

Strengthening Data and Research Tools on Migration and Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews available data sources for the study of migration and development through both retrospective and continuous data collection systems. It is argued that much basic data already exists for the study of international migration but that the addition of a relatively small number of simple, although not necessarily cheap measures can be taken to improve existing data. The priority is to generate flow data between countries for recent time periods and the paper makes suggestions how this can be best achieved. The paper goes on to an assessment of the types and availability of data needed to understand better the relationships between migration and development more broadly. Data at several scales, macro and micro, and for a variety of types of migration will be required in order to achieve this objective, particularly if less visible flows, such as those internal to developing countries, or those involving women, are to be better understood. The paper concludes by moving beyond the traditional state-led data-gathering systems to examine the potential for civil society organizations to help in strengthening data and research on migration and development.

INTRODUCTION

Data and research tools currently fall short in answering key policy questions about the relationship between migration and development in many areas. That this should be so is not surprising. Development policymakers have long complained of an inadequate evidence base for their

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interventions, reflecting both low research capacity in many poorer countries of the world and a “can do” attitude amongst many NGOs and other development agencies which have not often wanted to wait for the lengthy deliberations of academic researchers before acting to deliver assistance to the poor and needy. The international effort to codify what is meant by “development”, through the identification and adoption of a series of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with associated targets, has gone some way in setting out the evidence base that will be needed to measure the effectiveness of development policy (Black and White, 2004). Nonetheless, the MDGs remain politically contested and the available data to monitor them are still patchy in many countries.

MIGRATION DATA SYSTEMS

Macro-level retrospective systems

Data on migration are also problematic, their collection being complicated by myriad disputes and disagreements about definitions, and by the very mobility of the subjects of any data collection effort. This is not to say, however, that data availability and quality have not improved in recent years. The introduction of direct questions on migration into population censuses, basically the questions on birthplace, place of residence “n” years ago (generally 5 or 1), or the question on last place of permanent residence, has transformed our data on and understanding of internal migration since the 1960s. As will be discussed below, these questions can be refined and extended to provide basic information on international stocks and flows. The United Nations makes recommendations on the “best” questions to include in national population censuses (United Nations, 2008; also Skeldon, 1987)

The Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty at the University of Sussex has disaggregated the basic migrant stock data from the United Nations Population Division to provide the only complete data-set on origin-destination lifetime flows, but one in which substantial assumptions needed to be made to complete all cells in a 226x226 matrix of countries (Parsons, et al., 2007). Despite these assumptions, and the fact that the scope for a comprehensive update is limited until the next round of censuses in 2010-11, this data-set has already been used to underpin a substantial analysis of the global impact of migration on well-being (World Bank, 2006). Disaggregation

of a different sort has been carried out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on migrant stock data to generate estimates of global skilled migration, for example (see Docquier and Marfouk, 2006). The United Nations, the World Bank, and OECD are currently working with these macro data-sets to disaggregate migrant stocks by sex and age.

Thus, the basic questions to generate estimates for international migration already exist in many of the world's censuses. The principal task is to extend them to cover international migration and this is essentially a question of categorizing and coding. For example, Australia, a country with generally excellent data on migration, does not code the data on country of residence 5 years ago, even though these data are collected. Hence, it may not be so much a question of encouraging countries to collect the data in the first place but to ensure that they code the data that they do collect.

This issue of coding raises important questions. Is it in every country's interest to code data on all places of origin or places of last residence of migrants? There are 192 member states of the United Nations and a number of other territories and dependencies. Is every country expected to code to a level of three digits? Any such proposal seems unrealistic, as well as expensive. For most countries, the majority of the origin cells will be blank (how many people from Tonga can be expected to be in Togo, for example?) and some form of aggregation will be required. Even aggregating to a two-digit level will imply increased costs in data entry but, more importantly, in training specialist coders. A question may be raised why poor countries should be paying these additional costs where the benefit from the data will accrue mainly to other countries. Apart from information of the total number of foreigners within its borders, poor countries, and perhaps some not-so-poor countries, may question the value of such increased costs. Yet they are essential to the creation of a comparable international database on diasporas.

