

Mobility and Human Development: Introduction

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Over the past decade, the potential of migration to promote development in origin countries of migrants has gained increasing interest among policy-makers, development agencies and international organizations. This growing interest has particularly been boosted by the realization of the magnitude of remittances and their relevance to economic development. Recent data show that the magnitude of registered remittances outstrips some other sources of potential development finances such as official development assistance and foreign capital market flows (Ratha, 2003). This has coincided with a massive increase in interest among researchers from various disciplines in the impact of international migration on development in sending and receiving countries.

However, it is important to emphasize that the debate on migration and development is decades old. What is remarkable and intriguing is the rather drastic shift away from previously pessimistic views that predominated before the 1990s, in which migration was generally seen as a force that drained origin countries from their valuable skilled (brain drain) and unskilled labor force (de Haas, 2010a). The recent shift towards more optimistic views has partly been driven by empirical evidence highlighting the *potentially* positive impacts of migration on income, living standards, health, education and political processes in origin countries. However, this shift may also have had an ideological dimension, as the somehow naïve idea that migration and remittances would be an effective form of ‘self-help’ or ‘bottom’ development aid fits rather well into (neo) liberal political philosophies (Kapur, 2003; de Haas, 2010a).

Despite the wealth of new evidence, the debate on migration and development has a number of important shortcomings. First, there has been a one-sided emphasis on remittances and the economic impacts of migration. This is unfortunate because, reasoning from a broad, capabilities-based concept of development (cf. Sen, 1999), the social, cultural, political and gendered impacts of migration are relevant precisely because they affect people’s capabilities. This is connected to another shortcoming: the development value of

migration has mainly been evaluated from a rather utilitarian, *instrumental* perspective, which coincides with a lack of recognition for the *intrinsic* development value of human mobility.

Sen (1999) conceptualized development as the process of expanding the substantive freedoms that people enjoy. To operationalize such freedoms, Sen used the concept of *human capability*, which relates to the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have. He argued that freedoms are central to the process of development for two reasons. First of all, there is the *intrinsic* importance of human freedoms as an objective of development, which has to be clearly distinguished from the *instrumental* effectiveness of such freedoms to contribute to economic progress. Sen argued that freedoms such as the opportunity to live long and healthy lives, having access to education, enjoying the freedom of employment choice, and being able to participate in public debate without fear are components of development *in themselves*. So, from this perspective, the value of freedoms should not be mainly judged in their instrumental, income-generating capacity, but should first and foremost be seen as the principal ends of development in themselves. Second, Sen (1999) argued that, besides their intrinsic value, increasing individual freedoms (e.g. better education, skills, health, security and access to markets and politics) *also* happen to be instrumental in promoting economic growth and the further expansion of human freedoms.

Within this capabilities perspective on development, we can interpret human mobility as an integral part of human development for both *intrinsic* and *instrumental* reasons (de Haas, 2009). First, people can only move if they have the capability to do so. Human mobility is the capability to decide where to live – human movement (i.e. migration) is the associated functioning. Expansions in this capability are in fact an expansion of the choices open to an individual and therefore of their freedom. This is the *intrinsic* argument why mobility can be an integral part of human development. At the same time, movement can enable people to improve other dimensions relevant to their capabilities such as their earning capacity, their health, the education of themselves and of their children, and their self-respect. This is the *instrumental* value of mobility for development.

In practice, it is thus important to distinguish between the capability to move and the act of movement. In fact, if we define mobility as the capability to decide where one lives, we understand that some of the movement that we see in practice (e.g. that which results from trafficking or insecurity) is a result of the choice set of individuals becoming more restricted. Enhanced mobility is not only the freedom to move – it is also the freedom to stay in one's preferred location.

The links between mobility and migration are complex because mobility can also be an *expression* of human development. Migration can certainly not be dissociated from general macro-level processes of social and economic change that constantly alter the spatial distribution of opportunity structures and, hence, migration patterns. The way in which development

and migration are linked will vary according to a society's institutional and structural characteristics. However, recent research has shown some emerging cross-national patterns (de Haas, 2010b; Letouzé *et al.*, 2009). It would nevertheless be simplistic to reduce migrants to pawns passively reacting to macro-forces propelling them around the globe. People have agency, and, on the individual level, the decision to migrate (or not) and the act of migrating can generally be seen as an *expression* of human development.

People need a certain minimum of social and economic resources in order to be able to migrate. It is therefore no coincidence that wealthy people and societies tend to be generally more mobile than relatively poor people and societies. This challenges common views that poverty is the main driver of migration occurring within and from developing countries. It is no coincidence that high-emigration countries such as Mexico, Morocco and Turkey are typically not among the least developed societies and that highly developed societies tend to experience higher overall volumes of migration and mobility. This also reveals the common failure in much research and policy to see migration as an integral part of development rather than a problem to be 'managed' or 'solved' by tackling its perceived root causes. This concept obviously excludes forms of mobility such as slavery and deportation, which are the very products of *the lack of freedom*. However, it includes most other forms of migration where at least some degree of agency is involved. So, the ability and act of moving *in itself* can add to people's wellbeing. This is not only obvious in forms of mobility such as tourism, but this also applies in the case of migratory mobility, because curiosity, interest for other societies and the quest for adventure motivate (particularly young) people around the world to discover new horizons (de Haas, 2009).

