

## *Migration – the key to better life in cities and rural areas alike*

*“Cities, migration and trade have been the main catalysts of progress in the developed world over the past two centuries. These stories are now being repeated in the developing world’s most dynamic economies” (World Development Report 2009). This statement captures in a nutshell the key message of the World Development Report 2009. Migration is one of the driving factors of development in this view.*

Development has always been associated with urbanisation, with high density of population, with agglomeration economics, with the concentration of clusters of industrial production and technological advances, but also with migration of skilled labour from lagging to leading regions or from rural areas to cities. At the level of spatial arrangements, these are, the World Development Report 2009 posits, some of the important ingredients for successful development. It argues that they can and should be replicated in all parts of the world, particularly in developing countries. Migration is thus one of the important means of “Reshaping Economic Geography”.

Labour, the Report contends, is still less mobile than capital. But it makes a strong case for facilitating the voluntary movement of (skilled) people. The clustering of talented people is, according to the authors of the Report,

economically beneficial and highly desirable. The Report considers both international migration and migration of people within the same country. The authors, however, rightly emphasise the preponderance of internal over international migration. They also point to the fact that in many countries, the most important migration flows are not those between villages and cities, but between rural areas.

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### *Migration offers opportunities ...*

Obviously, the Report has a positive view of migration, which sharply contrasts not only with much of the earlier literature, but also with a dominant trend in the public debate that tends to look at migration mainly as a sign of crisis, emphasising the negative social and economic effects of migration flows rather than the opportunities. This positive view of migration definitely signifies a clear reversal in mainstream thinking on migration. No doubt, earlier policies by national governments in different parts of the world to stem the tide of rural-urban migration have achieved very little. On the contrary, as the Report rightly points out, socio-economic and spatial disparities have increased in those countries where strict anti-migration policies were implemented. Consequently, the Report calls on national



governments to consciously take advantage of the opportunities internal migration offers.

This positive stance on migration is anchored in the authors’ predilection for the cluster concept of spatial economic development. “Labour mobility and voluntary migration for economic gain are the human side of the agglomeration story” (WDR 2009, p. 158). In other words, the Report’s positive view of migration is closely linked to settings where skilled migrants move to dynamic clusters of manufacturing or high-tech industrial development. “The policy challenge is to keep households from moving for the wrong reasons” (WDR 2009, p. 147). Migration for other reasons, especially migration flows prompted by push factors like dwindling yields in agriculture or lack of educational facilities, is, in the words of WDR 2009, “economically inefficient”.

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### *... but migration is a complex process*

The migration section of WDR 2009 is a cornerstone of the document. But although it is an impressive synthesis of

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*The WDR's positive view of migration is closely linked to settings where skilled migrants move to dynamic manufacturing clusters of high-tech industrial development.*

modern economic literature on migration along with evidence from many different country cases, I would argue that it fails to capture the complexity of current migration flows. This obviously has a bearing on the quality of the policy recommendations derived from the Report's analysis. In my view, there are four dimensions of migration processes that have not been adequately considered in the Report:

1. The importance of non-permanent forms of migration and of multi-locational households.
2. The inextricable mix of push and pull factors in migration decisions; also the articulation between formal and informal income earning opportunities.
3. The wholeness of migrants' livelihoods, in which economic, social and psychic needs are intricately intertwined.
4. Households, not individuals as the key actors in migration; households

which are also embedded in social networks facilitating migration.

Though there is a considerable body of literature on all these aspects of migration, the WDR tells the story of people's movements from the economic point of view only.

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### *Non-permanent migration*

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Evidence from different parts of the world suggests that seasonal, circulatory and other forms of temporary migration are the dominant forms of migration these days. Nevertheless, the belief is still widespread that migrants all over the world take a once-in-a-lifetime decision to leave their home village and settle in the city. The assumption is that, by the second generation at the latest, the transition from a rural to an urban lifestyle will be complete. Kinship and family ties to the former rural homestead tend to become weaker in the process. This conventional paradigm is based on empirical observations of the urbanisation process in Europe, North America and Japan. Many academics and most practitioners assumed for a long time (and some still do) that the urbanisation process in Asia and Africa followed similar patterns. This is certainly a typical Eurocentric abstraction which cannot be supported by empirical evidence.

Since the 1980s numerous studies, especially from Southeast Asia and Africa, have shown that a large proportion of migrants move back to their home area at certain times of the year. Most mega-cities of Asia keep on growing, but not at a steady or even irreversible rate. In the course of a year, a city such as Surabaya in Indonesia experiences large fluctuations, with population both rising and falling. It may happen that there are suddenly 500,000 fewer inhabitants in Surabaya

*WDR 2009 suggests that clustering of talented people is economically desirable, whereas migration is economically inefficient because of the dwindling yields in agriculture and other push factors.*

than there were six months earlier. Similar fluctuations in total population have been reported from Bangkok and some African cities. Such data depend on the time of the year and the agricultural cycle in the countryside. People looking for survival options in the informal sector normally do not cut all their ties with their rural home. Rather, they return to their villages, when additional labour is needed on the land.

