a migration perspective, a situation where movements of people are driven by significant inequalities carries with it the risk of a range of undesirable outcomes – including exploitative working arrangements, people trafficking, unsafe and unhealthy travel and living arrangements.

7. The Hukuo system gives families access to services such as education only in their place of registration.
8. Total fiscal expenditure on agriculture grew significantly in China from the 1980s: by an average of 10.7 per cent during the period 1978-1998; 9.7 per cent between 1999 and 2003; and 25.1 per cent from 2004 to 2011.

Moreover, where migration and urbanization advances without the support of robust processes of rural and structural transformation, there are specific implications with respect to food security and poverty. Most obviously, the absence of a productive local agricultural sector leaves countries relying on food imports. This, in turn, leaves populations vulnerable to fluctuations in world food and energy prices, as has been witnessed during the recent food price crises. Indeed, the number of undernourished people in the world rose sharply between 2006 and 2009, reaching over a billion people for the first time since 1970, with rising food prices cited as a leading driving factor in this trend (FAO 2009). Food price rises led to unrest in many net food-importing countries during this period: many, including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco and Senegal, experienced protests and riots in late 2007 and early 2008.

While it is important to be wary of the pitfalls of haphazard urban migration that is driven – at least in part – by rural stagnation, blanket assertions that rural-urban migration should be stemmed because it leads to the growth of slums and poor living conditions should also be avoided. Indeed, even migration to so-called slums is reported as being livelihood-enhancing in some cases (Awumbila, Owusu and Kofi Teye 2014). Moreover, the attribution of urban expansion to migration in any major sense is questionable (UN-Habitat 2013). A more nuanced debate is called for. What does appear relatively clear is that the role of rural transformation in inclusive and sustainable processes of structural transformation and urbanization is potentially noteworthy – and all too frequently underacknowledged.

Migration and rural livelihoods

Having discussed some of the macro links between migration and transformation, it follows to examine the different ways in which migration processes influence rural livelihoods. Particular attention is given to the role that migration may play in rural transformation processes.

Remittance impacts on rural livelihoods

Remittances – international and internal – play a key role in supporting and enhancing the livelihoods of people in developing countries. International remittances, projected to reach US$435 billion in 2014, are a key source of external resource flows for developing countries, far exceeding official development assistance and more stable than private debt and portfolio equity flows (World Bank 2014). Crucially, an estimated 40 per cent of these transfers are sent to rural areas. Internal remittances, however, appear to flow to an even larger number of households than international remittances – not unexpected, given the predominance of internal compared with international migration.[9]

Notably, an analysis of household data from six countries in Africa and Asia[10] conducted by McKay and Deshingkar (2014) indicates that internal remittances mainly flow to relatively poor rural areas; in other words, the bulk of the poverty-reducing impact of remittances in all the countries studied came from internal transfers. In addition, USAID (2015) notes that a large share of the capital invested in agriculture in Africa originates from urban sectors, the bulk of this surely being from migrant remittances.

There is much evidence on the association of remittances with key drivers of rural transformation, such as increased investments in rural businesses, physical and human capital, and information and communication technology (as detailed, for example, in Ratha [2013], World Bank [2011], and IFAD and FAO [2008]). Remittances also provide an important source of rural income diversification, serving as insurance against adverse shocks (Ratha 2013), which is especially important, given the lack of access to and limited range of insurance products in rural areas. These uses of remittances all point to a significant association with key drivers of rural transformation. These effects are in need of more research and examination – in particular, the impact of internal remittances is an area that deserves more attention and analysis by researchers, planners and policymakers.

Human capital implications

Opinions are generally positive on the effects of migration and remittances on health and education, though some of the available evidence gives reason for caution. Clearly, an educated and healthy rural workforce will be a prerequisite to bring about sustainable and

9. Indications are that the sums involved are significant: in China, Kynge (2004) estimated that domestic migrants sent US$45 billion via formal transfer providers in 2003 (as cited by Isern, Deshpande and van Doorn [2005]).
10. Comprising Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Bangladesh and Viet Nam.

inclusive rural transformation. Indeed, Timmer (2007) notes that in countries where successful transformations have been achieved, significant human capital investments – particularly in young people – have been made.