Specialized surveys provide a powerful tool to generate the detailed data required on origins and destinations of migration. Early examples include the National Migration Surveys designed for countries in the Asia-Pacific region (United Nations, 1980-84) and the global guidelines developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Bilsborrow, Oberai and Standing, 1984). Other surveys that can be used to examine development and migration include the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) that have been taken in 75 countries, funded by the United

States Agency for International development (USAID), and the Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) presently covering 34 countries and supported by the World Bank. Specialized modules focusing on migration can also be added to national labour force surveys (e.g., Ducanes, 2008).

Generally, these surveys are best suited to examining internal population movements as well as household conditions. Statistics for international migration can also be generated, although issues of sampling loom large. The origins, as well as the destinations, of migration in any country are not randomly distributed but highly concentrated in particular areas. International migrants are also a “rare element” in all but very small populations, and robust sampling methods to focus on them will be required to generate adequate numbers and representative samples. Unless adequate provision is made to bias samples towards areas of known migrant origins and destinations, spurious results are likely to be generated. A review of guidelines for improving statistics on international migration appears in Bilsborrow, et al. (1997), with the most recent assessment in the draft report of the Commission on International Migration Data for Development Research, hereafter referred to in this paper as CIMDDR (CGD, 2008).

Continuous systems

The above census and survey data-gathering instruments are all single or multiple-round retrospective methods of collecting data. The second principal data sources cover those instruments collecting the information as the migration happens through records of changing residence within country or, of most relevance to the study of international migration and development, immigration records including not just the absolute number of people entering (or leaving) a country but the type of visa issued.

Immigration records generate data on the number of people who enter and leave a country in a particular period of time. These are flow data. Unlike census data, which cover the whole population and, if well taken, should include all migrants irrespective of their legal status, immigration data generate information only on those who enter a country through a legal channel. Irregular migrants are, by definition, excluded although those who enter legally, while recorded, might stay on beyond the term of their visas and become irregular. While total numbers entering or leaving can be compared across countries, the categories are likely to

vary by the country making the classification. Categories such as “temporary worker” or “student” can vary from country to country, making direct comparisons difficult. Even the period for which the data are released vary from country to country, and calendar or fiscal year, for example. Harmonizing such data will be more difficult than in the case of the population census.

One clear feature of immigration data is that emigration data are rarely collected with the same assiduity as immigration data. Many developed economies do not make any effort to collect even the numbers, let alone types and characteristics, of those who leave their borders. The United States and the United Kingdom fall into this category despite the fact that the United Kingdom is a major country of emigration, with some 9 per cent of its population overseas, a proportion not too dissimilar to “classic” countries of emigration such as Mexico or the Philippines (see Sriskandarajah and Drew, 2006). The United States, too, is a major country of emigration, although we do not know the magnitude of the flows. The technology to count people in and out of a country clearly exists and countries such as Australia and New Zealand, almost exceptionally, do have good data on exits as well as entries. What is required is a broader willingness to accept the need to implement such systems of monitoring, on the part of governments and of the travelling populations themselves. Systems will need to be devised to filter out the short-term visitors from long-term entrants and leavers. A whole series of other administrative recording systems exist that can be mined to generate continuous data that can be employed to update on an annual basis the benchmark data generated from censuses or surveys. Work permit statistics, reports from employers and company returns, and, in destination countries, data on regularization programmes, changes in citizenship and so on can all be profitably mined to generate supplementary information to the basic data from censuses and surveys.

Other examples of migration data include the move in developed countries to build up biometric databases such as the European Union’s Schengen Information System (SIS and SISII), Visa Information System (VIS) and Eurodac, which hold significant potential to monitor flows of migrants, as well as other travellers. Numerous intergovernmental, government and academic initiatives have started to build up useful databases, nationally representative and bespoke sample surveys (including longitudinal surveys), and case-study evidence that helps in understanding the magnitude, direction and consequences of migration for individuals, households, and host and home communities.

