The Economic Issues of Rural to Urban Labor Migration: A Study on Gambella Region of Ethiopia

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Abstract: Migration, is defined in various literatures as the relocation of individuals from the place of origin to place of destination due to certain economic and social issues. These issues can be due to the knowledge of the individual regarding the demand for human capital in the place of destination, little or no earning to sustain the livelihood in the place of origin and fully reliant on agricultural earnings. This can arise because of the regional imbalances in development between the place of origin and destination. Many factors like socio, economic and political factors can have an impact on the migration but the impact of economic factor seems to be more.

Introduction

Migration, is defined in various literatures as the relocation of individuals from the place of origin to place of destination due to certain economic and social issues. These issues can be due to the knowledge of the individual regarding the demand for human capital in the place of destination, little or no earning to sustain the livelihood in the place of origin, fully dependent on agricultural earnings. This can arise because of the regional imbalances in development between the place of origin and destination. Many factors like socio, economic and political factors can have an impact on the migration but the impact of economic factor seems to be more. This movement of individuals is a great problem in the rural as well as urban areas. The rapid shift of population from rural to urban areas will lead to worsening economic conditions in the rural areas, leading to persistent poverty and food diffidence. The reason is that the majority of the rural young population chooses to migrate leaving the older people to take part in the agricultural and related activities. Gambella is a region in Ethiopia which faces the problems of migration from rural to urban areas on a large scale and it is found to be ruthlessly upsetting the economic progress of the region. The researchers would like to throw light on the above problem and the main objective of the study will be to identify the major economic factors which force the people to migrate from the study district.

The Reasons for Migration:

Migration can be seen as a part of normal livelihood process, where poor people move from one place to other to meet the basic survival needs. Many people move to those places where work can be found and thus the movement becomes voluntary. But voluntary movement is not the normal case all the time. Sometimes people forced to move from place of origin because of the political factors. Initially the movement remains temporary, but that may become permanent in nature if the situation does not improve.

Economic factor is one of the important determinants of rural – urban migration. It is considered as both push as well as pull factor of migration. It is push factor in the sense that people tend to move from under developed rural sector to well-developed urban sector, because of lack of economic opportunities as well as access to resources which they can use for more productive purposes. On the other hand, it is a pull factor in the sense that since the urban sector is better developed as compared to rural counterpart, chances of getting employment, access to resources are high. The other aspect can be directly linked to the higher dependency on agriculture. Due to seasonal nature and high uncertainty in agricultural production, income of those individuals (mostly marginal labors and land less laborers, who do not own any land) related to agricultural

This uncertainty in income forced them to think for some alternative source of earnings, at least during lean period so that they can earn sufficient amount of money for their survival needs. The first comprehensive analysis on rural – urban migration, we can get in Lewis model (1954). The Lewis phenomenon of rural – urban migration was dominated by the fact that, there is a surplus labor market in the rural sector. It also highlights the fact...
that to take the opportunity in the urban areas, an individual should possess some human capital which will become essential to take a migration decision. This is because employers in the industrial sector expects a minimum level of educational qualification to fit for the job and these educated people can involve themselves more in job search activities in the urban sector.

Further in the Lewis Model of rural – urban migration, we found that Lewis has identified two different sectors – agricultural sector, characterized by little capital, large labor force and fixed supply of land, and industrial sector, termed as modern sector where capital could be accumulated and labor can be absorbed as and when required. Due to economic improvement it is the industrial sector rather than agricultural sector will develop rapidly. This will bring more capital accumulation and hence demand for labor will increase. This extra demand for labor can be met with the help of surplus labor force in the rural sector. Thus the basic understanding of the Lewis model, point out that, due to development differential between industrial sector and traditional sector, there will be a difference in terms of wage. This expected wage differential will attract underemployed or unemployed rural youth from rural areas to urban areas. So, it is implicit in the model that because of this wage difference rural – urban migration happens. It ignores the influence of social, cultural and political dimensions of rural – urban migration.

