The relationship between migration and poverty in Southern Africa

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Introduction

Migration and poverty have become critical development issues in the contemporary world. Surprisingly, the two phenomena have seldom been considered interrelated except wherever anecdotal evidence is adduced on plausible effects of one on the other. Migration and poverty researchers, planners policymakers and programme implementers continue to work independent of one another, never comparing notes on the reciprocal relationship between the two. In Southern Africa, the two phenomena occupy a central place in national as well as regional discourse. Yet important networks such as the Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) and the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) continue to push their research agenda forward while oblivious of what each does and apparently, at least in the past, unconcerned about prospects for collaborative ventures. This situation demands redressing, especially because both migration and poverty exhibit varied faces, are caused by a variety of factors and precipitate diverse consequences. It is in this height that this workshop breaks new ground in the relationship between the two regional outfits.

This paper seeks to provide some thoughts, based on previous research, on the interrelationship between migration and poverty as a cause and an effect of each other. First, it defines the concepts and their scope in the context of Southern Africa. Thereafter, it analyses how migration influences poverty, followed by the reverse relationship. To illustrate specific occurrences, the paper cites selected examples in the region. Against the analysis made, the paper suggests some policy options pertaining to research and policy for the region.

Migration and poverty defined

Although the two concepts seem too commonplace to require defining, they often conjure different meanings among a variety of users. That the concepts appear in the work of different experts and non-experts partly explains why they are easily misinterpreted or treated as a given.

Simply defined, “migration” is the spatial mobility or geographic mobility of population that involves a change of usual place of residence (van de Walle, 1982). Defining it requires identification of boundaries across which movements take place, duration of such movements, knowledge of the moves but not necessarily reason for their movement. In Southern Africa, it is meaningful to underpin international migration, which takes place across national boundaries that, having been arbitrarily drawn and being porous, unpoliced and unpolicable, slot people in political territories that have nothing to do with strong cultural bonds. Note should be taken of different types of international migration: permanent settlers; labour (unskilled/semi-skilled, highly educated/skilled professional transients) undocumented, illegal or clandestine; and refugees and asylum seekers. As no condition is by no means watertight, an earlier analysis of migration and poverty in Southern Africa in the SARPN workshop series identifies skilled contract (within mining and agricultural sectors) and undocumented migration, which subsume specific typologies of movement. It highlights the relationship between migration and salient regional issues such as trade, health/disease and poverty as well as poverty alleviation (Peberdy and Oucho, 2000). The evidence provided by that paper is not strong because detailed research has not been carried out on interrelationship between migration and these phenomena. Therefore, a subject like migration, which is studied across the sciences and humanities and engaging the attention of varied interests requires that its definitional terrain is well ploughed before it is analysed. Moreover, a number of studies acknowledge the fact that a majority of communities in Southern Africa share a common history, cultural heritage, language, religion and other social bond that transcend national boundaries and that sustain clandestine migration (Matlosa, 2000)

Definition of poverty can be most elusive given its complexity and niche at different levels in society. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1998:16) provides six definitions as follows:

- *Human poverty* denotes the lack of essential human capabilities, such as being literate or adequately nourished.
- *Income poverty* means the lack of minimally adequate income or expenditure.
- *Extreme poverty* is indigence or destitution, usually specified as the inability to satisfy even minimum food needs.
- *Overall poverty* refers to a less severe level of poverty, usually defined as the inability to satisfy essential non-food as well as food needs, the former varying considerably across countries.
- *Relative poverty* is poverty defined by standards that change across countries or overtime—in terms of mean per capita income—and often used loosely to mean overall poverty.
- *Absolute poverty* is defined by a fixed standard, e.g. the international “$1 a day” poverty line, which permits comparison of poverty across different countries, or a poverty line whose real value stays the same over time in order to determine changes in poverty in one country.

