

Non-Permanent Migration and Multilocality in the Global South

Editorial to DIE ERDE 143, 2012, Issue 3

Non-permanent migration has always existed in many parts of the world, notably in South Asia and in many African countries, but for a long time mainstream migration research paid little attention to this phenomenon. However, evidence from different parts of the world suggests that seasonal, circulatory and other forms of temporary migration have become the dominant type of migration in the Global South. Nevertheless, there is still the widespread belief 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 and may be severed altogether. 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 lines. This is certainly a typical Eurocentric abstraction which cannot be supported by empirical evidence.

In the last two decades migration research in Asia and Africa has pointed to the importance of non-permanent forms of migration. But quantitative evidence is scanty. Official statistics in most countries fail to capture part-time and seasonal occupations. In most countries, temporary or circular migrants do not show up on household registration data and in census counts. At least we know that there are 230 million temporary migrants in China, the so-called floating population, but this is due to the peculiar Chinese household registration system.

Estimating the number of temporary migrants is an important task. But this is the bird's eye view. In addition, and in order to properly understand non-permanent migration patterns and their implications for regional and local development, we need to study urban-rural linkages from the migrants' own perspective.

But who are the actors on the ground? Some researchers focus on the individual migrant as the key actor. Many authors have emphasised the role of households in migration decisions (e.g. *Dougllass* 2006). And they have pointed to the

phenomenon of informal rural-urban exchange within spatially multi-locational household arrangements. Multi-locational households consciously live in two locations, which are sometimes far away from each other. Their livelihood strategy takes advantage of opportunities at two or more places, often a rural and an urban base. Although multi-locational households do not necessarily have a higher income at their disposal than those based in a single location, they do spread risks better.

But the combination of urban and rural livelihoods is not only about increasing *economic* resilience. For the urban-based members of a multi-locational household, the rural part of the household may fulfil an important social function, for instance for child rearing, for the schooling of kids, and for care for the sick and elderly (*Schmidt-Kallert* 2009: 324). Some authors have suggested differentiating between *coping strategies* of very poor households and *accumulative strategies* of those who are somewhat better off and who have choices (*Deshingkar and Farrington* 2009: 18).

Understanding multi-locational livelihood strategies goes beyond recording the volume of remittances and establishing reciprocity in the exchange of goods and services. Researchers need to understand the internal household dynamics as well. This entails factors like age and seniority, gender and all internal power relations. Which family member moves first? Is the notion correct that the household *delegates* a young member to the urban labour market? To what extent is such a decision prompted by the individual's preferences? Or are such decisions imposed by the head of household on the younger members of the family? Gender is important as well. Evidence from different parts of the world suggests that migration has become more female over the last two decades. What is the significance of this development?

Obviously, the internal household dynamics and power relations are likely to have an im-

pact on livelihood strategies pursued by the households. Whether migrants' remittances are used for consumptive or productive purposes is ultimately dependent on who decides on the household budget.

Multi-locational livelihoods require the support of family- or home/village-based social networks, for example hometown associations (*Dick and Schmidt-Kallert* 2011: 30). They provide an important link between the rural and the urban household part. Improved start-up conditions for newly arrived migrants in cities and information on job opportunities or housing are another positive aspect of social networks. Migration and multi-locational livelihood strategies are often only possible with the support of migrant networks. The reverse is also true: Migrant networks have, in many instances, an important role in triggering migration. Migrant networks may span over short or large distances, transcend provincial, regional or even national borders. And, very important: They tend to be more flexible than formal governance structures.

Formal government institutions, on the other hand, can facilitate, but they can also impede informal urban-rural linkages. Case studies especially from Asia have shown that migrants' support networks have in many cases horizontal linkages with local government institutions. But in other settings local government institutions know surprisingly little about migrants and their needs and aspirations. Especially at the regional or national government level such linkages are extremely uncommon. There is definitely a need for more institutional studies on this linkage between migrant support networks and formal governance. This applies both to the areas of origin and the migrants' areas of destination. The inherent potential of informal rural-urban linkages for regional development can only be tapped if the efforts of migrants' informal networks are interwoven with government policies.

This special issue of DIE ERDE is a compilation of five articles which touch on many of the aspects of non-permanent migration and multi-locality highlighted in this editorial. Three of the papers were presented in an earlier version at an international conference on *Urban-Rural Linkages and Migration: A Potential for Poverty Alleviation in Developing Countries?* which was held at TU Dortmund University in September 2009. These papers have subsequently been revised and updated for the publication. Two other papers have specifically been written for this issue of DIE ERDE.

