

# Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

## Migration Through a Gender and Equity Lens

FORUM XII | 16 April 2014

BRIEFING NOTE 12

### HIGHLIGHTS / KEY POINTS

- Migration studies have primarily explored economic reasons while analyzing male migration and social reasons when it comes to female migration. Women have been seen as migrating primarily for reasons pertaining to marriage.
- There are increasing instances of single women migrating alone while other instances of single women or widows accompanying other family workers who are migrating have also been seen.
- A gendered perspective towards

migration is essential since women have different motivations, patterns, options and challenges while migrating as compared to men.

- Discrepancy in capturing the motivation for women's migration through surveys has led to the inability to capture the complexities of female migration.
- A comprehensive approach in understanding the role of women across the cycle of mobility (pre-departure to re-integration) and across source, transit and destination continuum is required.

The Gender and Economic Policy (GEP) Discussion Forum on Migration through a Gender Lens held on 16th April 2014 discussed the need for a gendered perspective on migration and the reasons for the lack of one. The discussion aimed at bringing out these biases, highlighting the need for a gender perspective in policies to help female migrants access social benefits as well as a better understanding of the gender dynamics involved in migration. The speakers for the forum were Ms Indrani Mazumdar from the Centre for Women's Development Studies, Dr S. K. Sasikumar from the V. V. Giri National Labour Institute, Mr Nabesh Bohidar from CARE India and Ms Amrita Sharma from the Aajeevika Bureau. The discussion was chaired

by Mr Partha Pratim Mitra from the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Migration has often been described as a form of mobility in which people change their residential location across administrative boundaries for a variety of reasons, which may be voluntary, involuntary or both.<sup>1</sup> This process, however, has often been studied with the point of view of male migrants with female migrants receiving little or no attention in the analysis. Most women recorded as migrants are migrants due to exogamous marriages. A very small proportion of women have been seen as migrating primarily for economic reasons<sup>2</sup>. Hence, while male migration has been largely been regarded as

for economic reasons, female migration has been studied as being for social reasons.

There are four patterns of internal migration: rural to urban, rural to rural, urban to urban and urban to rural. The rural to urban flows have generally garnered the most attention as this form of migration has been noted as a major contributor to urban growth in both developed and developing countries<sup>3</sup>.

Data taken from the Census as well as from NSSO surveys indicates that while female migrants largely outnumber male migrants, the proportion of female migrants identified as moving for employment reasons is small enough to be rendered insignificant<sup>4</sup>. Scholars argue that non economic, social reasons for migration by women mostly means that actual labour migration by women may appear in the data as migration or other forms of associational movement by women simply because they may coincide. However, the social reason is often presumed as being the primary reason even where women of a migrant family enter the income earning workforce in their individual capacity. Hence, especially for women, the social and economic reasons may be seen as intersecting though the social gains predominance in data and analysis<sup>5</sup>. Following this, it has been argued, there is a tendency towards using male migration as the primary indicator in development oriented discussions on migration at the cost of a gendered analysis. Such an approach also may lead to a rigid distinction between economic and social causes for migration with a lack of focus on intersections and overlapping between the two<sup>6</sup>. This hampers the process of studying significant trends and features of migration in relation to gender and labour.

It must be noted that it is not just the reasons for migration but also the manner of migration that vary for men and women. While men mostly migrate alone, women are seen migrating with family members or other women.

The impact of migration varies for men and women depending on the type of migration, policies and attitudes towards migrants as well as

household gender relations. It has been argued by some that migration may in fact challenge traditional gender roles- the absence of one spouse may leave the other with greater decision making power as well as greater responsibility and labour. Where men migrate from rural to urban areas, women are often left with a greater burden of agricultural labour but also may have more control over how crops and revenue are utilized<sup>7</sup>.

The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee lays out certain obligations on states to protect and promote the human rights of women migrant workers. This includes that states must ensure that occupations dominated by women migrant workers such as domestic work, etc are protected by labour laws including wage and hour regulations, health and safety codes. It has been noted that though women migrants are recruited into both skilled and unskilled jobs, the majority are concentrated in low status jobs at the lower end of the job hierarchy. They are also often subjected to abuse, violence by recruiters, exploitation as well as low wages and long and poor working conditions.

