5-3

Migration in Rural Burkina Faso

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Executive Summary

Migration plays an important role in development and as a strategy for poverty reduction. A recent World Bank investigation finds a significant positive relationship between international migration and poverty reduction at the country level (Adams and Page 2003). Burkina Faso, whose conditions for agriculture are far from favorable, has a long history of migratory movement, and migration within West Africa has long taken place in response to drought and low agricultural productivity. In recent decades, migration to destinations outside the African continent and in particular to Western Europe has become more important for migrants from Burkina Faso.

Migration can be considered a livelihood diversification strategy because remittances resulting from migration constitute an income source that is uncorrelated with household income from agriculture. Migration affects the sending household in three ways. First, when a household member migrates, the household loses labor. Second, migration often results in remittances. Third, migration implies a reduction in household size for consumption. It is likely that both motives for and consequences of migration will differ by whether the destination is within Africa or outside Africa. Migration to destinations outside Africa is expensive in terms of transport costs but generates a comparatively high level of remittances for the household.

This case study discusses the determinants and consequences of migration for households in four villages situated on the Central Plateau of Burkina Faso. Two forms of migration are distinguished: migration within Africa (continental migration) and migration to a destination outside Africa (intercontinental migration). A critical question is what happens to the welfare of rural households when they engage in either form of migration. When households lose labor, it may be harder for them to participate in and generate income from other activities such as agriculture. Remittances may partly compensate for these negative effects. In addition, a reduction in household size means less consumption pressure on the household.

Considering the welfare impacts of both forms of migration and the wider policy environment, your assignment is to consider how policy could be directed toward enhancing the role of migration in local development.

Background

Burkina Faso is a poor, landlocked country situated in the West African semi-arid tropics. With a population of around 12.1 million people, Burkina Faso is one of the most densely populated countries of the West African Sahel (World Bank 2005). For the majority of the population, agriculture forms the main source of subsistence. Conditions for agriculture are far from favorable, however, in most of Burkina Faso. It has a limited resource base and an unfavorable climate with unreliable rainfall. In addition, land degradation is a predominant feature. Performance on social indicators (such as life expectancy and education) is poor even by African standards (World Bank 2003).

The growth performance of Burkina Faso shows year-to-year fluctuations mainly due to the prominence of rainfed agriculture (IFAD 2001). The focus of development efforts has long been the agricultural sector. Given its importance in terms of employment and export revenue, it was thought to be difficult to achieve economic growth and standard of living improvements without agricultural growth (Asenso-Okyere et al. 1997). Severe droughts (1972–1973 and 1983–1984) have affected agricultural production in Burkina Faso in the past several decades, and actual crop yields are still low compared with potential yields (IFAD 2001). Poor households commonly have diverse sources of livelihood to deal with income risk and to achieve food security in adverse conditions. Recently, migration has been recognized as a development pathway for less-favored areas, which constitute a large part of Burkina Faso (Ruben and Pender 2004).

The analysis of the determinants and consequences of migration for rural households in Burkina Faso has been carried out in four villages in the country's central region (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Location of the Study Villages

Two villages, Boussouma and Korsimoro, are situated in the northern part of the Central Plateau in the province of Sanmatenga. They were selected on the basis of their accessibility; both are situated on the main northbound road from the capital, Ouagadougou. The other two villages, Niaogho and Béguédo, are situated in the southern part of the Central Plateau in the Boulgou province. The location of these villages is relatively isolated.

The intensity of soil occupation is much higher in the Central Plateau than in other regions and is particularly high in the regions where the survey villages are located, among other places (Djiguemdé 1988). High population density is said to have led to a saturation of space in the Central Plateau. In addition, lands on the Central Plateau are generally overexploited and degraded (Brasselle et al. 2002; Breusers 1998; Reyna 1987).

In the four study villages a random sample of 223 households was used as the basis for the analysis. Households in the four villages often contain extended families, and the average resident household contains 12 members, of whom between 58 and 64 percent are active. Cropping is the main primary activity for the majority of active household members. All households were found to engage in the cultivation of staple crops, mainly millet and sorghum. A number of households engage in horticulture on the riverside (Niaogho and Béguédo) or on irrigated plots (Boussouma and Korsimoro).

