

Rural-urban migration: what happens next?

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Abstract

If urban migration trend is compared worldwide, developing countries have a higher percentage. This is because the number of people added each year escalates to add more to the already increasing population. We have had countless discussions on the effect of urbanization challenges that these countries face. But how often did we ponder on the deserted rural alleys? The “pull” and the “push” factors for urban migration are discussed worldwide, where economic, social and financial sectors are often debated on. But then, the question outstands as, would there ever be “pull” factors back in the rural areas or they would continue to be tagged as “abandoned”.

The objectives settled for this discussion are first and foremost, to promote and encourage incentives that would reduce urban migration to some extent besides discovering ways that could be implied to revive these areas, so that even after major migration phases, the rural areas would not be considered inappropriate to function for the existing inhabitants. The approach is exploratory, incorporating qualitative research strategies. Scenarios from different countries are compared in the context of South Asia, where the urbanization rate seems to have reached the height. The results however are expected to have brought out ideas in for the country sides to be re-enacting, most importantly, highlighting the involvement of different actors in the process. It is expected that through these findings, we would be able to conclude that urbanization, besides being an effect of current globalization trend, with social aspects as well as the economic ones, would not always bring negative phases for rural sides of the developing countries but might as well open new opportunities for future development sectors.

A bird's eye view

The increasing urban population due to the migration trend, no longer awaits an explanation. As, David Harvey says, "From their inception, cities have arisen through geographical and social concentrations of a surplus product. Urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon, since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands (Harvey, 2008). Worldwide, rural to urban migrations are considered as a response to diverse economic opportunities. Looking back to historical evidences, this "displacement" seems to have played a significant role in the urbanization process of several countries, specifically developing nations and continues to be significant in scale. The reasons behind rural to urban migration ranges from climatic changes, demographic disparity to economic push or pull factors. Be it intentional or forced, the migrated group are not always on the greener side of the grass. Hardships, hard work and sacrificing what they could have afforded if they had not been a migrant, probably makes life a bit livable. Yet, that is questionable. The relationship between rural to urban migrations in developing countries has been viewed inversely by different concerned groups. One of the major one being the waving hands of better financial stands. Considered as economically favourable until now, migration has also experienced exceeding rates of job creation and to surpass greatly the absorption capacity of both industry and urban social services. Thus, this process is no longer viewed beneficiary for solving economic draw back in the urbanization trend.

Still, migrations happen. We, in the present urbanization trend set, are more concerned about the after effects of urbanization and how it puts a nation into a questionable status. Issues related to housing the poor, ups and downs in the labour market, even health and hygiene occurs in the discussion, making urban migration one important aspect of current globalization process. The pull factors in the urban setting are often eagerly discussed as we anticipate what attracts people to come to cities and take a chance on their fate. The push factors are also sometimes talked on, with the generous intention of exploring what initiates and enhances migration in the first place. What are left out from the discussion are the abandoned rural alleys.

Rural revival phase: A step towards no more migration?

This paper is meant to focus on the ways, which could be promoted to reduce the rate of relocation to a certain extent, besides discovering ways to revive these areas, even after major migration phases. As much as these are the objectives for this research, it is also expected that it would work as an eye opener for policy makers, who might have ignored the urgency to provide certain facilities to the rural parts of the developing countries. The reason for bringing up this issue is because; the lack of what we call "appropriateness of economic livability" in the rural areas is one factor that is argued as to be one of the main "push" factors for migrations to take

place. Probably, any counter argument regarding the rural areas for not being able to compete with the fast urbanization, would not be a stand point. We are aware of the growing population and the non- supportive labour market, which turns the table for the hopeful migrants, coming to the city for a better stand out in the future times. This could be a prolonged discussion, but we would focus on the dazed aftermath of migrations happened and happening in South Asia, instead of looking at the issue at a global “wide angled” perspective.