Not all of these initiatives have been welcomed by civil society actors, or indeed by migrants themselves. Most obviously, the development of biometric databases by governments has been highly controversial in a number of countries. Elsewhere, too, there is often tacit resistance or outright opposition to attempts to collect data on migration, ranging from increasing non-cooperation of migrants (and others) with population censuses, to public campaigns against surveys from those concerned with civil liberties and the singling out of migrant and minority populations, even where such surveys may be of considerable policy value.

To summarize this first section of the paper, we reiterate the five priority steps identified by CIMDDR for urgent action (CGD, 2008):

- Inclusion by census bureaux of basic questions on country of origin (by birth and citizenship) in all new population censuses, with this data tabulated by sex, age, place of residence 5 years ago, skill level and level of education;
- Release by states of administrative data on visas, work permits and population registers in anonymized form;
- Unification by OECD of Labour Force Surveys worldwide into a single, annually updated database, building on work already completed in Europe;
- The setting of guidelines by the United Nations and Eurostat for the release of anonymized microdata from specialized surveys of migrants;
- Promotion by the World Bank and USAID of a core, standardized migration module of 10 questions in LSMS and DHS.

Perhaps a cautionary word is required on the question of citizenship. It is an important variable but it is difficult to use for the analysis of migration and should only be used as a last resort where birthplace and previous residence data do not exist. People change their citizenship and the danger exists that significant migrant populations will be omitted if this question is used. People cannot change their place of birth or their place of usual residence although, admittedly, the latter is subject to what is known as memory lapse and the quality of the data collected tends not to be as high as birthplace data. At the global level, only just over half of countries have information on place of origin or citizenship for their stock of foreign-born. Citizenship, nevertheless, is an important indicator of integration, particularly in those cases where data on changes of citizenship by original nationality are available.

DATA ON MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The remainder of this overview paper brings development rather than simply migration into higher profile and is structured around three core questions and themes: first, what kind of evidence is needed, and currently available, in order to inform migration and development policy? Second, what are the key challenges to the collection of evidence that is currently missing? And, finally, what ways forward exist for civil society actors and governments in overcoming such challenges? While not ignoring the macro-level census and survey sources previously discussed, which must remain the principal sources to generate contextual data, more micro-approaches may suggest ways in which the relationship between migration and development can best be developed or amplified.

What is the “best evidence” on migration and development?

Micro-level evidence on migration

A first interesting point to note here is the emphasis on the need for individual data at a micro-level, whether about the migration itself, or outcomes in terms of the well-being of migrants. In practice, there is much knowledge and understanding that can be generated from such microdata – still better if it is in the form of large, representative samples, or censuses that avoid sampling problems altogether. Large samples and censuses provide a ready opportunity for comparison between individuals, households and communities that are touched by migration, and others that are not. There have been a number of recent initiatives to support the collection of new microdata, not least a six-country comparative study carried out by the Institute for Public Policy Research in collaboration with the Global Development Network.

Of particular interest here are microdata that are longitudinal in nature, whether because they form a panel (as in anonymized microdata from the United Kingdom and other censuses) or because they are retrospective, as in the Mexican Migration Project (MMP). Where they are available, such data have led to some real insights into the relationship between migration and development. For example, MMP data have contributed to the publication of some 26 books, and over 150 journal articles over a 20-year period, and have allowed us to know with some confidence what influences migration, remittance flows, return movements

and circulation between Mexico and the United States. This single data source has underpinned development of a key theoretical strand of migration studies that emphasizes the significance of social networks in facilitating and channelling migration flows and subsequent transnational development (Massey, 1986; Massey and España, 1987). It has been used to describe and explain emigration and return (Massey, et al., 1987; Massey and Espinosa, 1997); to investigate the impact of migration on sending areas (Durand, et al., 1996a; Durand, et al., 1996b); and to examine the effectiveness of border controls (Donato, et al., 1992; Donato and Massey, 1993; Durand and Massey, 2003).