With this in mind, it is noteworthy that in households where at least one member has migrated and is sending remittances, children have shown improvements in health outcomes and the likelihood of enrolling and remaining in school (World Bank 2011; IFAD and FAO 2008). This effect appears to be stronger when remittances are sent by migrant fathers to mothers (Malone 2007; and INSTRAW and IOM 2007, as cited by IFAD and FAO 2008). However, it has been noted in some cases that preventative health care, such as breastfeeding and vaccinations, is less common among migrant households, while parental absence has sometimes led to increased incidence of risk-taking health behaviour relating to alcohol and drug use (IFAD and FAO 2008).

It is also notable that migration – or the future possibility of migration – can enhance human capital. Lucas (2014), for example, highlights induced education among those intending to leave, even if they actually end up remaining in rural areas and using their skills there. The same author also notes the knowledge benefits accruing to rural communities as a result of transfers of knowledge from migrants who return to their communities of origin, as well as the creation of wider commercial opportunities through better access to information. These human capital-enhancing implications can be expected to be positive drivers of productivity, innovation and entrepreneurship – all key drivers of rural transformation.

On the other hand, there are legitimate concerns around rural areas losing a significant share of their young and educated labour force through migration, particularly given that young and educated people are observed to be more likely to migrate. In western Kenya, for example, Oucho, Oucho and Ochieng' (2014) grapple with these issues, reporting that many rural migrant households expressed concerns that young and able-bodied members had migrated, leaving behind only young children and elderly people who are unable to participate in labour-intensive farm work. Understanding differentiated impacts of diverse forms of migration will be needed to promote a more nuanced debate on its role in different rural contexts.

Labour market impacts

Migration – both seasonal and permanent – can play an important role in improving the efficiency of labour and supporting rural livelihoods. Seasonal labour mobility allows workers to increase their incomes through work in nearby towns and cities, at the same time as reducing underemployment during the agricultural lean season in communities of origin. In many countries that have undergone successful poverty-reducing transformations, seasonal migration is continuing to be a significant driver of rural livelihood resilience. To demonstrate this, Tacoli (2011) notes the cases of Viet Nam, Thailand and China. In Viet Nam, the author cites the findings of Hoang et al. (2005) that smallholders working in the Red River Delta commonly migrate to Hanoi for a few months of the year to work in the construction sector. In Thailand, Guest (1998) estimates that one third of internal migration consists of seasonal movements to the Bangkok metropolitan region during the agricultural

dry season. In China, Zhu (2003) states that, in the manufacturing and construction hubs of Guangdong, Beijing and Jiangsu, only between 15 and 30 per cent of migrant workers intend to settle permanently in their current workplaces.

Outmigration from rural areas has been associated with higher wages in the rural areas of many transforming countries. This has been particularly noticeable in Asia since before 2000, when significant rural labour mobility has been occurring in conjunction with structural transformation, with the trend becoming more marked in the past decade. In China, for example, rural wages increased by as much as 92 per cent between 2003 and 2007; in Viet Nam, the median rural wage tripled between 1992 and 2008; and in India, rural wages expanded by 35 per cent between 2005 and 2012 – all of these being increases in real terms. Where data are available, they show that differences have narrowed between female and male wages, and between more and less prosperous regions (Wiggins and Keats 2014b).

From a conceptual perspective, Lucas (2014) notes that a simplistic view of the migration process is that it would lead to convergence between rural and urban areas. An exodus of surplus labour from rural areas and a corresponding upward shift in labour supply in receiving centres would, in theory, close spatial disparities in wages. The author, however, explains that this convergence effect has rarely been observed in reality, suggesting a number of possible explanations for this, including a downward rigidity in urban wages,[11] persistent skills gaps,[12] and barriers to migration which prevent full factor price equalization.[13] However, it appears reasonable to conclude that in economies undergoing structural transformation, outmigration from rural areas does appear to place upward and converging effects on rural wages.