The research question that could be posed to the consequences of migration is formulated according to the priority of revival and reduction of migration rates. The question that needs to be answered through discussion is;

- How would it be possible to reduce the migration rate as an initiative for the revival of abandoned rural areas?

The issues to be discussed are based on the lights of some areas in the Asian context, which have faced migration to an extent and have brought themselves into the discussion sphere. What we intended to find out as an objective is the overall scenario of these migrations, what initiated the displacement, and what has it lead to.

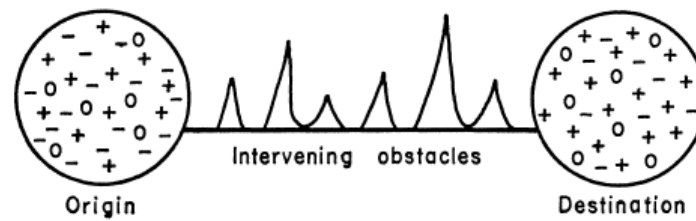
Methodology: Exploring migration literature

Migration is defined broadly as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. Any migration phase is obvious to involve an origin, a destination and intervening factors. It is not always possible to know what factors exactly initiate migration or escalate them. Although, not always accepted or understood by social scientists or affected people, there are some generalized versions of reasons and explanations from the migrating groups. A dominant strand of migration studies stresses on the rationalities of migrants. According to Harris and Torado model, migrants act according to rationality of economic self-interest, where decisions of migration are not exclusively individually taken, but are considered in the context of family and the household and ultimately migration is seen as a form of portfolio diversification by families (McDowell and de Haan,).

If we look at theories that explains and demonstrates migration trends, we would find displacement scenarios that not only suggests accumulation or detraction of population but also focuses on how and why migrations become unavoidable in certain circumstances. For this discussion, we are going to focus on how Everett S. Lee, in his “Theory of migration” explains factors (Fig: 01) in the migration process under four major headings with a frame work as a graphical explanation (Lee, 1966):

- Factors associated with the area of origin.
- Factors associated with the area of destination.
- Intervening obstacles.
- Personal factors.

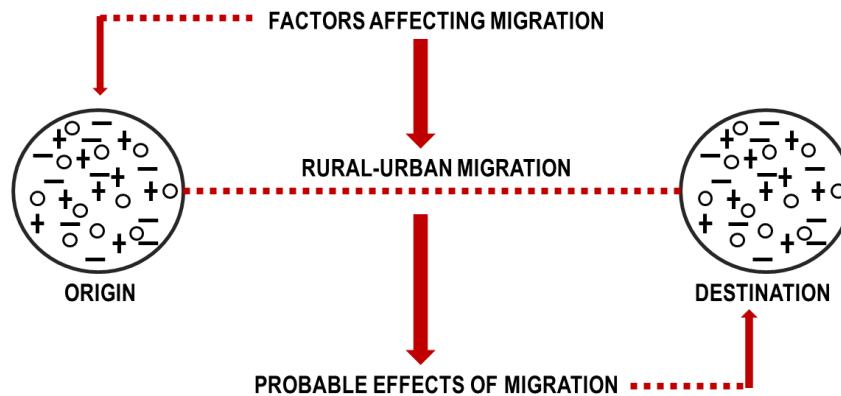
Fig 01: Origin and destination factors and intervening obstacles in migration



Source: A Theory of migration by Everett s. Lee, 1966

Figure 01 interprets situations of displacement where it is schematically depicted how countless factors attract people within an area and other factors tend to repel them, shown as “+” and “—” signs respectively. There are some other factors that people react indifferently to. Shown as “0”, this probably is one of the easiest graphical expressions of migration phase. This is used to construct a conceptual framework (Fig: 02) for this research, which also shows how Lee’s theory is combined with factors that affect migration and probable after effects of migration.