In turn, its “ethnosurvey” methodology has been replicated in other Latin American countries in the Latin American Migration Project. In Europe, the most recent examples are the INTAS ethnosurvey in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, carried out with European Union (EU) funds between 2005 and 2007 (Wallace and Vincent, 2007), and the “Migration from Africa to Europe” project, initiated in Senegal in 2007, and currently being extended to Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo, again with EU funding.

A key point here is the value of ethnosurveys in providing a relatively cost-effective route to the collection of longitudinal data, without which it is difficult to analyse how migration and development variables change over time, and at least partially overcome problems of endogeneity in the data. For example, in the recent revival of debates over whether climate change is at the root of major existing and potential flows of international migration (Christian Aid, 2007), the often clear association between areas of climate stress and areas of high outmigration can lead to assumptions about the role of increasingly harsh and/or variable climate in stimulating migration. Yet, in one of the few studies that has used (retrospective) longitudinal data to test associations between climate change and migration over time, Henry, et al. (2004) have challenged these assumptions. Rather, their analysis of trends in rainfall and migration over 30 years in Burkina Faso suggests that there is no association between declining rainfall and out-migration, even though rural-rural migration in the country is highest in those districts with lower rainfall over the entire period. Indeed, in the case of emigration to foreign countries (mainly Côte d’Ivoire), migration was actually found to fall in years preceded by lower than average rainfall, suggesting poor climatic conditions limit migration choices.

Contextual data, impact data

In addition to the need for good microdata on migration itself, it is clear that, in order to elaborate better policies on migration and development, good data are required on both migration and development. This is implicitly acknowledged in the report of CIMDDR (CGD 2008) in its elaboration of major policy questions that existing data cannot answer. However, the Commission's recommendations for improvements in data remained focused on migration data – in the form of specialist surveys and administrative data – rather than related contextual data on the investments and impacts of migrants.

In part, the focus of the Commission and the Global Forum itself on data on migrants and migration, rather than on the economic or other activities of migrants (e.g., investments in businesses, remittances) or the economic or political context in which migration occurs, is understandable. It makes sense that a forum involving mainly experts on migration should discuss mainly data on migration. Yet, the importance of contextual data that links with migration data is also critical if meaningful conclusions are to be drawn about associations between migration and development, or migration and poverty. Thus, for example, the availability of contextual data on rainfall and land degradation was crucial in the path-breaking analysis of Henry, et al., cited above, on links between migration and climate change in Burkina Faso, as well as associated work by Beauchemin and Schoumaker (2005) on links between development and migration; meanwhile, the compilation of time-series data sets on community-level development in Mexico has been an important element of the usefulness of the MMP data-set.

In addition, one area in which migration-related data have already improved in recent years is the field of international migrant remittances, thanks to the efforts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in collaboration with national governments and central banks to improve reporting. Not only have there been significant advances in data collection, but at the same time, there has been investment in a range of initiatives to make accessible both remittance data and resulting analyses of remittance flows – a good example being the “Remittances Information Library” funded by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, a resource that could be built upon or emulated for data on migration and development more generally.

One of the consequences of this improvement in data is that the importance of migrant remittances, and implicitly, the importance of migrants' own contributions to development, has been made visible in quite a dramatic way. It is now generally accepted that migrant remittances constitute the second largest inflow of finance to most developing countries, the highest in some cases, exceeding both foreign direct investment and development aid (Ratha, 2003). In turn, this visibility has led to a major spurt of academic attention to the causes and consequences of remittance flows to developing countries (Sander and Maimbo, 2003; King, et al., 2006; Ratha and Shaw, 2006), even if some have argued that this attention has overstated the case for the importance of remittances (Kapur, 2003) or that remittances tend not to flow to those areas of greatest need (Skeldon, 2008). Certainly, cautionary words on the uses of remittances or on the more general role that migration plays in development are not new, as evinced in the essays in Arnold and Shah (1986) and in Papademetriou and Martin (1991) on the migrations of the late 1970s and 1980s, but data today are more extensive even if they still do not form an entirely satisfactory base from which to generate definitive conclusions.