Certain decent work considerations are inherent to migration issues. Due to the informal nature of most urban labour market segments where rural migrants are often concentrated, finding reliable data is problematic. However it is generally accepted that migrants often enter into working arrangements that are typified by several decent work deficits. Long working hours, low pay, lack of social protection and bargaining rights are among the realities often facing migrant workers. From a gender perspective, it must be noted that the extent to which migrant women are able to enjoy higher wages in urban sectors appears to be limited in comparison to their male peers. According to Chant (2013), gender barriers in access to decent employment and earnings in informal enterprise mean that migrant women are less likely to benefit from income gains associated with migration. Thus, while employment opportunities in larger towns and cities frequently play a role in supporting rural livelihoods, there are clear issues with respect to the quality of employment (and sometimes exploitation) that migrants may have little choice but to accept.

Environmental impacts

Migration affects – and is affected by – the myriad of environmental and climatic challenges which people in both rural and urban areas are facing. A growing proportion of rural people are affected by climate-related livelihood stresses, such as droughts, floods, unpredictable weather patterns and shocks. As land is farmed more intensively, the risk of soil degradation increases, while off-site effects such as groundwater depletion, agrochemical pollution and

11. Driven by collective bargaining in the formal sector, minimum wage levels and/or variants in efficiency wage theories (such as employers paying above base rates in order to incentivize workers against shirking or cheating).
12. Differences in skills between rural and urban workers may persist, as rural workers possessing higher skills are more likely to migrate, while their lesser-skilled peers remain in their home communities.
13. Such as information gaps, poor transport infrastructure, regulations relating to residence-based access to services, etc.

loss of biodiversity are liable to be exacerbated. In addition, as land pressures intensify the increased use of marginal (i.e. lower potential) land, damages to ecologically fragile systems are inevitable. These land pressures are influenced by migration processes.

Opportunities for migration are linked to the extent of pressures on agricultural land. In Asia, farm sizes have already – or are about to – peak and are expected to decline in the decades ahead, as a result of migration and structural transformation, as well as age demographics (Masters et al. 2013). The expansion of opportunities in non-farm sectors and the emergence of modern industrial economies that have flowed from the development of agriculture are leading to declines in rural populations and a subsequent lowering of pressure on farmland in the continent's transforming countries. In Africa, in contrast, relatively fewer opportunities for rural people outside of farming and burgeoning youthful populations are contributing to a growing pressure on land.

In addition, migration can be seen to provide a coping strategy for rural households reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods – particularly in situations of extreme climatic and environmental threat – or a risk mitigation strategy by diversifying household incomes through remittances. In this context, it is relevant to point out that hundreds of millions of people (up to 1 billion by some estimates) are expected to flee their homes as a result of climatic and environmental pressures by 2050 (IIED 2010). On the flipside, rural-urban migration has been reported to worsen environmental vulnerabilities in cities and surrounding areas, as rising demand for urban housing against sluggish supply forces migrants to settle in ecologically vulnerable and overcrowded areas (Awumbila, Owusu and Teye 2014).

Clearly, the way that migration and structural transformation evolves, and whether it is managed by suitable policies, regulations and safeguards, will have important implications on the natural environment and climate. In turn, this will shape the nature of rural change and transformation, as rural sectors and rural people rely to a large degree on natural resources for their livelihoods.

Changes in family relations and gender roles

Migration can have diversified effects on social development and the way that households and communities work and live together. These effects are by no means uniform and vary according to socio-economic and cultural factors across different locations. In particular, differentiated social impacts of migration are strongly dependent upon the gender of the migrating household member. The latter has implications for the allocation of household labour and workloads, and is therefore relevant for the social dimensions of rural transformation.

In many cases, it has been observed that male migration has increased women's workloads, often forcing them to work longer in fields (IFAD and FAO 2008; Paris et al. 2009). On the other hand, some studies have found that male migration leads to an increase in women's empowerment, as women take on greater management and decision-making roles in the absence of their husbands (Oucho et al. 2014; Paris et al. 2009). Indeed, many women have expressed appreciation of the increased freedom and autonomy resulting from their husband's migration (Appendini 2009).

