

International Journal of Scientific Research and Reviews

A Survey of Literature on Seasonal out-Migration as a Survival Strategy in Rural India

Bisworanjan Behuria and Debendra Kumar Nayak

Department of Geography, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya-793022,
email: biswobehuria90@gmail.com, Phone: +91 8327781922

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the link between seasonal out-migration and adopted survival strategy in rural India. This study is concerned with socio-economic reality and concludes that migration should be seen as one of the livelihood strategies and is essential for the rural poor in absence of employment opportunities. Based upon issues related to migration in developing world, India and complex institutional factors involved in determining the process, the study finds it clear that migration is always there as an option of rural livelihood but the contribution is hidden to the society. Because of present day's crop failure and changes in many environmental factors this process has become a main source of earning for the landless poor and marginal landholders and many rural households. Earlier the rural poor adopted it as an option, but it has become a strategy to overcome poverty in a long run.

KEYWORDS: Seasonal out-migration, survival strategy, livelihood, institutional factors, marginal landholders.

***Corresponding author**

Bisworanjan Behuria

Research Scholar

North Eastern Hill University, Shillong-793022, Meghalaya, India

Email: biswobehuria90@gmail.com, Phone: +91 8327781922

BACKGROUND

Migration in general and seasonal migration in particular as a survival strategy is becoming an integral part of livelihood pursued by a large number of poor people living in agriculturally marginal areas. The important literature on migration and particularly seasonal migration has been reviewed in this survey are migration and occupational diversification, migrant characteristics, migration and community network, migration and remittances and seasonal migration as a survival strategy. The paper reviews the above portion of the literature on migration and seasonal migration in particular in the global south particularly developing countries and India and frames seasonal migration as a livelihood strategy for the rural poor. It articulates how the seasonal migration has become a survival strategy for the poor rural India during distress and adds the existing knowledge of internal migration. The aim of the paper is to see the seasonal out-migration as a survival strategy for the poor rural people in India or not. In the absence of socio-economic survey and interview method which are reliable sources, we believe that households are the appropriate unit of analysis of migration, acknowledging that the forms of households vary across time, space and socio-economic groups. This paper focusses on various forms of migration and the most often overlooked seasonal migration. Population movements, whether haphazard or ordered, are regarded as a threat to stability and challenge to established lifestyles. In much of India and South Asia, however, it is the established pattern and migration is both a strategy and livelihood option and inseparable from identity¹. This study agrees with the statement made that migration should generally be welcomed rather than seen as a problem².

Since migration is an important demographic determinant causing various socio-economic changes in the place of the source as well as the destination. Migration studies generally refer to distress driven and development driven or generalize the broad pattern into push and pull factors. Irrespective of the limitations involved in it some of these theories which continue to guide migration studies include the classical works by Ravenstein, Lewis, Lee, and Harris and Todaro and many more. Ravenstein is well known for the 'laws of migration' such as an inverse relationship between distance and migration. Many of the laws stated by him are still valid. According to this law, people migrate generally from the areas of low opportunity to the areas of high opportunity in which the choice of destination is regulated by distance. Migrants from the rural areas move first to nearby towns, and then to larger cities³. He further states that urban residents are less migratory than the rural ones and migration accelerates with growth in the means of transport and communication and with the expansion of trade and industry. In case of individual utility maximization, the decision to migrate to cities would be determined by wage differentials and the expected probability of obtaining employment expectation at the destination⁴. Lee argued that migration is due to pull and push factors

which is not questionable till date. His formulations with certain factors, which lead to spatial mobility of the population in any area, whereas each place possesses a set of positive and negative factors. The former which force migrants to leave origin areas, while the latter attracting migrants to destination areas⁵. Expected income theory or popularly known as Hariss-Todaro model, explains the decision to migrate from rural to urban centre would depend upon expected higher wages and the probability of successfully obtaining an urban job. Falling job probabilities resulting from the rising urban unemployment will be a factor for discouraging migration in a long run and the flow of migrants absolutely stops when the 'expected' urban income equals the expected rural income⁶.