In their study Dubey, Jones & Sen (2004), highlighted that the key prediction of Lewis model that rural – urban migration happens areas where there is a surplus labor, is true. Moreover, this kind of migration is mostly caste selective. According to them this caste system operates as a ‘surrogate network’ for employers in the city. This is because urban employers try to depend on their existing labor force to get extra labor from rural counterpart as these labors provide reference of those prospective laborers who belongs to the same caste in their locality. Yamauchi & Tanabe (2003), on the other hand argued on the same line that probability of getting suitable job in the urban area depends on vast network of people belongs to the same origin. But this may affect negatively to prospective migrants if they compete for the same job in the urban sector. However, in some research it was pointed out that the poor people are so poor that they do not possess the minimum amount of funds necessary to make the move from village to the city.

The model developed by Aroca, Hewings &Sonis (2002), pointed out that rural – urban migration becomes inefficient if migrants do not have access of borrowing funds or own funds. They categorize the prospective migrants into three different classes. First group represent those workers who migrate as and when they decided to do so, because they are able to finance the moving cost. Second group represent those workers who first save and arrange the moving cost and then take a decision to migrate. The third group, is not able to migrate (although they are willing to do so), because they are not in a position to arrange the moving cost. On the same line Kabir& Seeley (2008), in their empirical work covering rural areas of Murshidabad in West Bengal and Gaibandha in North – Western Bangladesh, found that people belongs to extremely poor category are unable to move. In their study they divided total sample (444 respondents) into four different classes, viz. rich class, middle class, poor class and extreme poor class to find out the status of migration.

It is quite obvious that poor people who do not have land of their own and belongs to the lower social class are unable to move. Simultaneously their agricultural income during lean period is also deteriorating which makes them more vulnerable in the rural set up, thus exclude them from social amenities. Exclusion means denial or not providing basic facilities to poor segment of the society although they are entitled for that under normal circumstances. Prof. Amartya Sen pointed out two important dimensions of social exclusion, viz. “Unfavorable Exclusion” and “Unfavorable Inclusion”. In the first case, some people intentionally left out from the basic services. Whereas in the second case, people do include in the social and economic activities but terms and conditions are not favorable, often treat them unequally in terms of wage, working hours, living conditions etc. This group of people although included growth process but this inclusion is not sufficient enough to maintain the standard of living in a specific society.

So, when an individual migrate to his nearest urban location for better opportunities, they also face the same situation. They migrated to a place of destination with the expectation that, this choice will increase their standard of living. But they, often, misjudge the cost of living in the urban location and most of the time they landed up in urban informal sector jobs. This situation can be termed as “Unfavorable Inclusion” which is explained above. The Harris – Todaro’s Model also explains the reason behind rural – urban migration. The model highlights on the fact that, rural – urban migration happens because of the difference in wage between urban and rural and the probability of finding a job in the urban sector. But the probability of getting a job in the urban sector depends on rate of job creation in the urban areas and this again depends on the industrial growth of that area. This also leads to the
conclusion that more unemployment may be created as more job opportunities increase the level of migration.

But the H – T Model is not a full proof model as some of its limitations can’t be matched with the real life situation. The assumption that the migrants have full information about the nature of jobs that they are expected to get and the potential migrants are risk neutral, is not practical (Sridhar, Reddy, Srinath). The ground reality is that most of the migrants are risk averse, since they try to maximize their gain from migration in the form of higher wages and better standard of living, which they are not getting in the rural areas. If this is not going to happen after migration, then entire decision will become a poverty trap for them.

Scope of the Study

For the past few years it is found that the Ethiopian economy is under a severe and consistent problem of rural to urban migration. Gambella region is one of the highly affected regions due to the following reasons. This region is the destination of the people from Sudan who seek amnesty in the rural areas due to the civil war that is going on in that region. It is one of the regions in Ethiopia which is situated far away from the capital Addis Ababa and depends heavily on road transport to bring the products. The region hosts many regional and zonal officers apart from many Non Governmental Organizations having their presence. All these activities tend to increase the cost of living in this area and the people in rural areas are highly vulnerable to the price shocks and the incidence of migration of people seeking employment from the rural areas are very high.

Research Objective:

The present study would like to identify the major economic factors which force the people to migrate from the study region – Gambella in Ethiopia.