## Women and Migration

Thadani and Todaro describe four principle types of female migrants, distinguished by their marital status and reasons for migrating<sup>8</sup>. These are:

- i) Married women migrating for employment
- ii) Unmarried women migrating for employment
- iii) Unmarried women migrating for marriage
- iv) Married women engaged in associational migration with no thought of employment

Across India 75% of women over the age of 21 have migrated as opposed to 15% of men who live someplace other than their birth village or town. According to NSSO 2005, there has been an increase in female migration for marriage. Studies have mostly treated female migration in India as a secondary phenomenon, one that was entirely dependent on men. Evidence, however, suggests that women's migration, earlier attributed solely to mobility after marriage, is now increasingly for

employment reasons<sup>9</sup>. It is suggested that even if the immediate and obvious reasons for women to move is domestic, it doesn't necessarily mean that the move had no economic consequences. Migrant women may have migrated along with their spouse to urban centers, but start working in the informal sector (mostly domestic work)<sup>10</sup>. Hence, it can be inferred that women's role in the labour market is not only considered secondary, but is also often considered insignificant.

Several complex factors have been seen as contributing to female migration apart from the usual push and pull factors, of which poverty and unemployment are the most significant. These additional factors include new and emerging markets for women's work, improving levels of educational and skill development and loosening of parental and societal control over women.

The patriarchal social context, according to Indrani Mazumdar, makes the unpaid labour of women both the cause and consequence of their economic dependence and a constraint on equality of opportunity for independent employment, income and economic independence<sup>11</sup>. Economic independence, then, holds the key for social independence for women. The lack of data available on women's short term migration coupled with the tendency to slot women's migration as purely social regardless of its economic impact, results in an underestimation of female labour migration inbuilt into the data<sup>12</sup>. Hence, we see that the data on migration remains largely unchanged.

Agriculture is seen as being the largest employer of female labour migrants. For men, apart from agriculture, other activities included mining and manufacturing as the prime drivers of labour and employment migration. Among short term migrants, construction stands second to agriculture as the key employment activity<sup>13</sup>.

A note must be made here that though there has been an increase in rural female marriage migration, there has been a subsequent decline in rural female work participation rates from 33% in 199-94 to 29% in 2007-08 and further

to 26% in 2009-10. In addition to this, urban female work participation rates too have declined from 15.5% in 1993-94 to 13.8% in 2007-08 and remained the same in 2009-10. Hence, the experience in India has been conclusively contrary to the expectations of expanding employment opportunities and demand for women workers under a liberalized policy regime. Rather, it seems to point to the unfolding of a major employment crisis, whose effects have been felt most sharply by rural women<sup>14</sup>.

Hence, overall female labour migration has had less of an impact on the structure of the female workforce in comparison to men, reflected in the continuing and relatively greater concentration of women in agriculture and in low employment rates among urban women<sup>15</sup>.

## Marriage and Migration

Analyzing data on marriage migration from the NSS, a sharp increase in rates of female migration from rural to urban areas has been seen<sup>16</sup>. Male migration rates, on the other hand, has seen a decline in rural areas and stagnated after an initial increase in urban areas. In the NSS data, states Mazumdar, while employment oriented migration rates among women are visible in both rural and urban areas, among men they have increased significantly in urban areas.

A note here must also be made for women left behind during migration by men. These women also experience changes in their role; the stay at home spouses may now have greater household and economic responsibilities. Although they may be financially dependent on remittances from their relatives or spouses, the women may have substantial autonomy over decisions about how funds will be used<sup>17</sup>.

## Services and Facilities Available to Migrant Women

A relatively less studied aspect of migration has been whether migrating women have access

to education, health care services and other programmes that may be available to them in urban areas but would have been out of reach of women in rural communities<sup>18</sup>. Migrant women often have restricted access to employment as well as the choice of employment and get lower wages. This may also be accompanied with sexual harassment in some instances<sup>19</sup>. Hence, providing the necessary comprehensive services, to help reduce the hardships and burden on these migrants would result in a positive experience of migration. Limited access to basic amenities as well as health care and limited knowledge about legal processes proves as a hindrance to this.

Women migrants, especially those in the lower end informal sector occupations, remain invisible and discriminated against in the workforce.

Female migrants are less well represented in regular jobs and are on an average, paid less than male migrants and enjoy no maternity benefits. Another point to be made here is the adverse impact that a lack of access to proper sanitation has on the health of women workers.

In addition to this, another key aspect to note would be the inability of internal migrants to vote once they migrate. Since voting is linked to residence and most migrants do not possess electoral cards in their destination areas, they are often not able to exercise their right to vote unless they are present in their place of origin at the time of elections<sup>20</sup>.

Efforts to address some of these issues have been made, stated Amrita Sharma, giving instances of work done in this regard in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Some of the examples of support for migrants included skill training and placement, legal aid and counseling, financial services and social security, family empowerment programmes, etc. There has also been a launch of a helpline for workers called labour line in Udaipur, Rajasthan. This helpline involves a dedicated phone line answered by a trained counselor. The purpose of the helpline is to allow workers to reach out for counsel in case of any problems related to wages and abuse.