Recent theories go beyond the neo-classical economics and Marxist interpretations by incorporating livelihoods and social exclusion perspectives⁷. Livelihood strategies are diverse and multiple but migration remains a central part for many poor individuals in developing countries. The approach argues that migration is one amongst the foremost parts of the support ways of individuals living in rural areas⁸. Seasonal migration has become a typical livelihood strategy of poor households that helps to swish seasonal financial gain fluctuations and earn further money therefore on supplement financial gain, that successively contribute to impoverishment reduction and development⁹.

MIGRATION AND OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSIFICATION

The occupational diversification and migration becomes an important strategy while many rural dwellers have increasingly diversified their sources of livelihoods. Twenty three case studies distributed over eastern, western and southern Africa and found that the average share of income earned in the non-farm sector was forty five per cent and most African rural households have long depended on more than one sources of livelihood¹⁰. Rural households in Mali have for decades combined farming with migration, local wage labour and sale of goods and services. There is also evidence that livelihoods are becoming increasingly diverse and were concerned with the implications of these changes in livelihoods for gender relations and, conversely, in making possible, or impeding, people's ability to construct diversified livelihoods^{11, 12 & 13}. Focusing on the links between the livelihood diversification and access to natural resources, it can provide the basis for building assets that permit individuals and households to construct their own exit routes out of poverty and it can improve the standard and sustainability of natural resources that represent key assets in rural livelihoods¹⁴. Unemployment caused by drought has led to large-scale female out-migration of rural agricultural labour to the cities in Coimbatore and Chennai¹⁵. While examining the nature, experience and implications of seasonal labour migration to major urban centers for construction purpose, it has been found that such migration has become an irreversible part of the

livelihoods of rural Adivasi communities i.e. Bhil in western India, who once practiced agriculture as their main occupation. For these people, migration is the route of upward social and economic mobility¹⁶. People migrate from rural areas to urban areas as an enhancement strategy to eradicate poverty, want to improve the assets or capitals, which they need in order to make their lives better^{17 & 18}.

MIGRANT CHARACTERISTICS

Most researches commenting on seasonal migration find the group consisting of population belonging to deprived segments of the population. Bulk of them is of young age group dominated by males and mostly illiterate¹⁹. In India, the seasonal migrants are largely belongs to socially and economically marginalized groups such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, *Dalits* and the Other Backward Classes^{20, 21 & 22}. Small and marginal farmers, people having some land and the scheduled tribes had higher migration rates in Jharkhand²³. Ethiopian rural people migrate because they lack farmland and access to land is important to rural population and it is difficult to make a living without it²⁴. Major factors driving rural people to migrate for seasonal migration are shortage of farmland, debt, lack of sufficient means of subsistence, and income desire as supplement to agricultural income. The poorest of the poor often does not have the opportunity to move because the cost of moving are too high for them²⁵. Seasonal migration is especially because of weak resources, as the tillable land is little, less fertile and dependent mostly on rain-fed cultivation. Moreover, due to inadequate farm and non-farm employment opportunities within the village, most of the households are compelled to migrate during the lean agricultural season to supplement their farm financial gain²⁶. Migrants come from a variety of backgrounds and different groups concentrate on specific occupations; migration streams are strongly segmented. They belong to various religious groups, castes and are both landless and landowners and come from a variety of districts, not necessarily the poorest²⁷.

MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY NETWORK

Migration options are not open to all and it is a selective process. Migration streams are highly segmented²⁸ and people's networks, preceding migrations and various social institutions determine, to a large extent the choice to migrate^{29, 30, 31, 32&33}. Women are more dependent on the social network in the destination area than the men. The information about potential jobs in cities or related costs can be easily shared in communities with a history of migration networks, hence reducing migration costs³⁴. While studying the health and survival strategies of Odia workers, it has been found that, in Surat there is a well-functioning recruitment system of labourers that runs on

tapping of social capital and family networks³⁵. Poorer people move shorter distances because of their limited resources, skills, networks and market intelligence³⁶. The SLAM project showed that mobility patterns are highly differentiated according to levels of income and the size and type of settlement in which they reside. Informal networks bind migrants and non-migrants together in a complex web of social roles and interpersonal relationships³⁷. Migration apart from contributing to livelihoods is part of social networks and is usually consistent with community's values and norms³⁸. Social networks help with support during personal accidents, looking for jobs, providing shelter and making the migratory process safer and more manageable for the migrants and their families³⁹.

MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES

Remittances account a substantial proportion of household income especially for the poor all over the world and play an important role in poverty reduction and economic development⁴⁰, helping to sustain rural livelihoods by preventing people from sliding further into poverty⁴¹. International migration and remittances have a strong, statistically significant impact on reducing poverty in the developing world⁴². It was used before for loan repayment and consumption but as the family became wealthier they have started investing in farming, sharecropping and leasing land⁴³. Remittances have positive as well as negative consequences on migrants and it depends upon the way remittances are used on the form and characteristics of migration and who stay behind. Remittances provide some security to the dependents of the workers who constitute the poor and landless peasantry and the families who have some land invest it to increase the agricultural productivity in Bihar⁴⁴. The pattern and utilization of remittances show that these provide much needed financial support to households located in a marginal environment suffering persistent drought and distress condition. On the other hand the effect of migration, remittances and livelihoods also points at a complex relationship in Mexico and that international migration increases inequality, whereas national migration decrease it.

SEASONAL MIGRATION AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY

The livelihood approach changes its direction from earlier narrow economics and Marxist approaches of political and institutional analysis to understand seasonal migration as one of the strategies adopted by individuals, households and communities to enhance their livelihoods⁴⁵. Survival strategies are diverse and multiple but migration remains a central component for many poor people in developing countries. It has become a common livelihood strategy of poor households which helps to smooth seasonal income fluctuations and earns extra cash so as to supplement income which in turn, positively contribute to poverty reduction and development. Seasonal and circular

migration has long been part of the livelihood portfolio of poor people across India^{46 & 47}. Migration is a part of normal livelihood strategy of the poor^{48, 49 & 50} and does not occur only during the time of stress. On the other hand while studying data from the IHD's longitudinal study in seven representative districts of Bihar it reveals that the incidence of migration, measured by proportion of households with at least one migrant member substantially increased from forty five per cent in 1998-99 to about sixty two per cent in 2011 and seasonal migration has become an increasingly important survival strategy for households in rural Bihar. The Indian village studies project in the 1970s found that unequal and not the poorest had the highest rate of out-migration. Therefore, it is likely that not only objective, inequality but also people's perception are a determinant factor.

CONCLUSION

This extensive review of the literature has been undertaken to prepare the research on seasonal out-migration as survival strategy, which looks at interrelated strategies of developing world, and particularly India. Many studies conducted on India and abroad particularly developing world highlight various aspects and magnitude of migration and seasonal migration. In this context we have not studied migration itself, but overlapped with one of the adopted survival strategy and concluded that migration as a rule rather than the exception. We believe that there is much to gain from seeing migration as one of the livelihood strategies of households, rather than isolating migration events. Particularly the role in improving the socio-economic status of a poor household cannot be ignored which pulls out of poverty. Whereas, a very large chunk of the population, especially the depressed segment faces food insecurity and sustainable means of livelihood forcing them to adopt seasonal migration as a survival strategy to overcome the problems of food insecurity.

The review on migration literature and particularly seasonal migration should not be discouraged rather it should be encouraged. The process of seasonal labour migration to the cities in a long run pulls many out of poverty and plays a significant role in building the assets of poorer rural households. It should be welcomed in the migration origin as well as in destination place. In future there should be an introduction of migration identity card so that during any crisis or physical harassment they will be able to get help at the migration destination place. After thoroughly observed these particular issues, this study opined the seasonal labour out-migration will become as the primary earning source for the landless or marginal landholders and marginalized sections of few pockets of India in recent future. Though migrant population was recognized as one of the vulnerable populations along with indigenous, local children and populations with disabilities and out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) three goals namely, Goal 8 'Economic Growth and Decent Work', Goal 10 'Reduce Inequalities within and among Countries' and Goal 17 'Global Partnership'

which deals with migration and migrants. In future, these vulnerable groups need to be protected through suitable policy and planning.