Key challenges

Three areas have been outlined in the previous sections: data on migrant stocks and flows; longitudinal microdata on migration linked to contextual data on development; and data on migrant remittances. Where good evidence has started to emerge, significant scope to improve these data remains. This section seeks to focus attention on two further areas where key challenges remain: collecting data on certain types of migration; and challenges specific to the field of remittances.

What type of migration?

Although it is true that data on migration are generally poor, variations exist in the quality of data on different types of migration. Such a narrowed focus is sometimes explicit, sometimes not: in particular, internal migration is often simply ignored in public discussions of migration and development, even though it is clearly the type of migration that most impacts on poverty and poor people. It is equally clear that some types of migration are easier to measure, and therefore better measured, than others. We identify two distinct groups: first, those who receive significant policy attention, but for whom major difficulties exist in data compilation; and, second, those who are often not visible in policy debates

but for whom data should, in principle, be relatively easy to assemble, although often they are not readily available.

Among the first group, at least three migrant populations exist about whom we know relatively little in demographic terms, even though they are a major focus of policy debates. First, there are “illegal” or “irregular” migrants, or those who either do not have official permission to live where they are living or are working in contravention of the visa or entry clearance that allowed them to move. Knowledge about the volume of irregular migration is important, both for governments and for those advocating on behalf of migrants’ rights. Some estimates of irregular migration do exist. For example, perhaps up to one quarter of Filipino migrants overseas, a country with one of the most systematic labour export programmes in the world, may be in an irregular situation (Batistella and Asis, 2003: 39). Global estimates of irregular migration are even more “spongy” but reach as high as 40 million, or 15-20 per cent of the total international migrant population (Koser, 2005).

Yet the basis for these estimates is weak, and debate continues on the best way to produce more reliable estimates. In cases where relatively good immigration records and a recent census exist, the “residual method” is often favoured. This method involves subtracting the total number of migrants in the census from the total number of legal migrants over a certain time period. However, such a method is simply not feasible in many countries where either or both of these data sources are inadequate. Even in the United States, where a degree of consensus exists amongst demographers on the size of the illegal immigrant population, web-based estimates by others still vary from 10 to 30 million, suggesting that the matter is far from settled amongst civil society at large. Meanwhile, at a global level, Angenendt (2008) compares the 40 million estimate cited by Koser, which originates in the Council of Europe, with an estimate of just 2 million produced by a similarly reputable organization, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

Second, trafficking is a recurrent theme in the debate on irregular migration and concerns exist that increasing levels of trafficking impact negatively on development. Yet our knowledge about trafficking is arguably even weaker than our knowledge of irregular migration, beset as it is by strong incentives for irregular migrants to define themselves as trafficking victims if caught by the authorities, and a tendency to recycle figures without comparison against independent sources of evidence in parts of the academic literature.

Third, much attention has been directed within the Global Forum to the development potential of the diaspora. However, here again a lack of conceptual clarity about who should be considered as part of a “diaspora” or “transnational” community clouds the debate. Certainly, this group is going to include people who are themselves migrants (in a demographic sense), as well as the “second generation”, but it is likely that states wishing to encourage diaspora investment in development will be also interested in those with a more distant relationship with their “home” country. Thus, a “Person of Indian Origin” is defined quite precisely by the Indian government as including anyone up to the fourth generation. In contrast, definitions of “Overseas Chinese” vary, but generally appear to include anyone of Chinese descent who still self-identifies with Chinese culture or acknowledges Chinese origin. No simple way to account for such poorly defined populations demographically exists and the additional questions suggested by CIMDDR and listed above would not achieve this goal even if the question on citizenship of migrants might provide some kind of indicator.