Experience of working with women migrants that are both internal and international in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata highlights the need for focusing on a coordinated approach across source, transit and destination sites. The experience of CARE<sup>21</sup>, as highlighted by Nabesh Bohidar, underscores the importance of specific measures, by both government and non-government actors, in making migration a safer and more positive experience. It has been possible to enable access to some schemes and entitlements, to enhanced labor rights, to enhance safer migration and remittance processes. However, challenges remain in terms of many other basic schemes, including PDS, financial inclusion, etc. It is important to underscore the role and leadership of women groups at source and destination in this process.

The Draft of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17)<sup>22</sup> recognizes the need to reach out to women migrants through initiatives such as establishing a system of registration, monitoring and accountability of placement agencies for domestic workers, ensuring portability of entitlements, extending financial services to transmit remittances and setting up for migrant resource centres to provide information on training and placement for better integration into labour markets. It has also been reiterated that there is an urgent need to fill knowledge and research gaps to incorporate gender sensitive realities and to capture multiple reasons for women's migration.

In the absence of documentary proof of identity and local residence, regulations and administrative procedures exclude migrants from access to legal rights, public services and are often treated as second class citizens. A positive step taken to address this has been seen by way of the Unique Identification Programme (Aadhar). The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) was created to issue to every resident, a unique identification number (Aadhar), linked to the resident's demographics and biometric information which they can use to identify themselves anywhere in India and to access benefits and services.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As has been mentioned above, the lack of data covering the nuances in reasons for migration proves to be a hindrance in analysis. Studying the reasons for migration as strictly for social or economic reasons, tends to gloss over the complexity of issues involved for female migration. Research shows that a mono causal approach to the reason behind migration has an inability to capture the social reality while also re-emphasizing the in-built bias with regard to women, most of whom may select familial reasons for migration. This in turn disguises and erases the multiple causes underlying a large proportion of female migration in India.

Hence, in order to improve the data collected and thereby result in a richer, better understanding of the nuances and complexities involved in studying female migration, the following recommendations are made<sup>23</sup>:

- i) Improve design, collection and reporting efforts to allow for better data to provide a good basis for informed policy making and implementation at all levels of government. It has been noted that both the NSSO as well as the Census fail to capture the magnitude, scale and types of movements occurring within India by migrants. Official data design and collection efforts must allow for more accurate recording of all motivations driving the internal migration of women and of their economic activities once they've moved.
- ii) Ensure equality of access to civil rights and social entitlements for migrants and non migrants, paying particular attention to the challenges faced by migrant women. One of the key issues discussed by scholars while studying migration has also been the inability of getting PDS and other benefits once they migrate to another city or town. PDS food ration cards also double up as documentation for other welfare schemes and entitlements is hence crucial. Official policy must allow, it is

suggested, for migrants to access subsidized rations close to their place of work rather than residence. Further, migrants, especially women migrants find it almost impossible to open bank accounts at the city / urban centres. Another related point is made for the opportunity to exercise political franchise in the destination of migrants. In many of these aspects, an Identity card, which is recognized by the source and destination governments, as well as entitles the migrant to enjoy basic services and entitlements at the destination, is important.

- iii) Prioritize the reduction of gendered vulnerabilities in the context of internal migration. It has been argued that first, efforts must be made to address gender concerns at all levels in the conceptual frame of migration, labour and social policy making. Since it is evident that it is no longer sufficient to work within a context where women are described merely as 'associational' or 'marriage' migrants, there must be a shift in paradigm to understand them as workers. Lastly, the bias surrounding the registration of women headed households must be overcome.

Hence, gender sensitive approaches need to be mainstreamed into migrant support initiatives including collection of sex disaggregated data, adoption of gender budgeting, besides increasing awareness of the rights and entitlements of women migrants and promoting and facilitating safe migration. In addition to this, attention must be paid to strengthen and improve the efficiency of schemes to ensure that services and benefits are made available to migrants in all parts of the country. To address the issues pertaining to registration of domestic workers, provision of legal protection and minimum wages, prevention of trafficking and other forms of exploitation of women and children, the National Commission for Women has drafted a bill entitled Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010<sup>24</sup>. While a step in the right direction, the proposed legislation is yet to be passed in Parliament.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Internal Migration in India Initiative 'National Workshop on Internal Migration and Human Development in India'; Workshop Compendium; December 2011 Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg 21

<sup>3</sup> Forbes Susan. 'Women and Migration', pg 13

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS). 'Gender and Migration: Negotiating Rights, A Women's Movement Perspective'.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid pg 12