REFERENCES

1. McDowell, C., & De Haan, A. Migration and sustainable livelihoods: A critical review of the literature. IDS Working Paper 1997;65: 1-29.
2. Green, R. H. Food security in refuge and return: some aspects of entitlements, markets and modalities. In C. McDowell & M. Cerena. *Reconstructing Livelihoods: New Approaches to Resettlement*. Oxford: Berghahn. 1996.
3. Ravenstein, E. G. The laws of migration. *Journal of the statistical society of London*. 1885; 48(2):167-235.
4. Lewis, W. A. Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour. *The Manchester School*. 1954; 22(2): 139-191.
5. Lee, E. S. A theory of migration. *Demography*. 1966; 3(1): 47-57.
6. Harris, J. R., & Todaro, M. P. Migration, unemployment and development: a two-sector analysis. *The American economic review*. 1970; 60(1): 126-142.
7. Deshingkar, P., & Start, D. Seasonal migration for livelihoods in India: Coping, accumulation and exclusion. London: Overseas Development Institute. 2003; 3.
8. Kothari, U. Migration and chronic poverty. Manchester: Institute for Development Policy and Management: Chronic Poverty Research Centre. 2002; 16
9. Ellis, F. *A Livelihood approaches to migration and Poverty reduction*, 2003
10. Reardon, T. Using evidence of household income diversification to inform study of the rural nonfarm labor market in Africa. *World development*. 1997; 25(5): 735-747.
11. Bryceson, D. F., & Fonseca, J. Risking death for survival: Peasant responses to hunger and HIV/AIDS in Malawi. *World Development*. 2006; 34(9): 1654-1666.
12. Ellis, F. *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford university press. 2000.
13. Francis, E. Gender, migration and multiple livelihoods: Cases from Eastern and Southern Africa. *Journal of Development Studies*, 2002; 38(5): 167-190.
14. Ellis, F., & Allison, E. *Livelihood diversification and natural resource access*. Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia. 2004.
15. Sundari, S. "Migration as a livelihood strategy: a gender perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2005; 2295-2303.

16. Mosse, D., Gupta, S., Mehta, M., Shah, V., Rees, J. F., and Team, K. P. "Brokered livelihoods: Debt, labour migration and development in tribal western India." *Journal of Development Studies*, 2002; 38(5): 59-88.
17. de Haan, A. *Migration and Livelihoods in Historical Perspective: A Case Study of Bihar, India.* *Journal of Development Studies*. 2002; 38(5): 115-142.
18. Thieme, S. *Social networks and migration: Far West Nepalese labour migrants in Delhi.* LIT Verlag Munster. 2006; 7
19. Ali, Z., & Sharma, S. *Migration trends from coastal and western Odisha: A study of migration incidence and issues.* *Studies, Stories and Canvas: Seasonal Labor Migration and Migrant Workers from Odisha.* 2014.
20. Srivastava, R., & Sasikumar, S. K. *An overview of migration in India, its impacts and key issues.* In *Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia.* 2003; 22-24.
21. Keshri, K., & Bhagat, R. B. *Temporary and seasonal migration: Regional pattern, characteristics and associated factors.* *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(4): 81-88.
22. National Commission on Rural Labour (NCRL), 1991. *Reports of the Study Group on Migrant Labour*, GOI, Ministry Of Labour, New Delhi. 2012; 2.
23. Dayal, H., & Karan, A. K. *Labour migration from Jharkhand.* Institute for human development, New Delhi. 2003.
24. Fosse, T. E. *Migration and livelihoods: The voluntary resettlement program in Ethiopia.* 2006.
25. Zeleke, G., Asfaw, W., Tolosa, D., Alemu, B., & Trutmann, P. *Seasonal migration and rural livelihoods in Ethiopia: An empirical study.* Technical report, Working Paper Series on Rural-Urban-Linkage Theme of the Global Mountain Program, Working Paper 3. Lima, Peru: Global Mountain Program. 2008.
26. Rani, U., & Shylendra, H. S. *Seasonal migration and rural-urban interface in semi-arid tropics of Gujarat: Study of a tribal village.* *Journal of Rural Development-Hyderabad*, 2001; 20(2): 187-218.
27. de Haan, A., & Rogaly, B. *Introduction: Migrant workers and their role in rural change.* *Journal of Development Studies*, 2002; 38(5): 1-14.
28. Gazdar, H. *A review of migration issues in Pakistan.* *Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Bangladesh, DFID.* 2003.
29. de Haan, A. *Livelihoods and poverty: The role of migration-a critical review of the migration literature.* *The journal of development studies*, 1999; 36(2): 1-47.