In contrast, groups also exist for which data should, in principle, be available, but where lack of policy focus has led to the same outcome: a lack of robust global or comparative national figures on which to base sensible policy developments. We will limit the discussion to just two groups, internal migrants and women migrants, although others could be readily identified.

People who move within their own state are implicitly included in the Global Forum’s discussions, yet are, in practice, frequently absent from international debates on migration and development. Estimates put their numbers far in excess of the number of international migrants, on which most efforts to improve data have focused. For example, official estimates of internal migration in China at the turn of the century stand at around 140 million (Ping and Shaohua, 2005), whilst for India similar data for 1991 suggest as many as 220-230 million internal migrants (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2005; Bhagat, 2005).

A number of issues exist in relation to the enumeration of internal migrants, not least the questions of over what distance, and what time period, people should be enumerated as migrants for comparative purposes. Such debates are long-standing in the demographic literature and will not be repeated here; however, of particular interest is movement within larger nations that is similar in physical, political and cultural distance to international migration, but which is rarely considered

comparable to international migration. A focus on India is instructive here, where some 27 million people were estimated to be inter-state migrants in 1991 (Bhagat, 2005), small compared to estimates of all internal migration in India, but still involving significant flows compared to other inter-state flows in the region.

Turning to women migrants, there is increasing attention paid to the fact that women migrate as well as men, indeed, often in numbers similar to or larger than male migration, yet analysis of flows is not always routinely gender-disaggregated. Data do exist at a global level, and for flows to major world regions, which suggest that female migration has represented at least half of all international flows since 1960, and has grown little over the subsequent period (Zlotnik, 2003). Yet aggregate data are rarely referred to in statements from a number of organizations about the “feminization of migration” (see, for example, IOM, 2008). In contrast, few data systematically analyse, for example, gender differences in the propensity to send remittances, although some recent contributions have started to address this question (e.g., Simmons and Garcia Domínguez, 2008).

Challenges relating to remittance data

A number of problems remain in terms of remittance data that also need to be considered. Concern exists that year-on-year increases in the volume of remittances reported by governments reflect less a growth in remittances themselves but more an improvement in the collection and reporting of data. This improved reporting may in part reflect an over-enthusiasm to report financial transfers as “remittances”, even though these do not always correspond with the classic image of what migrant remittances are. For example, Kapur (2003) highlights high levels of remittances from states that are major banking centres, which he argues could simply reflect high levels of money laundering. This begs the even more basic question of the definition of a remittance itself. While money sent back by a migrant in the Gulf to his or her family in the Philippines seems unquestionably a remittance, a sum of US\$1 million sent by a non-resident Indian or Viet Kieu back to a businessman brother or sister in India or Vietnam may seem closer to foreign direct investment than a remittance.

Again, little attention has been paid to financial flows in the form of philanthropy rather than simple person-to-person flows. The Action Plan arising from the 4th Biannual Regional Conference on

Philanthropy, “Diaspora Giving: An Agent of Change in Asia-Pacific Communities?” held in May 2008 in Hanoi, Vietnam, included a recommendation to “develop reliable information, through a database, on projects and organizations that promote development of communities”, an initiative that could, and perhaps should be supported by civil society rather than government. Finally, the question of reverse remittances also exists: whether monies are sent from the global south to the north to support the education of migrant children, for example.

Ways forward for civil society actors

This paper has sought to summarize some of the existing “best evidence” and “key challenges” in relation to migration data. However, an important point that has remained largely unsaid is that the need for such knowledge is clearly situated: in other words, different actors have or perceive needs for different kinds of data. For the governments of developing countries, key areas in which evidence is needed to guide policy do indeed revolve around the size and composition of migrant populations, as well as their likely impact on countries of origin. In this context, the focus of CIMDDR on basic numbers, as well as migration indicators believed to influence development such as the skill profile of migrant populations and the volume of return, circulation and remittances, is understandable.