Fig 02: Conceptual framework showing migration phase

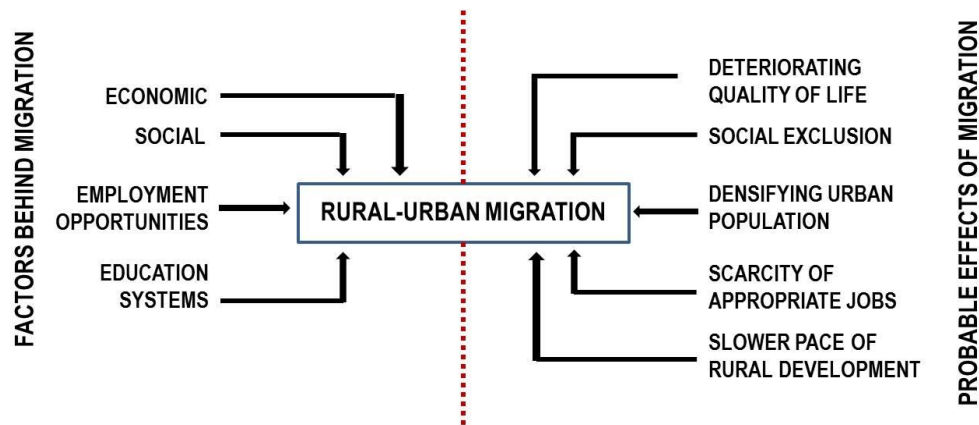


Source: Developed by author combining Lee’s migration theory

An exploratory way of finding the hidden and perceptible facts of migration and aftermath is presented for being able to actually compare the existing situation among the developing countries and how they could be either resolved or brought to a termination. In other words, this method could be stated as a comparative research strategy, where we evaluate various case studies and come to a concluding remark. The cases discussed, in a way demonstrates migration is generated by economic, social and most importantly employment opportunities, and what

migration results to (Fig 03). The consequences range from social exclusion to a deteriorated quality of life and scarcity of job sectors to a slower rural development pace.

Fig 03: Rural-urban migration in a cause and effect scenario



Source: Islam, 2014

This research is based on secondary data, which includes the case studies as main focus of discussion. This method of data collection has been based upon previous studies and records, where interpretations are made grounded on present circumstances of migration linking to comprehensive migration theories and concepts.

India: Static urbanization trend or massive migration crisis

Migration literature has come to regard rural-urban migration as one of the major contributor to the ever-present phenomenon of urban surplus labour and as a force which continues to exacerbates already serious urban employment problems (Gimba and Kumshe.). India's still strong growth in a way reflects that it remains a practically rural nation. Migrations are still happening but at a considerably slower rate, may be than that of China. In fact it might reduce more in the coming years. One of the major reasons for migration in the Indian sub-continent is the saturated Indian valleys, which are unable to provide employment opportunities for the growing population. Theirs could be termed a chain migration, because one group tends to follow the other, in the displacement process. On a further general note, as more and more people are arriving in the urban centre, the risk of having insufficient jobs and more workers chasing too few jobs persists. Even after experiencing worsened quality of life, migration rates could be seen not going down because the rural areas are yet to offer the existing group of inhabitants with sufficient job sector, technologies, business opportunities or social stability.

The effects of this sort of displacement from the source region to the destination region end up in the decreased population count in rural areas. Mostly, left with elderly groups, these areas then fall behind in the list of "could be" developed zones. The simple reason as it could be perceived

is that since more people, significantly younger generations are moving towards the urban centre, there remains no urge to have these areas developed. Female migrants have a slightly higher rate, than that of male, because besides being accompanists of the male migrants, female, especially from Northern parts of India migrate more to cities, in search of employment. The influence of economic factors however does not play a major role in any of encouraging or discouraging mobility. The concerned groups for development initiatives are most often seen unsuccessful, rather unconcerned in taking the first step. What adds more to it is the unavailability of high productivity of jobs. As a result, migration continues at its pace and ends up in creating and re-creating slums in the changing process of the cityscape.