Female migration has also been found to contribute to women's empowerment in terms of access to paid employment outside the family and relaxation of often rigid gender norms experienced in their rural communities of origin. However, it should be noted that disadvantages in terms of access to decent employment, training, financial and physical assets, and representation in governance structures remain prevalent among many female migrants (Chant 2013).

When women migrate, men are often obliged to take on further household tasks and childcare duties that in many rural societies are traditionally still the domain of women (Ramirez et al. 2005, as cited by IFAD and FAO 2008). Using remittances to hire labour would obviously reverse this effect, and there is evidence that this occurs in at least some cases (see, for example, Paris et al. 2009), though more research is needed to understand to what extent this relates to internal – as opposed to international – migration.

In terms of family and social relations, the documented consequences of migration are mixed, with some negative social trends observed in many cases as a result of migration. In the case of male migration, there is anecdotal evidence of an associated increase in the incidence of marital infidelity and family break-ups (Thinh 2009). In addition, in some studies, women have reported problems such as feelings of loneliness, depression and insecurity as a result of their husbands migrating (Paris et al. 2009). In cases where the migrating family member is female, surveys have pointed to heightened risks of various antisocial behaviours among husbands and children left behind, for example, alcoholism and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Tolstokorova 2009). Reliance on remittances from female spouses in traditionally patriarchal societies has also been seen to adversely impact upon the self-esteem of non-migrating husbands (IFAD and FAO 2008).

With respect to social empowerment, it should be noted that sociocultural gendered norms dictate the attitudes towards migrants – especially the young ones – in their rural communities of origin. In some communities, the migration of young men is regarded as a rite of passage – with those staying often ridiculed and labelled as idle. In contrast, young women who decide to migrate may be viewed negatively by their families and members of the community (Tacoli and Mabala 2010). These gendered attitudinal differences shape the social status of young women and men in rural communities, impacting upon feelings of self-worth and confidence – and underpinning their incentives to adopt different livelihood strategies.

Opportunities for political engagement

In general, migration can offer opportunities for increased political participation. Traditional marginalization of rural populations from democratic processes is a long-standing side effect of wide distances – physical, cultural, economic – that separate them from urban-based centres of power. This has been highlighted by many economists specializing in rural sectors since the initial seminal work of Lipton (1982). Thus, the migration of rural people to larger settlements can – under certain conditions at least – offer opportunities for greater political engagement. This effect is by no means automatic and is dependent upon the existence of various decentralized democratic institutions, as well as the capabilities of migrants themselves to organize and take advantage of the available space for political engagement. Unfortunately, to date this has rarely happened.

To the extent that migration brings people closer to political centres of power and increases their visibility to policymakers, it can be regarded as having the potential to redress certain imbalances that relate to political voice. However, it is worrying that migrants are rarely well connected to political processes and frequently suffer from underrepresentation in institutions. Gender and generational dimensions are important to consider, and in this respect it is significant that these realities have been found to be especially stark in the case of young migrant women (Chant 2013). From a generational perspective, Leahy Madsen (2008) found that autocratic or partially autocratic governments tend to limit the scope for migration to contribute to increased political voice in many African countries with youthful population. This raises broader questions around the need to address transparency and democratic representation in governments. While migration can contribute to increased voice for rural people in political processes, the reality is that this potential has rarely been captured.

Policy implications

It has been argued that it is inevitable that rural and structural transformation shall be accompanied by a degree of internal mobility, as emerging sectors absorb new workers and agriculture becomes more productive and less labour-intensive. It has also been shown that, at individual, household and community level, migration can play a role in supporting the livelihoods of rural people, offering pathways out of poverty, both for migrants and for families remaining behind. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the process carries with it a range of risks – social, economic and environmental – which need to be managed. At a society-wide level, it is not always easy to generalize about the effects of large-scale migration on wider processes of rural and structural transformation, as many intersecting factors must be considered. While an exhaustive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, this section will attempt to outline some of the most relevant policy issues.