30. Roberts, K. D. China's "tidal wave" of migrant labor: What can we learn from Mexican undocumented migration to the United States? *International Migration Review*, 1997; 31(2): 249-293.
31. De Neve, G. Expectations and rewards of modernity: Commitment and mobility among rural migrants in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 2003; 37(1-2): 251-280.
32. Mallee, H. In defence of migration: recent Chinese studies on rural population mobility. *China Information*, 1995; 10(3-4): 108-140.
33. Lipton, M. Migration from rural areas of poor countries: the impact on rural productivity and income distribution. *World development*, 1980; 8(1): 1-24.
34. Taylor, J. E., Rozelle, S., & De Brauw, A. Migration and incomes in source communities: A new economics of migration perspective from China. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 2003; 52(1): 75-101.
35. Sharma, V., Saraswati, L. R., Das, S., & Sarna, A. *Migration in South Asia: a Review*. Population Council. 2015.
36. Deshingkar, P., & Grimm, S. *Voluntary internal migration: An update*. London: Overseas Development Institute, 2004; 44.
37. Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education. 2013.
38. de Haan, A. *Migrants, livelihoods and rights: the relevance of migration in development policies*. 2000.
39. Deshingkar, P. Understanding the implications of migration for pro-poor agricultural growth. In DAC POVNET Agriculture Task Group Meeting, 2004; 17-18.
40. Adams Jr, R. H., & Cuecuecha, A. Remittances, household expenditure and investment in Guatemala. *World Development*, 2010; 38(11): 1626-1641.
41. Deshingkar, P. Internal migration, poverty and development in Asia: Including the excluded. *IDS Bulletin*, 2006; 37(3): 88-100.
42. Adams Jr, R. H., & Page, J. Do international migration and remittances reduce poverty in developing countries? *World development*, 2005; 33(10): 1645-1669.
43. Deshingkar, P., Kumar, S., Chobey, H. K., & Kumar, D. *The role of migration and remittances in promoting livelihoods in Bihar*. Overseas Development Institute, London, 2006; 1-47.
44. de Haan, A., & Rogaly, B. *Labour mobility and rural society*. Routledge. 2015.
45. de Haan, A., & Rogaly, B. Introduction: Migrant workers and their role in rural change. *Journal of Development Studies*, 2002; 38(5): 1-14.

46. Rao, N., & Rana, K. Women's labour and migration: the case of the Santhals. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1997; 3187-3189.
47. Srivastava, R. C., & Ali, J. Unskilled migrants: their socio-economic life and patterns of migration. 1981.
48. Aw-Hassan, A., A. Mazid & R. La Rovere. *Understanding Poverty and Development in dry areas: the Khanasser Valley integrated research site in Syria*. The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Caravan, 2002.
49. Abdelali-Martini, M., & Hamza, R. How do migration remittances affect rural livelihoods in dry lands? *Journal of international development*, 2014; 26(4): 454-470.
50. Rovere, R. L., Aw-Hassan, A., Turkelboom, F., & Thomas, R. Targeting research for poverty reduction in marginal areas of rural Syria. *Development and Change*, 2006; 37(3): 627-648.