In turn, the relative lack of focus of CIMDDR on factors that cause migration is also understandable. In a world in which migration is increasingly being seen, rightly or wrongly, as a potential resource for development, rather than as a symptom of the lack of development, developing country governments might not want the spotlight turned on factors such as poverty, inequality, or lack of economic opportunity, which underpin many, if not most, migration flows from poorer to richer countries. In addition, in a funding world where donor governments are often willing to make substantial resources available for projects designed to promote economic opportunities so that people will not migrate, or to disseminate information so that people will migrate in a more orderly fashion, the governments and agencies receiving such funding may not wish to query whether such projects are actually effective in reducing the motivations to migrate in the first place.

However, what is seen as the “best evidence” to guide migration and development policy might arguably be seen differently if viewed from the perspective of other actors. For example, for a number of civil

society actors, the causes of migration are very much an area of legitimate debate. Yet it is far from clear that the answers to questions of causation lie in the characteristics of migrants themselves, or their families or communities, compared to the characteristics of non-migrant individuals, families or communities.

Rather, a number of civil society actors, whether from the “policy” or “academic” worlds, have pointed out that the key drivers of migration lie also in destination economies and societies: the demand for low-wage labourers in sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality or domestic service, as well as demand in specific areas of skill shortage, such as health care or education. Data on such indicators of the “pull” drivers of migration are relevant to migration and development debates if only to counter the relatively simplistic notion that it is poverty that “pushes” people to migrate.

Indeed, it is important to question the assumption, also prevalent across much of “civil society”, that increases in poverty associated with climate change, food shortages and economic restructuring are likely to drive larger volumes of migration in the future. The outcomes could indeed be quite the reverse: larger numbers of increasingly poor people become trapped in poor countries where they do not have sufficient opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty.

Another important perspective from which “best evidence” to guide migration and development policy might come is that of migrants themselves, who are so often a particular group of civil society actors hardly represented at all in debates about data. From the perspective of migrants, the key evidence needed might be less about themselves as migrants, and more about the structures, institutions and actions of others that impinge on their ability to promote development through their migration experience. For example, the degree of hazardousness of journeys, and violence and exploitation, both en route and at destination, might have a substantial impact on the extent to which migrants are able to earn and save money and invest this in “development” activities in their places of origin. Yet systematic monitoring of death and injury associated with border crossing is largely limited to the Mexico-United States border⁶ and the Mediterranean border of Europe, whilst monitoring of incidents of racial violence against, or exploitation of, migrant workers remains patchy and is rarely linked to discussions of the migration-development nexus.

None of this is to suggest that a concern with improving the quality of data on flows and stocks of migrants, including standardization of census questions, increasing the public availability of microdata, or disseminating model “migration modules” within existing socio-economic surveys is not in the interests of civil society. Indeed, the focus of CIMDDR on making existing data accessible might be taken further by encouraging actors other than governments that undertake surveys on migration to make sure that these are made publicly available in anonymized format to the research community. A start could be made by non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations making a commitment that when putting new survey work out to tender, they would include a clause requiring contractors to anonymize and make public the data they collect. This would be a significant change from common practice at present, where many organizations, including civil society organizations, that commission new research insist on retaining copyright and restricting access to data.

However, it might be argued that civil society also has a particular role in advocating for types of data collection and analysis that states are less keen to see in the public domain and particularly data relating to the consequences for individuals and communities of the implementation of public policies on migration, where these consequences either promote, or leave unchallenged, violence, harm or exploitation. It is in these areas that perhaps the greatest challenges exist in terms of data and research tools, but where a debate on improvement of data has barely begun. Nevertheless, the fundamental need is still accurate information on the basic origin and destination geography of migration flows and their composition. Until such data are compiled, everything else is secondary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This composite paper is based on two separate and different presentations: one at The Global Forum on Migration and Development in Manila, 27-28 October 2008 by Richard Black and one at the Expert Meeting on Data Collection on Migration and Development in Helsinki, 1 October 2008 by Ronald Skeldon. The authors would like to thank a range of people who provided comments within and beyond these two meetings, but especially Michael Clemens.

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