Although this phenomenon cannot be denied, up to the present day, official statistics in most countries have completely ignored these part-time and seasonal migration flows. Temporary or circular migrants do not show up on annual household registration data and are even less likely to be counted in a census.

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### *Livelihood strategies between the city and the village*

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The WDR 2009 does mention the existence of seasonal and circulatory migration. However, it ought to be emphasised that this type of migration is by no means a transitional phenomenon. Many households in Africa and Asia, and to a lesser extent in Latin America, consciously live in two locations, in an urban and a rural one, which are often far away from each other. Their livelihood strategy takes advantage of both urban and rural opportunities. Although split house-

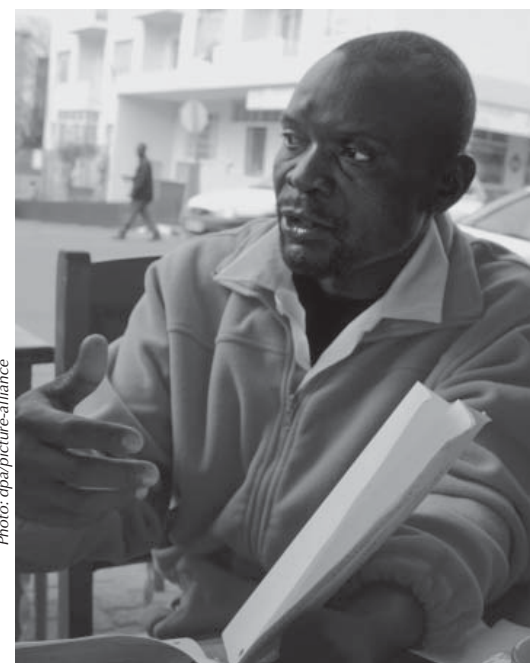


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*Particularly in Africa and South-East Asia, many migrants move back to rural areas following the agricultural cycle.*

holds do not generate a higher income, they do spread the risks.

In many African cases, for example, one or more family members live in the city for cash. When necessary, some of these can be called on by the rural segment of the household to help out with tilling the land and sowing. Several months later, after the harvest, the situation reverses, with the urban household members receiving yams and other produce for their sustenance.

Since the collapse of the Soviet system, similar structures have evolved on the fringes of Moscow or Minsk and other cities of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A large number of city dwellers would not have survived the crisis years without producing food

on their dachas. Some people also let their apartments in town to wealthy foreigners during the summer, increasing their cash income thanks to a partly urban, partly rural lifestyle.

Most studies from Africa and Asia tend to suggest that forming multi-locational households, thereby spreading assets and risks across space, is not simply an interim phenomenon but a strategy, which may be upheld for several generations.

### Social and economic reciprocity

Migrants' livelihood strategies go beyond economic reciprocity between urban and rural locations. Also, social and psychic needs play an important

role. A study on informal linkages between former townships in Cape Town and Eastern Cape Province of South Africa presents another form of combining urban and rural opportunities (Beate Lohnert: *Vom Hüttendorf zur Eigenheimsiedlung*. Osnabrück 2002). Young families move from the countryside to Cape Town, but many of the children are left behind with the rest of the family and stay with their parents only during school holidays. This has resulted in a special division of responsibilities. The rural members of the family take care of the small children, as well as of the elderly and the sick; in addition they produce surplus food for the urban household members. The urban members earn the cash income and take on a mentoring role for new migrants. They also organise the exchange of goods, services and information.

Another aspect is the role of social capital in tying together rural people and people migrating to the cities. Migrant networks and social relations between rural producers and their urban kin are of utmost importance. Many financial transactions are embedded in social relations. This phenomenon can be found in Indonesia and in some African countries.

## Zusammenfassung

Der Weltentwicklungsbericht 2009 betont, dass Migration sowohl den Zielregionen als auch den Herkunftsregionen nützlich ist: Die Zielregionen werden im Bericht idealtypisch als Standorte von aufstrebenden Industrien und neuen Hightech-Dienstleistungen beschrieben. Sie könnten von der Zuwanderung ausgebildeter Arbeitskräfte profitieren. Positiv sei die Abwanderung aber letztlich auch für die Herkunftsregionen. Diese Analyse aus volkswirtschaftlicher Sicht wird aber der Komplexität des Wanderungsgeschehens in Entwicklungsländern nur bedingt gerecht. Sie müsste durch die Sicht der Migrantenhaushalte ergänzt werden, und

die Besonderheiten nicht-permanenter Wanderungen müssten stärker in den Mittelpunkt rücken. Die Analyse des Weltentwicklungsberichts greift letztlich zu kurz; das wirkt sich auch auf die Qualität der Handlungsempfehlungen aus.