Support rural sectors within an integrated development planning agenda

It will be important to ensure that the indispensable role of rural areas and rural people in an increasingly urbanized world is prominently reflected in spatially integrated development planning processes. Acknowledgement of the centrality of rural transformation to structural transformation must underpin the development of opportunities for livelihood-supporting labour mobility. Inclusive and sustainable rural transformation must be part and parcel of a process of urbanization that is sustainable in all its dimensions – social, economic and environmental – and provides decent employment in both rural and urban areas.

Key to this will be investing in rural people – enhancing skills, knowledge, gender equality and women's empowerment, and facilitating better access to markets, land and a range of financial products, in particular for women and youth. Sensitivity to the way migration is interacting with different demographic transitions and changing the make-up of rural societies is also crucial. In many scenarios, this will involve paying particular attention to challenges facing single-headed households, with different challenges emerging in communities depending upon gendered patterns of migration. Generating decent employment for young people will obviously be vital in countries with burgeoning youth populations. The role of intermediate towns in connecting rural and urban areas and contributing to balanced modalities of urbanization is also in need of further consideration and emphasis.

However, it may take some work to reverse the mistakes of the past. The effects of past policy decisions, especially the failure to support rural producers in some countries and the associated dependence on food imports, will not be easy to reverse. In particular, investments in sustainable food systems are essential to reduce hunger, protect and preserve key natural resources and biodiversity, and provide decent incomes and working conditions for the rural women and men who work on smallholder family farms.

It is encouraging that there are signs of this being increasingly recognized, as manifested by initiatives such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the pledges to increase investment in agriculture made at the L'Aquila G8 meeting, and the Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security in Rome. More pertinently, the draft Sustainable Development Goals acknowledge the centrality of some key aspects of inclusive and sustainable rural transformation to the new universal agenda for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Notably, within the proposed goals, the critical role of smallholder family farmers, including women and indigenous peoples, is explicitly highlighted.

Enhance the participation of rural people in policy and planning processes

Multiple measures will be required to address the political disempowerment of rural people – for both those living in their home communities and those migrating. Where appropriate institutional frameworks are in place in towns and cities – allowing different political, religious, social, ethnic groups and including populations in informal settlements to participate in debates – there are opportunities for a wider political engagement of migrants, but until now these have been leveraged by urban ministries or central governments. Sensitization and anti-discrimination campaigns, the devolution of power to effective decentralized systems, and targeted measures to integrate migrants into the political landscape at municipal, state and national levels are urgently needed.

For people remaining in rural areas, a starting point will be working with rural institutions, ensuring they represent the voices of local people – including those groups who are often underrepresented, such as women, young people and indigenous peoples – and connecting them to country-level and regional processes. Building the capacity of rural citizens – particularly young people, given their increasing numbers – to understand and claim their rights will obviously be important, as will be building their confidence to participate in public life. Such opportunities – particularly in many of the countries with extremely youthful age structures – will depend upon wider macrolevel governance and democracy reforms, with the predominance of autocratic or semi-autocratic systems in many of these countries being a potential barrier to the political participation of large numbers of young women and men. Recognition and reorganization of power relations within societies will be also be important, as various forms of social exclusion are often present within societies themselves. Public awareness and advocacy campaigns can play important roles in this area.

Given the increased incidence of migration among women and the gender dimensions associated with this, it will be important to promote the involvement of women's groups and migrants' associations in discussions between governments, employers, trade unions, civil society and migrant communities, in order to ensure that the contribution of migrants is recognized and their rights are protected. Further, women's groups should be engaged in initiatives to improve the safety of migrants, especially women, during their journeys as well as at destinations. Also needed is the introduction of gender-sensitive labour and migration legislation that enshrines international standards for the legal protection of migrants. In areas where migrating family members are predominantly men, it will be important to ensure that women remaining behind are given opportunities to participate in local institutions, such as farmers' cooperatives and rural workers' associations.

Remove obstacles to livelihood-enhancing migration

Given the potential livelihood impacts of migration and its inherent role in transformative processes, an obvious first observation is that policies designed to constrain and stop the migration process should be avoided. As a starting point, policies that tie residency to entitlements to formal employment and vital services should be revisited and replaced with systems that do not disadvantage migrant workers and their families. But this alone is not enough: pro-active measures are needed to address the barriers to livelihood-enhancing migration.