Bangladesh: Adding more to the “most” unlivable city

As much as we talk about the urbanization of Dhaka being the capital, the fact that migration has long been an important livelihood strategy for the people of Bangladesh is very much in discussion. Every year, we find thousands of victims of impoverishment, pouring into the cities from rural areas. Others come in the hope of a better life. This happens when the population increases to an extent when securing a livelihood becomes tougher in their previous living place. Even today, both poor and better off people look over to migration as a livelihood strategy in Bangladesh. The factors behind any migration phase in Bangladesh are no different than discussed earlier. In this case, other factors that are discussed consist of natural, economic and social factors, education systems and not the least, employment opportunities.

With more and more people arriving in the urban centre, the inevitable consequence of insufficient jobs and an increase in the unemployment rate persists to an extent, where it brings a pressure on urban housing and environment as well. The high rate of population growth in the urban centers lessens the quality of life, but what is more relevant to this discussion is how it slows down the pace of development of the rural areas. As more people move in to the city centre, they leave behind alleys, yearning for development sectors to take a look at them. Now, we see a similar context as discussed earlier, where the city planners are more concerned about the urbanization effects, but might have fallen a bit behind in deciding what fate the rural areas would have in the long run, where they are falling short of resources and opportunities to have the areas developed and progressed. On a general tone, this has something to do with a government intervention. Unless they provide basic necessities and productive youth in the rural areas, people would continue to drift in to the urban zonings. They cannot be blamed since; it is a right for everyone to have a better life with employment opportunities. The rural or the sub urban areas of Bangladesh are considered as much livable places, compared to the city hustle. On the other hand, development sectors are yet to reach these corners. The scale is not balanced since, the rural areas do not prosper, despite of standing out in livability options.

Other migration phases: a generalized overview

Besides the two above mentioned, on a broad scale, South Asian countries have several cases of migration scenarios, which are often discussed. If we take a quick look at nations like China, by the recent statistics, it probably has an estimated rural-urban migrant population, almost catching up with the total population of Bangladesh. As a consequence of continuous economic growth, the past two decades has witnessed a Rapid City expansion with millions of rural migrants moving in. The rural-to-urban population movement is chiefly viewed as a reaction to the economic restructuring, and better employment opportunities in destination cities have generally been the main determining factor in the decision to migrate. For new-generation migrants, economic incentive is still unquestionably the primary motivation behind their movements.

The Philippines, however, has been adopting migration as one of the major livelihood strategies over the years. With both its positive and negative impacts on both the sending and the receiving areas, urbanization happens with a mindset of the people who thinks the grass is greener on the other side. The opportunities and facilities might make the urban life seem more stimulating, but the question lies whether the people moving out, would be able to match up that standard of life, in terms of education and competency. Rural areas are mostly characterized by isolation or lack of basic amenities, and this issue of isolation needs to be resolved, in order to solve the other backlogs in the long run. Like any other country that faces migration as one of their major urbanization aspects, the Philippines is no different, and are left with under developed areas with scopes to become technologically and socially advanced at some point of time.

Although the migration patterns have changed the faces of the country's megacities, its impacts do reach the residents of the village, left behind by their family members. With most of the migrants being men, a great percentage of women, especially young women also move in to the city. As a result, villages are increasingly populated by the elderly and the children. Surprising enough, the reasons for moving out of the villages, are not limited to earning a better amount in the end. Incentives also include helping a family member as a sign of altruistic behavior or as a willing decision to put an end to education.

What happens next: a comparative analysis

On a comparative note, migrations seem inevitable in these countries. Although there is a chance that it might reduce to a certain extent. The reasons behind it highlight the unavailability of employment opportunities, in some cases social and economic state of the migrating group. Some scenarios are similar in these contexts, including migration being one of the major livelihood strategies for years. Though migration might not be termed under "social exclusion", because it is mostly voluntary, migrants are bound to accept and experience changes in the society that they existed, and also the one they would be stepping in. The ratio of male-female

migrants is one aspect to be noticed, which we find in India, that female migrants have an existing higher rate. In both cases of Bangladesh and India and also in the overview of China and the Philippines, the tendency is mostly in the younger generation to migrate to the urban centre, in search of better opportunities.