Migration generally involves men with an average age at the time of departure of 25–26 years. For migrants from Niaogho and Béguédo, Europe (primarily Italy) is an important destination, whereas most migrants from Boussouma and Korsimoro stay within Africa. The education level of migrants, which does not differ by destination, is about two years, implying very basic primary schooling. Seasonal migration was found to be rare, and the majority of both types of migrants (more than 90 percent) in all four villages were found to stay away permanently (more than one year). Permanent migration involves a one-time change of residence, which means that the migrated member does not return to the village regularly to engage in economic and social life, although often migratory household members do return to visit the household.

Migration to Italy from Niaogho and Béguédo started in the early 1980s when a Burkinabé from Béguédo working in Côte d'Ivoire was invited by his employer, who was Italian, to work for him as a driver in Italy. A similar story holds for Niaogho. Initially, most intercontinental migrants found themselves around Naples working in horticulture. Some managed to obtain a residence permit and moved to northern Italy to work mainly in heavy industry. For intercontinental migrants the propensity to remit is 56 percent; some migrants send a fixed amount, whereas others remit depending on household requests. With an average of two migrants per intercontinental-migrant household, almost all of these households receive remittances. In 2002 households with intercontinental migrants received, on average, about 400,000 FCFA from their intercontinental migrants, representing 40 percent of household income.[1]

Until recently, the primary destination of continental migrants from the surveyed villages was Côte d'Ivoire. The migrant flow to Côte d'Ivoire, however, has all but vanished owing to the unstable political situation, ethnic tensions, and antiforeigner sentiment there. Many Burkinabé now migrate to find work in the capital of their country, Ouagadougou. The propensity to remit for continental migrants is 49 percent, and households received almost 50,000 FCFA in remittances, representing 10 percent of household income—much lower than the amount received by households with intercontinental migrants.

In addition to cropping and migration, households engage in livestock keeping and nonfarm activities to generate income. Many households keep cattle and small ruminants. Income derived from livestock is mainly in the form of embodied production (increase in weight or herd size); the sale of livestock produce is rare. Livestock should be considered a store of wealth serving as an important insurance mechanism, because these assets can be sold in poor years (Reardon et al. 1988). Nonfarm activities tend to be self-employment activities and are generally labor intensive. Local nonfarm income is derived almost entirely from artisanal manufacturing of pots, potholders, and cotton rugs and from services such as food preparation or sorghum beer making.

Households in the study villages thus derive their income from a number of sources. Table 1 depicts the income composition of households grouped on the basis of their migration status.

Clearly, households with intercontinental migration earn less from staple cropping and nonfarm activities but more from cash cropping and livestock, for which participation rates are also higher. Per capita remittances received from intercontinental migrants are about six times those received from continental migrants.

Two hypotheses emerge from this summary analysis of the survey data. First, intercontinental migration facilitates livestock investment, as reflected in a higher rate of participation in livestock activities, whereas continental migration does not. Second, intercontinental migration discourages participation in noncrop activities that are labor intensive. Households with continental migrants, lacking the capital and insurance to enter into high-return but capital-intensive activities such as livestock, remain engaged in low-return, labor-intensive ones.

Economic activities of the households in the study villages need to be viewed in a context of missing and imperfect markets. Three missing or imperfect markets were identified in the research villages: labor, land, and credit or insurance. Households in the villages were found to make hardly any use of hired labor on their farms. Similar findings for Burkina Faso have been recorded by Mazzucato and Niemeijer (2000), who emphasize that working on someone else's field in order to earn revenue is looked upon negatively and is considered a sign of inability to sustain one's household with one's own agricultural production. Households were found to resort to a form of exchange labor. So-called work parties are common, particularly in cash-crop cultivation when labor requirements peak. Work parties can be seen as an occasion where households offer food or drinks to village members in exchange for work on their fields. These parties often take place on a reciprocal basis, with different households organizing them in turn, and are beneficial to production, although they were found to fulfill a social purpose as well (Mazzucato and Niemeijer 2000).

[1] 169 FCFA = US$1 (2002 purchasing power parity) (World Bank 2006b).