The 2009 *Human Development Report* 'Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development' recognized this intrinsic value by defining mobility as "the ability of individuals, families or groups of people to choose their place of residence" (UNDP 2009, p. 15). The report also stressed that the distinction between freedoms and actions is central to the capabilities approach. The capability to decide where to live exemplifies the importance to consider the conditions under which people are, or are not, able to choose their place of residence. So, while most analyses on migration and development focus on the effect of migration on income, living standards and economic growth, there has been much less consideration of the intrinsic value of *mobility as a freedom*, and migration—a change of the place of residence by crossing international or administrative borders—as an exercise of that freedom.

Second, the more *instrumental* reason why mobility is closely connected to development is that the act of migrating—the movement to places generally offering more opportunities in terms of work, education, political rights, safety, and/or health—can, under favourable conditions, also give people the capabilities to increase the social, economic and political freedoms of themselves and their families. Because people have agency, their mobility is also a potential force for structural change (i.e. development),

through its potential role in altering the social and economic conditions in both sending and receiving localities, regions and countries. However, it is important to emphasize that all migrants face structural constraints and that the degree to which they can exercise agency is fundamentally limited.

From this, we can hypothesize that the intrinsic and instrumental developmental dimensions of human mobility tend to reinforce each other. The degree to which migrants' agency is constrained also limits the extent to which migrants and migration can contribute to development. It also means that if migrants are exploited, if they lack fundamental rights and if unfavorable development conditions prevail in sending and receiving societies, mobility might have a limited or even negative impact on people's well-being and economic growth.

This also points to the risk of exaggerating the development potential of migration. Notwithstanding their often considerable blessings for migrants, their families and communities, migration is no panacea for solving more structural development problems at the macro-level. Migration can neither be blamed for a lack of development nor be expected to trigger take-off development in generally unattractive investment environments or if political instability, repression and insecurity prevails. So, if states fail to implement *general* social and economic reform, migration and remittances are unlikely to contribute to nationwide sustainable development. At the same time, migrants' rights and their opportunities for social and economic integration at the destination will affect their capabilities and, hence, the extent to which they can potentially contribute to origin country development—for instance, by remitting money, investing in enterprises, contributing to public debates, and so on.

This reveals the importance of connecting the debates on the position of migrants in destination countries to the debates on migration and development in origin countries. Unfortunately, these two issues have rarely been connected in policy and academic debates. By increasing selectivity and suffering among migrants, restrictive immigration policies that deprive migrants of rights might have a negative impact on migrants' well-being as well as the poverty and inequality reducing potential for migration. For instance, the frequent claim that temporary or 'circular' migration represents a 'win-win-win situation' for destination countries, origin countries and the migrants themselves should be treated with reserve. Governments of labor-importing countries may well prefer temporary migration of the lower skilled, which deprive migrants from many rights (partly for political reasons in view of the unpopularity of immigration), but it is far from clear that this is beneficial to migrants themselves or to the development of their origin countries (de Haas, 2009). In other words, immigration policies and the position of migrants have fundamental development implications.

The aim of this special issue is to connect these debates on human mobility, human and migrants' rights and human development. This idea was born out of the research efforts conducted to produce the 2009 *Human Development Report*. Some of the papers were commissioned as background

papers for that report, while others were independently submitted to an open call for papers launched by the *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* together with the Human Development Report Office. While diverse in their scope and methods, all papers deal with some of the basic issues that arise from trying to understand migration and mobility from the human development perspective. Doing so inevitably leads us to think about difficult policy and institutional choices that try to balance off the gains that many individuals, communities and societies derive from enhanced mobility with the potential real or perceived threat to the opportunities of those who may be adversely affected. It also leads us to re-examine our basic intuitions regarding the relationship between human movement, human rights, and human development.

Gordon Hanson's 'The Governance of Migration Policy' starts out from considering one of the basic puzzles in the understanding of migration policy. This is the fact that despite the substantial potential gains to the world economy from liberalization of labor mobility, developed countries unilaterally impose significant limits on labor inflows. The reasons are manifold, ranging from the political costs of accepting increased immigration flows to the fiscal distortions in place in many advanced economies that lead to adverse fiscal effects. But at the same time these reflect political and institutional decisions. This implies that feasible policy reforms—such as subjecting immigrant workers to payroll taxes and auctioning visas to temporary immigrant workers—could make greater openness to immigration politically feasible.

But the reasons for resistance to immigration are not only economic. Cultural intolerance of 'others' has been one of the main reasons for resistance to migration in world history. In their paper 'Xenophobia, International Migration and Development' in India and South Africa, Jonathan Crush and Sujata Ramachandran highlight the fact that rising xenophobia is not a phenomenon that is unique to developed countries. Through a careful comparison of the cases of South Africa and India, the paper illustrates that xenophobia, general anti-immigrant sentiment and violence against 'South–South' migrants is also prevalent in many developing countries. They also document the response of the South African and Indian states to xenophobic violence, and argue that their ability to implement remedial policies is compromised by their own complicity or denial in regard to xenophobia. The paper highlights that xenophobia and denial of rights is not only detrimental to the well-being of migrants, but also bedevils efforts to maximize the development potential of migration.