Formal systems of social protection can play an important role in mitigating many of the risks associated with migration and provide a measure of security for migrants conducting job searches at their destinations. Munshi and Rosenzweig (2013) demonstrate that even small improvements in the availability of formal insurance facilitates migration, particularly among members of poorer households, resulting in pro-poor income redistribution. Improving the access of rural people to quality education and training can enhance the employment prospects of those who decide to migrate. Provision of suitable transport and communications infrastructure – either directly by the public sector or by fostering private investment – will be important to bring down the costs associated with both travel and sending remittances, as well as facilitate information flows on employment and business opportunities.

The reality of relatively higher levels of internal mobility compared with historical norms needs to be reflected in urban planning processes. Effective urban planning should address the common deprivations which affect many migrants, such as: lack of decent employment and income-generating opportunities; risks associated with poor living conditions; lack of access to services and infrastructure; unavailability of affordable transport; and marginalization from democratic processes. While in some cases politicians and city officials have seemingly sought to shift the blame for poor urban planning onto migrants themselves, in other cases effective planning and political commitment have led to a reduction in slums and improved living conditions. Much can be learned from countries which have achieved success in the latter, including Argentina, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia (UN-Habitat 2013).

Build evidence base

Despite increased attention to issues relating to the ways internal migration is connecting cities, towns and villages and changing the way goods, information and money flows between them, the evidence base remains weak. Data relating to the magnitude and spatial patterns of internal migration remain weak in most developing countries. In addition, little country-by-country information is available on the gender or age distribution of migrants. Coordinated and systematic approaches to the collection, dissemination and use of these data are required to foster appropriate policy responses. As concluded by Landau (2014), this may involve establishing data collection methods that are agreed upon at regional, national and municipal level, in order to ensure widespread legitimacy, reliability and usefulness of such information. The same authors also highlight the need to train population scientists, matching technical demographic skills with those in anthropology and sociology.

Of particular concern is the observation that even where migration data are available, they often have little influence on policymaking . This suggests the need not just for more data, but also for procedural regulations regarding consultation and use of data in order to ensure that migration policymaking decisions are grounded in fact. Awareness of and sensitivity to institutional and political factors constraining the appropriate use of data is also needed on the part of researchers (Landau 2014).

Meaningful and robust data collection on rural employment needs to be systematized and scaled up. Employment data rarely reflect the realities of rural labour markets, where most of the activities are centred around the informal and household sectors. Moreover, the limited rural employment data that are available do not encompass important qualitative aspects of employment. Given the predominance of decent work deficits, such as low incomes, underemployment, poor working conditions and lack of social protection in rural areas, this is a serious impediment to understanding the various livelihood choices facing potential migrants.

Conclusions

This paper has outlined the linkages between rural transformation, migration, and sustainable and equitable development, within an overall context of increasing population shares living in urban areas. It has shown how different rural transformations lead to different outcomes in terms of structural transformation and migration, and the need for wider recognition of the positive role migration frequently plays in supporting key aspects of rural transformation.

Internal migration plays an important role in shaping opportunities for poor households to escape poverty, and in transforming rural and urban spaces. Where suitable policies are in place to support migrants within a broad agenda of pro-poor, balanced rural and urban development, opportunities for poverty reduction are significant. At the same time, more research is needed to understand the interplay between these dynamics. In particular, more knowledge is needed on mobility – especially within countries – including size, composition, motivations and outcomes. The relative neglect of internal vis-à-vis international migration within policy debates also needs to be redressed.

Fortunately, international development discussions – in particular those surrounding the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda – indicate a broadening acknowledgement of these priorities. In particular, the proposed Sustainable Development Goals affirm the important role of key aspects of rural transformation – empowering smallholder farmers, leveraging rural-urban linkages, achieving gender equality. Encouragingly, the importance of supporting and protecting the rights of migrants is also highlighted. Though much remains to be done in terms of agreeing on implementation and financing arrangements – and leveraging national support and ownership of agreed-upon priorities – the prospects for building a more sustainable and equitable world, where rural and urban transformations support each other and help create fairer and more sustainable societies, appears promising.

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