Research methodology:

Sample Respondents:

The sample respondents are the migrants who are migrating from the study district for economic reasons only.

Sampling Technique:

For the present study judgmental sampling technique is applied. Since, the research is being conducted on migrants who are migrating for economic reasons only, other factors are excluded. Thus, to get the appropriate response it has been decided to go for this type of sampling technique.

Sample Size

For the present study it has been decided to collect approximately 300 sample respondents and the questionnaires are distributed with the help of surveyors to get the desired result.

Variable Identification

Identification of variables is very important as it will provide meaningful conclusion to the research. In this study 12 variables have been identified with the help of review of literatures.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is an important instrument to conduct a primary study and for this purpose adequate care has been taken to make the questionnaire foolproof. The questionnaire has been divided into two parts. Section A of the questionnaire deals with the basic demographic variables related to migrants and section B of the questionnaire deals with the main research variables as identified through review of literatures. For the second part of the questionnaire a 5 point Likert scale has been incorporated to know the response of the respondents.

Analysis

The study has been conducted based on 145 respondents. The respondents are asked to give their responses against each of the 12 variables identified through literature review. The 5 point Likert scale has been used to know the degree of agreement to disagreement. The weight of the scale is described below:

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

A simple rank order table has been prepared to know which factor influences most in terms of decision to migrate from rural areas to urban areas. The response is shown in the table below where total score has been calculated by multiplying the respective weights with the number of responses and the result has been added to get the ranking.

Economic Factors Affecting Rural to Urban labor Migration Decision
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Variable 1: Lack of finance from government controlled banks does not give you adequate opportunities for nonfarm activities, which compels you to migrate</td>
<td>80 92 33 30 14 249</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Variable 2: Number of dependent family member is very high, which require extra source of income</td>
<td>165 96 21 20 5 307</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Variable 3: You are migrating to locate better market for farm products</td>
<td>90 124 30 22 9 275</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Variable 4: Remittances send by you help family members to increase asset base</td>
<td>75 136 33 28 5 277</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Variable 5: Migration gives you better job opportunity and better income</td>
<td>110 116 21 22 10 279</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Variable 6: Remittances send by you help family members to overcome credit constraint</td>
<td>135 88 45 28 1 297</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Variable 7: It reduces the risk of income loss during the lean period of agriculture</td>
<td>90 112 45 18 9 274</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Variable 8: Strict repayment mechanism of micro credit institutions forces you not to take loans from them, but to migrate to earn</td>
<td>105 64 60 30 7 266</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Variable 9: Remittances send by you is used to avail better healthcare facilities which motivates you to migrate</td>
<td>135 120 18 16 8 297</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Variable 10: Increased income from migration helps you to pay school fees of your children/siblings</td>
<td>140 120 33 10 5 308</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Variable 11: You have less land to earn sufficiently for your family, this compels you to migrate</td>
<td>110 84 42 30 7 273</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Variable 12: You would like to get training which you can implement to start your own business &amp; migration gives that training opportunity in urban location</td>
<td>215 100 18 4 3 340</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table given above, it is understood that most of the people from rural areas of Gambella migrate in order to get training to start their own business and are of the opinion that migration gives them the opportunity to get trained in their area of interest. It is also understood that they migrate to increase their income and pay the school fees of their children.

One another reason for rampant migration is that the number of dependent members is very high and migrating to the urban areas will help them to get more income to feed all the members of the family as well as the extended family members. According to our respondents, the rural-urban migrants remit any or all of the food, money, and clothing to their rural households of origin.

Most of the respondents were facing problems with borrowings and they had to migrate to the urban areas to repay the loan. The other reasons include improved health care facilities, good job opportunities resulting in increased
income and the interest in increasing their asset base seems to be major contributing factors for the people in rural areas to migrate.

It is observed that the majority of the respondents gave little importance to their agricultural activities and marketing of their farm products in the urban areas. It is learnt that in spite of the measures taken by the government to give micro credit to the farmers they do not take farming seriously and try to migrate to urban areas where the promises of a better life attracts them.

