The Impact of Migration of Children in Developing countries

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Notes by Heather Joshi

While in principle migration has benefits as well as costs (probably even on balance or it wouldn’t occur) the ‘gain’ for the mover may only by the avoidance of harm, the people left behind may or may not gain, and nor may those who were already at the destination. Movers themselves may not have much to gain, particularly if they are trailing the primary mover, and moving has costs particularly in the short term.

Rossi’s paper is about the impact of migration, South to South, on children who move or are left behind. It does not include within its already ambitious terms of reference, impacts of migration on people, or children, who are not ‘migrants’ (or in non-migrant households) in areas of destination. It points out the inadequacy of static definitions of the household in situations of fluidity of families across residences, which occurs almost by definition in many migration streams. Even if nuclear families move en bloc, extended families seldom do. Another challenge for analysis which it acknowledges is to allow for the selectivity of migration even if quantitative datasets were more adequate, people who actually move are likely to have characteristics, or character which distinguish them from people who don’t or can’t but which are not easily measured in quantitative data.

One type of ‘residential’ mobility seems to be excluded for the international definition - young people’s moves for education. An educational motive can take unaccompanied
young persons across international boundaries as well as within countries, and could be a major source of benefit to the mover, and any family members who eventually benefit from remittances or subsequent migration, not to mention gains to whatever economy the educated person eventually works in. The pros and cons of being fostered in a non-parental household are considered, but not other arrangements for students.

The paper touches on the impact of migration on fertility. If the migration stream is such that it delays fertility, reduces family size of increases birth intervals, those offspring of migrants who are born, whether they are left behind, or taken along, may have some gains over and above the counter-factual family building scenario in the absence of migration (but on the other hand there may be advantages in having more siblings). If migration of youth delays or averts entry to adolescent parenthood, it could be argued to bring benefits to those whose parenthood is postponed, as well as their eventual children. Another demographic consequence of migration could be to affect the formation of partnerships or marriages, not only in its timing, but who partners with whom, and and the balance of ‘power’ within partnerships. This would affect the biographies of movers compared to non-movers, and may also impact on their children, particularly if it brings them into a cross-cultural setting. Any such effects are, as will many others discussed in the review, likely to be context-specific. It will be a challenge to our discussions to see how far comparisons can lead to generalization or to lessons about why contexts differ.