Table 1: Per Capita Income from Different Activities by Household Migration Status, 2002

Income	Mean net income (FCFA)[a]		
	For nonmigrant households (N = 79)	For continental-migrant households (N = 112)	For intercontinental-migrant households (N = 32)
Total income (FCFA)[b]	42,621	47,060	67,803
Staple cropping	24,420 (100)[c]	26,219 (100)	22,168 (100)
Cash cropping	4,940 (66)	4,604 (64)	6,031 (88)
Livestock	2,710 (37)	2,327 (57)	4,313 (97)
Nonfarm activities	10,551 (61)	9,024 (72)	7,779 (41)
Remittances	n.a.	4,886	27,512

Source: Author's survey.

Note: n.a. indicates not applicable.
[a] Migrants are not included as household members.
[b] 169 FCFA = US$1 (2002 purchasing power parity) (World Bank 2006b).
[c] Figures in parentheses are percentages of households that participated in the respective activity.

Land markets in rural Africa often barely function and are generally quite thin (Lanjouw et al. 2001). For Burkina Faso in general, commercial land market transactions were found to be extremely rare (Ouedraogo et al. 1996). Udry (1999), using a four-year panel study (from the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics [ICRISAT]) of households in three different agro-climatic zones of Burkina Faso, finds evidence for a missing land market when testing for profit maximization in agriculture. In the study villages, where high population density has led to land scarcity, cultivation on the basis of hereditary possession was found to be most common (Kessler and Geerling 1994). Restricted options for collateral and collateral substitutes imply severe limitations in access to a formal credit market.

An imperfect market environment has implications for household behavior. Migration as an aspect of household behavior can thus not be analyzed in isolation. Conditions underlying migration, as well as consequences of migration, are tied in with the village environment and its markets in particular. Hence, household migration behavior in a perfect market setting is likely to differ from behavior in an imperfect setting.

Policy Issues

Results of the study relate to the determinants and consequences of migration. In terms of determinants, findings in the study suggest that continental and intercontinental migration constitute two different diversification strategies, implying that households engaging in the former differ from those engaging in the latter. Table 2 shows that intercontinental-migrant households own much more land than do households in the other groups. As mentioned previously, a land market does not exist; thus migration cannot facilitate land acquisition in this study area. Land is considered a determinant of the income generation ability of the household. Arguably, the larger the area of land available for cultivation, the wealthier the household.

Intercontinental migration thus appears to be a strategy for accumulation accessible only to households that have a certain level of wealth, such as land, at their disposal. Table 2 also shows that households with continental migrants have about the same amount of land but more adult sons than nonmigrant households, implying pressure on resources. Continental migration can thus be viewed as a survival strategy stemming from a lack of wealth but positively related to household size.[2]

Consequences of migration are summarized in three migration effects: remittances, lost labor, and reduced consumption. Remittance effects are much stronger for households with intercontinental migrants, who receive substantial sums of money from migrants in Italy. The lost-labor and remittance effects jointly affect the resource use and income of migrant households. For households with intercontinental migrants, these two effects reduce income from labor-intensive activities (staple cropping and nonfarm activities) and increase income from capital-intensive activities (livestock investment). For households with continental migrants, income from nonfarm activities falls. Despite the receipt of remittances, households with continental migrants experience a loss in income owing to migration, whereas intercontinental migration increases household income, as the remittances effect reverses the negative lost-labor effect of migration. The welfare of households with continental migrants increases but only when the reduced consumption effect due to a smaller household size is taken into account, suggesting a survival strategy. Intercontinental migration increases household welfare much more strongly.

Studies concerning the impact of migration on the migrant-sending area generally conclude that migrants in an imperfect market environment can promote development by sending remittances that lessen investment and production constraints. Taylor et al. (2003), for example, find that for rural China remittances stimulate crop production and compensate for the lost-labor effect. Lucas (1987) finds that for a number of countries in Southern Africa, remittances enhance both crop productivity and cattle accumulation in the longer run. Benefits of migration to development in the sending country crucially depend, however, on the institutional setting. Although members of developing countries receiving remittances may be best placed to oversee their own needs and the needs of their local economy, it is possible that in the context of a weak institutional setting, the impact of remittances on growth is not maximized.