In Southern Africa where wealth (the opposite of poverty) is measured in terms of the number of wives and children, farms, cattle, cash or cash-equivalent income, it is inadvisable to assume that poverty conveys the same meaning in different countries or even at different levels of the society in any particular country. To simplify our interpretation, we take the term “poverty” as a given and apply the different strands of it according to its relationship with migration that is being analysed. Of the six definitions of poverty, “extreme poverty” seems to be the odd one out because migration literature informs us that extremely poor people never migrate and that migration often tends to ameliorate economic and social conditions of poor people, communities or countries.

Another way to simplify our interpretation is to divide Southern African countries along, on the one hand, migration and, on the other, poverty spectrum. The countries consist of the net immigration countries of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia that are wealthier in natural resources than the rest of the countries that, while poorly endowed in natural resources, are richer in human resources. The compatibility between resource–rich migrant–receiving countries and resource–poor migrant–sending countries sustains efforts to resolve problems surrounding the migration—poverty interrelationship.

We present two theses: that poverty causes migration to ensure a minimal standard of survival and that migration, in some instances, causes poverty among migrants, in others alleviates poverty or discriminates poverty alleviation between migrant/migrant households and no-migrant/no-migrant households.

Thesis one: Poverty stimulates emigration and engenders inequality

Poor countries or societies all over the world generally produce generations of emigrants for richer or relatively richer counterparts. In the 1990s, research commissioned by the international organization for migration (10M) on emigration dynamics of developing countries applied a conceptual framework, which specifies the following relationships. Emigration (dependent variable) is influenced by five independent variables—demographic setting, economic setting, socio-cultural context, political systems and environmental conditions–operating through or in conjunction with intervening variables, namely world economic/political order, regional/ sub-regional economic co-operation and perceptions as well as policies of sending vis–a–vis receiving national governments (Adepoju, 19195:379). Of the five independent variables, the "economic setting" best fits our interpretation of effects of poverty on migration. It consists of GNP per capita, real GDP per capita, income distribution, structural transformation and human development index used in *Human Development Report* series published by UNDP since 1990. To some extent, these factors capture both absolute and relative poverty in Southern African countries. Table 1 presents some measures of poverty, which most likely influence international migration, particularly of labour, in Southern Africa.

Trends in economic performance

Two measures of national $ wealth–GNP and GDP–help to explain the economic performance of Southern African countries. In 1993, South Africa had by for the largest GNP measured in US $billions, followed by Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia as extremely poor second, third and fourth respectively. At that point in time, all these countries would theoretically be expected to be migrant–receiving countries, yet Zambia was already losing its population in brain drain and brain circulation and Botswana had not become the magnet of immigration it is today.

Table 1: Some measures of poverty and their potential impact on International Migration in Southern African Countries, 1993-2001

Country	Trends in economic performances GNP (US $ Billions)	GDP per capita annual growth (%)		Population below poverty line (%) $ /day	Human Development Index		Human Poverty Index	
	1993	1975-99	1990-99	1983-99	1990	1999	1998	2001
Botswana	3.9	5.1	1.8	33.3	0.655	0.621	28.3	-
Lesotho	1.3	2.4	2.1	43.1	0.572	0.569	23.3	25.8
Malawi	2.1	-0.2	0.9	-	0.363	0.397	41.9	43.4
Mozambique	1.4	1.3	3.8	37.9	0.311	0.313	50.7	48.3
Namibia	2.8	-	0.8	34.9	0.551	0.601	28.6	34.5
South Africa	118.3	-0.2	2.8	11.5	0.712	0.702	20.2	18.7
Swaziland	1.0	1.4	0.4	-	0.611	0.615	27.3	-
Zambia	3.3	-2.4	-2.4	63.7	0.466	0.431	37.8	40.0
Zimbabwe	5.6	0.6	0.6	36.0	0.598	0.563	30.0	36.2