For any urban spatial quality to be defined, it is important that the city is well planned according to regulations and that spaces are adequately distributed among the users. Migrations in a way impede this situation, since the urban areas are being occupied by the displacement of these people coming from rural parts of the country. It goes without saying that due to the lack of sufficient housing schemes and provisions, squatter settlements become obvious, henceforth questioning any planned spatial character. The socio-economic situation is something that remains the priority for any migrant to be made better. However, any city that houses excess population after a certain period of time is definite to have scarcity of appropriate job sector or education facilities to offer in the market. What happens as a result is that the problem of unemployment persists, giving rise to crime and corruption in respected sectors. Needless to say, the pace of development in the rural areas slows down, with one group leaving for the capital or big cities and the other group, left behind and with little or no resources to be applied for further development. Quality of life tends to be questioned, since whichever way the migrants plan to survive, is most certainly not enough for the number of people who migrate each week, each month and over the years. The figure below shows the factors behind migration and probable effects of migration, in a graphical way.

Rural revival: Recommendations or initiatives

Now, we take a look at what could possibly be done to sort of revive these rural areas, so that after a certain period of time, migration phases would reduce or might even stop for some developing nations. In the first place, why do people move out from the rural areas? The answers lie in the opportunities that are found in the city streets and how they kind of promise a better life to the migrants. As mentioned earlier, the government has a probable intervention to this. Firstly, the education system could be made better in the rural sides. One of the major reasons, why the younger generation moves out, is in search of better academics in the long run. Why not improve the existing educational facilities and add more to it, so that they could be depended upon, for even higher education.

Employment opportunities come in next, as a migration incentive. This could be developed as a sure thing in the rural areas. All that are required, government to provide with some employment sectors to be developed in later stages, but those could work as bread earners for many. The intention should be to invest and create options for more and more people to get better jobs, so that the pressure is lessened on the urban areas, and it is no longer necessary to move out of the comfort zone! Infrastructure development is a major sector to be focused on in order to stop or

reduce migration. With a developed infrastructure in the rural zones, people could be made to believe that there are scopes where they live, and that they could compete with urban areas in future. Surely, there are minds in the rural areas, which want to develop these areas, but are unable to do so, due to lack of encouragement and initiatives from related fields. A comprehensive step towards this would be to provide them with necessary support, be it financial or moral. Not to forget, we are looking for “pull” factors back to the rural areas, which could start with the generation of employment scopes.

Much of rural South Asia depends upon agriculture, which could be improvised by adding technological support to the existing skills. It is justified, that much of the agro-based sector has its secondary production in cities, in lack of proper and adequate technical concluding. This could be promoted in the rural areas, to make the agricultural production rural based, which is expected to make the hands and labour behind them flourish accordingly and as they deserve it. Another concept that could be added in the initiatives is Rubanisation. It is a re-conceptualization of human settlements, in which the city and countryside are considered as one single space. In this way, when we think of both these areas as one, it becomes easier to shape up the differences and develop a new spatial geometry of cohesive progress that is expected to offer viable choices for living.

The recommendations might seem fewer than the described drawbacks, but the efforts could make a bigger difference in terms of motivation and a step towards a life changing initiative for people who are victims of migration. Urbanization might be cherished by many, but if the pressure that is built on the cities and mega cities, is considered, there would be numerous hands going up in favour of “no-more urbanization, in form of migration” title. As much as the government is expected to take necessary measures, it also depends upon the inhabitants themselves, whether they want a change. No change or development is justified in an area, without the people in it being involved whole heartedly and having that keenness to achieve it. On a positive conclusion, with such enthusiasm and actions, migration rate are certain to moderate as a lift up and revival for rural areas on a broad scale.

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