Discussions about the relationship between migration and development often start out from a given idea about what constitutes development and how we measure it. The UNDP's Human Development Index constitutes a well-known alternative to the Gross Domestic Product as a summary aggregate measure of development. But both the Gross Domestic Product and Human Development Index are measures of the level of development of people living in a particular territory. Daniel Ortega's 'Human Development

of Peoples' asks how we would measure development if we were to instead understand development as the expansion of the capabilities of the people *born* in a country. As shown by Ortega, this can have radical implications for thinking about progress: one way in which people expand their freedoms is by seeking opportunity elsewhere, and it seems odd to rely on measures that do not count this as development.

One of the most important contributions of the capabilities approach to the study of development is the understanding that actions and policies can have differing effects on the capabilities of different persons and even on different capabilities of the same person. This can lead to complex ethical choices in which we may need to accept reductions in some capabilities in order to achieve improvements in others. Martin Ruhs's 'Migrant Rights, Immigration Policy and Human Development' puts forward the hypothesis that such a trade-off exists in the design of immigration policy. Both labor-market dynamics and political economy considerations lead countries to offer a more restrictive set of socio-economic rights to the low-skilled labor migrants that they admit. This trade-off presents a real dilemma for policymakers—the less generous the rights regime offered to migrants, the more politically feasible it may be to allow a larger number of people to immigrate—thereby expanding their capabilities in many relevant dimensions.

Matthew Cummins and Francisco Rodríguez take an alternative viewpoint. While they recognize the feasibility of the existence of such a trade-off, they ultimately propose that whether it exists or not is an empirical matter. In 'Is there a Numbers versus Rights Trade-off in Immigration Policy? What the Data Say', they study the empirical relationship between measures of migrants' rights and the size of both the stock and flow of immigrants in a number of existing databases. Their analysis yields no evidence that a trade-off exists—in fact, their estimates are often positive rather than negative, indicating the possibility that greater numbers and greater rights can go together.

The article is published together with a comment by Ruhs and a rejoinder by Cummins and Rodríguez, which raise relevant issues about the appropriateness of the empirical tests proposed, the proper scope of the hypothesis, and the need for development of improved measures of measures of migrants' numbers and their rights. One of the valuable outcomes of this discussion is that it illustrates the importance of an improved contextualization of this debate. In this sense—and notwithstanding the disagreements—there is an important complementarity between the papers. They both exemplify that, in order to advance our knowledge of possible numbers-rights trade-offs, future research has to disaggregate different categories of rights and different time scales. This would allow for determining under which conditions the trade-off may occur, and under which circumstances it may not—in other words, a better contextualization of the debate would improve our understanding on the possible heterogeneity of the relationship between numbers and rights.

Aggregate analyses looking at cross-national patterns tell us only part of the story. It is only by going to the analysis of concrete case studies that we

can understand how development and migration interact in particular historically specific contexts. Denise Stanley's 'Outmigration, Human Development and Trade: A Central American Case Study' centers on understanding the drivers of outmigration in the case of Honduras. Using an innovative research design, Stanley combines Honduras census data with geographic information systems analysis in order to measure the effect of different crop patterns on outmigration. This analysis shows that not all types of economic activity equally affect migration. For example, labor-intensive melon crops reduced outmigration, while capital-intensive shrimp farms exacerbated it. This suggests that efforts to develop profitable export industries may have unintended effects on human movement. The extent of satisfaction of basic needs was also an important deterrent to outmigration, supporting the hypothesis that people tend to leave places with high levels of deprivation.

We close the issue with 'Movements of the "We": International and Transnational Migration and the Capabilities Approach' by Des Gasper and Thanh-Dam Truong, who analyze cross-border migration through the perspective of the capabilities approach. This paper provides a critical perspective on the standard, rather utilitarian interpretations of 'migration and development'. The authors show the value of the capabilities approach in enabling a multidimensional, disaggregated, and more reflective evaluation of the development implications of migration. At the same time, they show how the highly vulnerable and exploited position of many migrants challenges some key elements of capabilities thinking, and overly optimistic evaluations of the migration–development nexus more generally.

The papers in this issue begin to answer some important questions but also suggest several new productive directions for future research. What type of international and intra-national agreements will allow us to break the current deadlock over migration policies? How can the adverse effects of xenophobia be overcome through public education and awareness-raising campaigns? What type of reforms to our systems of measurement will allow us to have better data to evaluate hypotheses about trade-offs in capabilities and to assess the instrumental effect of mobility on development? What are the economic and institutional arrangements that lead people to move or stay in particular places? Future years will doubtless see much more research on these issues. We hope that the current special issue of *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* will contribute to this area of research by showing how the capabilities approach can shed light on new and old questions in the migration and development literature.

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