Sources: UNDP (1996) Human Development Report 1996, Table 25, pp. 186-187
UNDP (2001) Human Development Report 1996, Table 11, pp. 178-181
UNDP (2001) Human Development Report 2001, Table 3, pp. 149-151
UNDP (2001) Human Development Report 2001, Table 2, pp. 145-148
UNDP, SADC and SAPES Trust (220) SADC Regional Human Development Report 2000, Table 2. 10, pp. 70
UNDP (2001) Human Development Report 2001, Table 3, pp. 149-151

Annual growth rate of GDP per capita for two periods depicts an interesting picture. The longer period of nearly quarter-century, 1975–1999 saw Zambia and Malawi (emigration countries) as well as South Africa (immigration country) where apartheid shrouded conditions register negative GDP growth. Botswana had an impressive GDP growth, followed by Lesotho whose growth was presumably spurred by remittances from Basotho employed in South African mines.

The shorter period of the 1990's saw Zambia still languishing in the negative GDP growth, Mozambique and South Africa register an increasing trend, and Botswana and Namibia lose the momentum. This economic performance resulted in emigration of Malawians, Zambians and Zimbabweans as Mozambique's economic upturn, returning Mozambicans and investments in Mozambique improved the country's performance, thus reducing emigration.

Population below US$ a day

A better measure of poverty is the proportion of population living below US $ 1 per day, which captures poverty at household/individual level. In the sixteen years 1983-1999, the highest proportion was about 64 percent in Zambia, 43 percent in Lesotho and 38 percent in Mozambique—all well-known countries of emigration. Yet even Botswana and Namibia had more than one-third of their populations living below US $1 a day. A study of poverty in Botswana, using individual incomes, put the average poverty at about 47 percent of Botswana and 38 percent of households living in poverty in 1993/94 (Botswana, 1997:18). Surprisingly Botswana were not emigrating, at least in as large numbers as the citizens of other countries, though professionals envisioned emigrating at some stage to the United States, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Namibia

(Campbell, 2001:1:55). Other factors clearly enter the calculus of potential emigration from Botswana.

Human Development Index

From estimates of Human Development Index (HDI) at the beginning and end of the last decade, the net emigration countries (with exception of Swaziland and Lesotho) recorded lower HDI than the immigration countries with the exception of Namibia. Perhaps, changes in measuring HDI account for this situation. It should be noted that most countries of the region had declining HDI, attributed to HIV/AIDS epidemic which has drastically reduced life expectancy and eaten up national GDP.

Human Poverty Index

This is a measure of deprivation in economic provision (HPI) measured by: 1) percentage of people not using improved water resources and 2) percentage of under 5 who are underweight both which yield a probability at birth of not surviving to age of 40. Human Poverty Index (HPI) reflects the distribution of progress and measures the backlog of deprivation that still exists (UNDP, 2001:14). Except for Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa registered the lowest HP-I measures in 1998 and 2001. The situation has become more complex with the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, the countries devastated by HIV/AIDS often dispute UNDP measures for being higher than those made by their Central Statistics Offices. Nonetheless, the measures at hand suggest that human poverty compels nationals of a country to emigrate.

Unequally and economic growth bedevil South African countries, and even the three countries of emigration are affected. For instance, Namibia, at independence in 1990, inherited one of the most unequal societies, with its white population of 5 percent of the total enjoying affect lifestyles; the country is polarized with mining and foreign companies dominating the economy for creating few jobs, and most Namibians continue to struggle on the margins of economic progress. South Africa’s inequality is a product of the legacy of apartheid, with the poorest half of the population receiving only 11 percent of the national income; and apartheid created land hunger, rural poverty and other forms of inequality. Finally, Botswana suffers from income inequality, now entrenched by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (UNDP, 1998: 46-7). Although these countries receive migrants from other Southern African Countries, they experience increasing internal migration, particularly rural-urban migration which in some instances alleviates poverty and in others deepens it.