Considering that remittances from migrants to destinations outside Africa are much more substantial than remittances from those that remain on the continent, intercontinental migration, in particular, is likely to have strong benefits for the sending household. A recent World Bank investigation identifies a significant positive relationship between international migration and poverty reduction at the country level (Adams and Page 2003).

Despite the benefits of cheap, low-skilled labor for the receiving economy, however, both Europe and the United States have strong concerns about the overall impact of migrants on the host country. A strong tension thus exists between the need for members of developing countries to migrate (in the context of a lack of "empty" continents like those that drew generations of poor European migrants in the past) and the reluctance of developed countries to receive poor, unskilled migrants.

Stakeholders

Rural Households in Developing Countries

A useful benchmark for development in the current context is how migration and related remittances reshape migrant-sending economies. The migration development debate should be viewed in the context of the three Rs: remittances, recruitment, and returns (IOM 2005). One important advantage of remittances is that they constitute a structured financial flow earned by members of developing countries. "Recruitment" deals with the question of who migrates. "Returns" refers to the issue of migrants' return with new technologies and ideas of use to them and their country.

[2] Fluid household structures imply that household size changes over time and may even change owing to migration. Commonly, however, adult sons stay in their family home even after marriage, whereas daughters move out. The number of adult sons is thus a proxy for household size at the time of the migrant's departure.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics by Household Migration Status, 2002

Variable	Nonmigrant (N = 79)	Continental migrant (N = 112)	Intercontinental migrant (N = 32)
Household composition			
Household size	9.57 (5.52)	13.34 (6.17)	18.56 (9.11)
Number of males	2.78 (1.79)	4.88 (2.43)	6.41 (2.49)
Number of adult sons	2.29 (1.47)	4.18 (2.05)	5.41 (2.01)
Number of dependants	4.11 (3.10)	4.76 (3.33)	6.88 (4.97)
Age household head	49.14 (12.40)	54.62 (15.15)	58.59 (10.64)
Human capital			
Education level of household head (years)	0.57 (1.78)	0.47 (1.49)	0.88 (3.37)
Primary education (number of adults)	0.59 (0.97)	1.13 (1.71)	1.69 (1.94)
Secondary education (number of adults)	0.19 (0.75)	0.49 (0.90)	0.38 (0.66)
Physical capital			
Land (hectares)	4.24 (3.06)	4.38 (2.77)	7.40 (6.12)
Cattle (number)	0.85 (1.42)	1.25 (1.64)	5.81 (7.09)
Value of farm equipment (FCFA)[a]	34,078 (53,822)	40,050 (54,162)	53,708 (47,550)

Source: Author's survey.

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses.
[a]169 FCFA = US$1 (2002 purchasing power parity) (World Bank 2006b).

Rural households in developing countries are affected by all three Rs. Remittances are private transfers, and migrants and their families can decide on their allocation. Intercontinental migration has much stronger positive welfare implications than continental migration. Given the costs involved in intercontinental migration, however, only comparatively wealthy households—that is, those with more land, as shown in Table 2—are able to engage in it. Recruitment, or which households send migrants to a particular destination, is thus likely to affect inequality between households. Migrants display a certain risk-taking behavior, which, when combined with skills and capital acquired abroad, can lead to economic take-off in their area of origin upon their return.

Governments in Developing Countries

Governments in developing countries can implement policies that affect all three Rs and enhance the role of migration in development. By enabling households to overcome production and investment constraints, remittances could stimulate the local economy. In fact, multiplier effects on incomes, employment, and production in migrant-sending economies could set in motion development dynamics. Previous studies suggest, however, that productive investments are strongly related to the level of market formation and local economy conditions (Taylor 1999), and governments have a role to play in strengthening markets and local economies. In addition, only comparatively wealthy households are able to send migrants outside the African continent. Governments in developing countries thus also have a role to play in enabling poorer households to escape poverty through migration, by creating investment opportunities that would enable returning migrants to become a force for economic growth in their local economy.