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Jolly Susan, Hazel Reeves. 'Gender and Migration'; BRIDGE; pg 17-18

<sup>8</sup> Forbes pg 14

<sup>9</sup> Kaur Ravinder. 'Migrating for Work'; Poverty, Gender and Migration', Ed. Sandhya Arya, Anupama Roy, Sage, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Page 21, Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS; CARE 2011; [http://www.care-emphasis.org/report/5\\_5\\_Vulnerability%20to%20HIV%20&%20AIDS,%20A%20social%20Research%20on%20Cross%20Border%20Mobile%20Population%20from%20Bangladesh%20to%20India-%20Report.pdf](http://www.care-emphasis.org/report/5_5_Vulnerability%20to%20HIV%20&%20AIDS,%20A%20social%20Research%20on%20Cross%20Border%20Mobile%20Population%20from%20Bangladesh%20to%20India-%20Report.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Agnihotri Indu, Indrani Mazumdar. 'Traversing Myriad Trails: Tracking Gender and Labour Migration across India'.

<sup>12</sup> CWDS

<sup>13</sup> Ibid; pg 30-31

<sup>14</sup> Agnihotri 130

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pg 148

<sup>16</sup> CWDS pg 17

<sup>17</sup> Forbes, pg 4

<sup>18</sup> Ibid; pg 14

<sup>19</sup> Arya Sadhna, Anupama Roy. 'When Poor Women Migrate'. Poverty, Gender and Migration', Ed. Sandhya Arya, Anupama Roy, Sage, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Internal Migration in India: Addressing Gendered Vulnerabilities and Access to Rights

<sup>21</sup> CARE India, Solutions for Sustainable Development, draws upon experiences of two projects on Migration: REVAMP (internal migrants from UP and Bihar to Delhi) and EMPHASIS (international migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh to India).

<sup>22</sup> Internal Migration in India Initiative 'Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India'. UNESCO, June 2013

<sup>23</sup> Internal Migration in India: Addressing Gendered Vulnerabilities and Access to Rights

<sup>24</sup> Internal Migration in India Initiative 'Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India'. UNESCO, June 2013

## References:

1. Agnihotri Indu, Indrani Mazumdar. 'Traversing Myriad Trails: Tracking Gender and Labour Migration across India'. Retrieved from [http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/293/chp%253A10.1007%252F978-3-642-28012-2\\_7.pdf?auth66=1402467198\\_f3d32d13bace97ca6d20d2c927cb1b7f&ext=.pdf](http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/293/chp%253A10.1007%252F978-3-642-28012-2_7.pdf?auth66=1402467198_f3d32d13bace97ca6d20d2c927cb1b7f&ext=.pdf)
2. Arya Sadhna, Anupama Roy. 'When Poor Women Migrate'. Poverty, Gender and Migration', Ed. Sandhya Arya, Anupama Roy, Sage, 2006.
3. Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS). 'Gender and Migration: Negotiating Rights, A Women's Movement Perspective'
4. Forbes Susan. 'Women and Migration'. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/meetings/consult/CM-Dec03-WP1.pdf>
5. Jolly Susan, Hazel Reeves. 'Gender and Migration'. Retrieved from <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/cep-mig-or.pdf>
6. Kaur Ravinder. 'Migrating for Work'; Poverty, Gender and Migration', Ed. Sandhya Arya, Anupama Roy, Sage, 2006.
7. Internal Migration in India Initiative 'National Workshop on Internal Migration and Human Development in India'; Workshop Compendium; December 2011 Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). Retrieved from [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New\\_Delhi/pdf/Internal\\_Migration\\_Workshop\\_-\\_Vol\\_2\\_07.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New_Delhi/pdf/Internal_Migration_Workshop_-_Vol_2_07.pdf)
8. Internal Migration in India Initiative 'Social Inclusion of Internal Migrants in India'. UNESCO, June 2013

## Speakers at the Forum

### Panel

**Mr. Partha Pratim Mitra**, Ministry of Labour and Employment

**Ms. Indrani Mazumdar**, Centre for Women's Development Studies,

**Dr. S K Sasikumar**, V V Giri National Labour Institute

**Mr. Nabesh Bohidar**, CARE India

**Ms. Amrita Sharma**, Aajeevika Bureau

## Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

presented by



### INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES TRUST

Core 6 A, UG Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110003  
Phone: +91-11-4768 2222 Website: [www.isst-india.org](http://www.isst-india.org)

in association with



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG  
INDIA

C-20, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 016

Phone: +91 11 26854405, 26516695 Website: <http://in.boell.org>