**Conclusion and Recommendation:**

Rapid migration leads to the problem of urbanization. It is generally believed that urban centres provide jobs, good education and health care facilities and other services more efficiently and effectively as compared to non urban areas. Migration is global phenomenon, normally considered as a survival strategy of the poor people when they have lack of income generating opportunities in their own place. The study has raised some important dimensions which the policy makers should take into consideration.

Having quantified the effects of rural-urban migration in the various parts of the study area, it is expected that the findings of this study will make it easy for government, NGOs, policy makers, and so forth to initiate appropriate development interventions to augment the contributions of rural-urban migration in the area. Second, governments at Federal and State levels should ensure that social infrastructures are put in place in the rural areas so as to improve the quality of life of the population. Consequently, skills acquisition centers should be established in different parts of the study area. These centers would be used to inculcate self-sustaining skills in the youth, at the same time providing them with employment and helping to stem the tide of rural-urban drift.

Finally, concerted effort should be directed towards improving the agriculture capacities of the rural populations since agriculture is their main source of livelihoods. It can be seen that despite several measures like skill development and financial inclusion, certain portion of the rural poor are still out of reach of these government provided services and thus depending on agriculture alone to maintain the livelihood. Even there also development has not been witnessed so far. A uniform development approach in agricultural sector is still missing. The point to be noted is that only implementing various programs will not be effective until and unless the same is monitored properly. If their agricultural capacities are improved, it will translate to increased agricultural produce and ultimately reduce the dependency of the rural households on remittances for survival. A policy need to developed in this regard otherwise this problem of migration will surely affect both the rural economy and the urban economy as well.

It should be noted these this recommendations are not exhaustive but as noted earlier more appropriate ones can be added based on the unique nature of the area concerned. However, if diligently executed, these recommendations will go a long way in augmenting the contributions of rural-urban migration towards socioeconomic development of the study area.

**References:**

1. AbdurRafique, Deeptima Massey & Ben Rogaly (October 2006), Migration for Hard Work: A Reluctant Livelihood Strategy for Poor Households in West Bengal, India; Working Paper T 11, University of Sussex, UK.


4. AKM Ahsan Ullah (2003), Bright City Lights & Slums of Dhaka City: Determinants of Rural Urban Migration in Bangladesh, Dept. of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong.


15. Clare Waddington (December 2003), Livelihood Outcomes of Migration for Poor People; Working Paper T – 1, Sussex Centre for Migration Research.


Annexure I (Questionnaire):

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
GAMBELLA UNIVERSITY
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REASONS OF RURAL TO URBAN LABOR MIGRATION: A STUDY ON GAMBELLA REGION OF ETHIOPIA

Dear Respondents, we assure that the information given to us will be kept confidential and will be used exclusively for the purpose of this research.

1. Name of the Respondent :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Place of Origin (Woreda) :</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4.  | Place of present stay :
| 5.  | Lack of finance from government controlled banks does not give you adequate opportunities for nonfarm activities, which compels you to migrate (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 6.  | Number of dependent family member is very high, which require extra source of income (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 7.  | You are migrating to locate better market for farm products (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 8.  | Remittances send by you help family members to increase asset base (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 9.  | Migration gives you better job opportunity and better income (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 10. | Remittances send by you help family members to overcome credit constraint (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 11. | It reduces the risk of income loss during the lean period of agriculture (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 12. | Strict repayment mechanism of micro credit institutions forces you not to take loans from them, but to migrate to earn sufficiently for your family (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree
| 13. | Remittances sent by you is used to avail better healthcare facilities which motivates you to migrate (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Neutral (d) Disagree (e) Strongly disagree

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15. Increased income from migration helps you to pay school fees of your children/siblings
   (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree
   (c) Neutral (d) Disagree
   (e) Strongly disagree

16. You have less land to earn sufficiently for your family, this compels you to migrate
   (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree
   (c) Neutral (d) Disagree
   (e) Strongly disagree

17. You would like to get training which you can implement to start your own business & migration gives that training opportunity in urban location
   (a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree
   (c) Neutral (d) Disagree
   (e) Strongly disagree