Though the main focus of this special issue is on migration in countries of the Global South, the first article is a reminder that multi-locational household arrangements are not confined to a particular region of the world. As a matter of fact, multi-locational household arrangements have increased both in the Global North and in the Global South in recent decades. In his latest publications *Mike Douglass* has pointed to the fact that in the era of globalisation *global householding* has become a common livelihood strategy in many different settings. However, in regional sciences two distinctly different strands of research have emerged, one which looks at the phenomenon in developing countries and another which investigates the situation in highly industrialised countries. In an attempt to reconcile the divide between these strands of research, in their article, *Eva Dick* and *Darja Reuschke* take a comparative perspective and attempt to identify commonalities and differences between multi-locational livelihood strategies in the North and the South. Based on empirical evidence from Africa and on a sample survey recently conducted in Germany, they discuss four key dimensions of structural factors influencing circular migration. The comparison yields some very interesting insights. Subsequently they proceed to classify typical spatio-temporal patterns of circular migration by looking at factors such as distances, regional

differences, type and size of origin and destination. The different patterns can be attributed to the specific urbanisation trajectories in different parts of the world. –

Clemens Greiner's article provides on the one hand interesting insights into the specifics of *translocal livelihoods* in Namibia. Three biographical sketches, as well as his other fieldwork data, show clear evidence of extremely strong connections between rural-urban migrants and their rural homes. Most rural households in his case study area base their livelihood on a combination of transfer incomes from pensions and remittances, supplemented with revenues from live-stock farming. On the other hand *Greiner* uses his case to contribute to the conceptual discourse on multi-locational livelihoods. All the other authors of this special issue of DIE ERDE (implicitly or explicitly) subscribe to the concept of *multi-locational households*. In contrast, *Greiner* argues that the concept might be misleading, even fuzzy, he proposes to use the more conventional definitions of households which refer to people living together in one location. He suggests to study *networks* to capture the specifics of *translocal livelihoods*. –

In his study on South Africa *Loren Landau* addresses government, especially local government, responses to the current population and migration dynamics in the country. Based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, he argues that while migration has important consequences for the development at the local and regional level, planning makes little reference to the mobility of people. This applies to policies in the fields of housing, employment and the provision of social infrastructure. Based on his analysis he formulates a number of recommendations for policy reform which take cognisance of the specific needs of migrants.

The last two articles of this special issue are devoted to the situation in China, the country with

the highest number of non-permanent migrants in the world. The scholarly debate on internal migration in China has for many years been dominated by controversies over the function of the *hukou* system, China's unique household registration system. The article by *Zhang Jijiao* of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences gives an overview of the functioning of *hukou* since its inception in 1958, and of the changes it has undergone in the process of rapid industrial development and accelerated urbanisation in the country since the 1980s. The author shows how the system was initially tied to the command economy, ensuring an adequate supply of labour both in rural and urban areas. He then proceeds to highlight how in the wake of the political reforms after 1980 migration was encouraged, while at the same time maintaining the social implications of *hukou*, especially the limitations of access to social services. The author then gives a detailed account of the gradual changes and reforms of the *hukou* from 1990 to the present day. In his concluding remarks he calls for the gradual abolition of *hukou* and the introduction of a unified household registration, thus eliminating the rural-urban divide.

Although there is a vast body of literature on labour migration in China since the beginning of the reforms in the 1980s, the concept of *multi-locality* has hardly been applied to the study of livelihood strategies of China's migrant workers. In the last article of this special issue *Einhart Schmidt-Kallert* and *Peter Franke* report on the findings of an exploratory study on livelihood strategies of multi-locational households in five selected rural-urban migration corridors. They define a multi-locational household as a unit of joint planning (which in many cases is supplemented by family based networks spanning the

rural-urban interface). Similar to the situation in many parts of Africa, they were able to identify different levels of reciprocity between the urban and the rural part of the household; and their study findings also confirmed that multi-locality is maintained over many years, even decades. In most cases the multi-locational livelihood strategies evolve in accord with the family cycle. There were also discernible differences between the strategies of the first generation of migrants and the more recent ones. The rural urban divide is likely to be one of the key challenges China will be faced with in decades to come. At present government urbanisation policies are not entirely clear; but the authors of the article contend that the future of the rural-urban interface will equally be shaped by the people's livelihood strategies between cities and countryside. And this is not peculiar to China, it rather holds true for many countries in the Global South.

References

- Deshingkar, P.* and *J. Farrington* (eds.) 2009: Circular Migration and Multilocational Livelihood Strategies in Rural India. – New Delhi et al.
- Dick, E.* and *E. Schmidt-Kallert* 2011: Understanding the (Mega-)Urban from the Rural: Non-Permanent Migration and Multi-Locational Households. – *disP* **187** (4): 24-36
- Douglass, M.* 2006: Global Householding in Pacific Asia. – *International Development Planning Review* **28** (4): 421-446
- Schmidt-Kallert, E.* 2009: A New Paradigm of Urban Transition: Tracing the Livelihood Strategies of Multi-Locational Households. – *DIE ERDE* **140** (3): 319-336

Einhart Schmidt-Kallert (Dortmund)