## Resumen

El Informe sobre el Desarrollo Mundial de 2009 subraya que la migración beneficia tanto a las regiones de destino como a las regiones de origen: en su forma ideal, las regiones de destino se describen en el informe como lugares con industrias emergentes y nuevos servicios de alta tecnología, para lo cual la inmigración de trabajadores calificados

resulta provechosa. Por otro lado, según el informe la emigración también terminaría siendo favorable para las regiones de origen. Sin embargo, este análisis desde el punto de vista económico no logra dar cuenta cabal de toda la complejidad del fenómeno de la migración en los países en desarrollo. Habría que complementarlo con el punto de vista de los hogares de los migrantes, y también dar mayor importancia a las particularidades de las migraciones no permanentes. En conclusión, el análisis del Informe sobre el Desarrollo Mundial no abarca todos los aspectos necesarios, lo cual afecta la calidad de las recomendaciones para la acción.

## Households as actors

Livelihood strategies are normally ascribed to households, not to individuals. Likewise, migration decisions in Africa and Asia, but also in many transition countries of the former Soviet Union, are taken within an extended family. The head of the household or the elders may send young members of the family to migrate to the city for a certain period of time. Obviously, migration decisions and livelihood strategies of multi-locational households depend on the power structure within a family. In some cases,

younger migrating members of the family acquire a more important role when migrating to the city, but without shedding the responsibilities for the extended family or the multi-locational household.

## Conclusion

Migration patterns can be extremely complex and multi-faceted. At the level of migrants' motives, push and pull factors are intricately interwoven. Merely distinguishing between migration that is economically efficient and migration that is not, as the WDR 2009 does, is

a very simplistic analytical approach and does not reflect the complexity of the issue. The same may apply to policy recommendations to governments across the world, which are based on this rather simple analysis.

No doubt, migration in its various forms has tremendous positive potentials, e.g. for ensuring people's sustenance, for upward mobility, for opening up new horizons to individuals and entire families. But in the final analysis, conditions related to the specific setting will determine whether or not a particular migration process has been a success story.

## Migration in eastern Germany after 1990

The fall of the inner-German border in 1989 and the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990 did not just lead to the radical reconfiguration of the social and economic system in the "new" states – the states (*Länder*) that were created in the territory of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) – it also triggered an enormous migratory wave from the east to the west. Between 1989 and 2007, on balance 1.7 million people left the eastern German states to go west, causing the new states to lose around 10 percent of their former population. In 1989 and 1990, as the migration pressure in a country that had been shut off for decades was being released, east-west migration reached dramatic levels with a total of nearly 400,000 people migrating. In the following years migration slowed, and in 1996 and 1997 it almost came to a standstill. Due to the continuing bad economic situation, migration losses rose again in the late 1990s, and in the recent past (from 2003 to 2006) amounted to around 50,000 people annually.

### Primarily young women are migrating

This east-west migration is basically migration for the sake of jobs and training opportunities and is therefore very age-selective. Around 60 percent of the east-west migrants are younger than 30 years old. Of note is the disproportionately high migration rates of young women. Of the people who have migrated from

the east since 1989, around 55 percent have been women and only 45 percent men. In more than half of all of the eastern German districts this has caused the sex ratio to fall to less than 85 women per 100 men among 18- to 29-year-olds. One of the reasons for this sex-selective migration, which is unusual in Europe, is the noticeably higher graduation rate from secondary school for eastern German women (Kröhnert/Vollmer 2008). The high level of education and a focus on modern service jobs in their choice of profession has led to higher standards regarding incomes and careers and is why women have become more mobile.

### The "halved" generation

Natural population growth, the difference between births and deaths, also greatly influences demographic developments in eastern Germany. After reunification, the fertility rate took a nosedive and in 1994 it reached a historic low with a total fertility rate of 0.77. While the total fertility rate has now gone back up to western German levels, in the 1990s a "halved" generation was born in eastern Germany, and in the future this low rate will be manifested in the form of a lack of potential parents and labour force. The markedly higher number of deaths compared to births adds to the population loss. In the new states taken as a whole population loss due to higher death rates is currently higher than that due to migration.

### Rural areas are losing

In the five new states, 96 of 114 districts have lost inhabitants compared to 1990. Initially, cities recorded the largest population losses because deindustrialisation there deprived an especially high number of people of their livelihoods. In numerous large and medium-sized cities population figures have dropped by more than 20 percent compared to 1990. But in recent years this situation has changed. Now the populations of larger cities have stabilised while rural areas continue to lose their populations. Zones of stability are the area around Berlin, the region along the string of Thuringian cities from Jena to Erfurt to Eisenach, and the Saxon metropolises of Dresden and Leipzig.

Over the next few years east-west migration will probably slow because the very low birth rate cohorts are now entering the most active migration ages of 18 to 24. Population loss in eastern Germany will continue, however, because of negative natural population growth. Official population projections predict that population values in the new states will fall another 7.5 percent by 2020 (German Federal Statistical Office 2007).

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*A list of references can be obtained from the author.*