Governments in Europe and the United States

Migration and related remittances can directly benefit the receiving as well as the sending economy. Low-skill migrants constitute a source of cheap labor for the receiving economy. In fact, it is thought that a country like the Netherlands is losing out by not allowing more migrants to enter to work and thereby to increase economic activity and welfare (Jorritsma 2005). In addition, it is important to realize that the aging of the population in Europe shrinks the workforce and raises the overall dependency ratio (World Bank 2006a). In Western Europe there are three categories of jobs where issues of competition and displacement between migrants and natives hardly arise: (1) many dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs; (2) a wide variety of service jobs; and (3) low-skilled jobs in the informal economy. In these sectors low-skilled migrants are able to balance distorted labor demand (IOM 2005). The success of migration for both the sending and receiving economies crucially depends on agreements between these economies. Some argue that a country like the Netherlands, by attempting to close its borders to migrants from developing countries, disturbs the self-regulating mechanism of migration by capturing migrants in the host country even though many migrants are not looking for permanent residence there (Sassen 2005).

Policy Options

Conditions for agriculture are far from favorable in most of Burkina Faso. Poor households commonly have diverse sources of income to deal with income risk and to achieve food security in adverse conditions. Recently, migration, as one option for diversification, has been recognized as a development pathway for less-favored areas, which constitute a large part of Burkina Faso (Ruben and Pender 2004). Migration to destinations outside Africa is thought to be particularly important for poverty reduction and development (Acosta et al. 2006; Adams and Page 2003; Gustafsson and Makonnen 1993). A number of conditions need to be met, however, for migration to set in motion a virtuous development circle leading to economic take-off in rural areas of developing countries.

Improvements in the Institutional Setting of Migrant-Sending Countries

As already mentioned, the benefits of migration to development in the sending country depend crucially on the institutional setting. Although members of developing countries themselves may be best placed to oversee their own needs and the needs of their local economy, in the context of a weak institutional setting, the impact of remittances on economic growth may not be maximized. Developing countries can maximize the impact of remittances by implementing sound macroeconomic policies and good governance, as well as development strategies involving all actors in the economy (OECD 2005).

Improvements in the Market Environment of Migrant-Sending Countries

Remittances from intercontinental migration are found, in this study, to be largely invested in livestock. Although livestock constitutes a productive investment, other investment options with multiplier effects on incomes, employment, and production need to be created in migrant-sending economies. Creation of investment opportunities would also encourage migrants to return and become a force for economic growth in their local economy. The finding that migration is not beneficial to labor-intensive activities such as cropping and nonfarm activities demonstrates that options for labor substitution are limited. Development of a labor market would enable households to substitute for labor lost to migration by hiring labor. Improvement of the market environment is thus an important issue.

Addressing of Inequality Issues in Migrant-Sending Countries

Recruitment for intercontinental migration takes place among comparatively wealthy households that are able to bear the cost of this long-distance migration. When the already wealthy households further improve their economic situation through high intercontinental remittances, an increasing gap between poor and rich households may result. Governments in developing countries thus have a role to play in enabling poorer households to escape poverty through migration. One option is to provide information on migration opportunities and risks.

Liberalization of Labor Flows between Migrant-Sending and Migrant-Receiving Economies

The possibility of a virtuous circle of development also hinges on policy in the receiving countries. Although trade liberalization for agricultural products is generally considered desirable and beneficial in terms of economic growth, the free movement of natural persons appears much more controversial. History teaches that migration played an important role in allowing countries in Europe to develop. Historical migratory movements were less problematic owing to the abundance of land in the "New World." Even though "empty" continents no longer exist, migration remains important for development.

Development of a System of Labor Exchange between Migrant-Sending and Migrant-Receiving Economies

Recognizing the benefits of migration for receiving countries is important, as is developing a system of labor exchange that meets the needs of both sending and receiving economies. To protect the welfare state, it should be possible to devise a system under which migrants build up their right to social security over a number of years (Jorritsma 2005). Calls are made to liberalize international labor migration through new types of temporary foreign worker programs for particularly low-skilled foreign workers. Although arguments have been made against such programs mainly on ethical grounds, they may be both desirable from an ethical point of view and feasible in the sense that the adverse and unintended consequences of most past and existing guest worker programs can be avoided (IOM 2005).

Assignment

Considering the welfare impacts of both forms of migration and the wider policy environment, your assignment is to consider how policy could be directed toward enhancing the role of migration in local development.

Additional Readings

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