Household and Individual Perspectives of Poverty and Migration

As Emigration is not a national response to poverty or economic survival strategy of households or individuals, national measures mask the extent to which household/ individual poverty determines it in southern Africa. A number of migration surveys have provided useful insights of household–and individual-level factors at play.

In the seventies, several studies portrayed poverty as an important cause of emigration of individuals and from households in southern African countries to Africa. On the other hand, the studies found that migration to South Africa actually alleviated poverty in the emigrants' countries of origin, considered in the second thesis of this paper. The latest evidence comes from SAMP studies made in different countries.

In the 1970s, Bohning (1981) edited *Black Migration to South Africa* which contains studies on conditions of migrant mineworkers and South Africa's gold mines and on Swaziland and Lesotho and on effects of the unskilled labour in these countries and Southern Africa in general. As Africans in southern African countries became attracted to modern goods and saw possibilities of rearing livestock from earnings at the mines, they opted for recruitment as a means of fleeing poverty in their countries. In that socio-economic milieu, the rural subsistence sector gave way to emigration of males. Moreover, many Africans lost their land that was alienated by the white farmers, plunging the Africans in poverty which in turn pushed the landless outside their areas of provenance and forced them to emigrate. That was poverty engendered by colonialisation and one that lingered on up to in some countries even after, independence and majority rule. Later as South Africa adopted the "internationalisation" policy, which substantially reduced foreign labour (Bohning, 1981: 37-9), poverty struck in the former labour suppliers and stimulated clandestine immigration into the country.

Economic discussions of the causes of rural out-migration have centred on the Todaro (1969), Fei-Ranis(1961) and Lewis(1954) "push-pull" models that are superficial, historical and "indifferent to the specific structural circumstances of labour reserve economy (Clarke,1977, quoted in de Vletter et al., 1981:60). Among the structural circumstances are rural poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Yet Todaro's probability of securing employment and higher income at the destination as the principal determinants of migration operate in a stronger more than that of urban unemployment. Studies in different Southern African Countries reported the need to purchase cattle, food and clothing building and household requirements as the perceived areas of expenditure by outgoing migrants, workers and returned (de Vletter, 1981:64). This explains why Basotho migrants on remittances and deferred pay has alleviated poverty, and why when the remittances fell 17 percent in real terms in 1987-1992, the dent sharply reduced national income (Sechaba Consultants, 1997:5)

Lack of employment opportunities constitutes the most important reason for emigration. As these opportunities dwindle in the countries of immigration, a number of ills bedevil the labour supplying countries: loses of valuable revenue (more than 50 per cent of GDP in Lesotho); worsening domestic unemployment; aggravation of rural poverty; destabilising of the social fabric; and intensification of rural–urban migration(UNDP, SADC and SAPES Trust, 2000: 142). Thus, these conditions aggravate poverty and cause further emigration, notably clandestine and fake refugees/asylum seekers.

The whole of Southern Africa is being plunged in an overwhelming poverty trap: that caused by HIV/AIDS. This pandemic is already drastically reducing life expectancy and changing the population structure; it is producing an increasing number of orphans and the widowed; and is eating into every fabric of the society including it unbearable health, economic and social costs. In the near future, Southern African countries will be lacking skilled human resources to run national economies. Instead, they might have to import more skilled labour from outside Africa given that other African sub-regions are being similarly affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Thesis two: Migration causes and alleviates poverty

This thesis examines the other side of migration poverty interrelationship. A plethora of literature on the influence of migration on poverty underlines its positive impact. However, Dodson (1998:25) cautions that:

> "The impact of migration is difficult to assess in any absolute or objective sense, especially by those actually involved. Not only does it touch on virtually, every aspect of life, but it present on combination of costs and benefits that are not easy to disentangle… How, for example, does one calculate the benefit of economic gains obtained at the social cost of disrupted family lives?"

This statement has an important message: that a balanced view of the impact (a difficult phenomenon to measure) is necessary.

Negative Effects of Migration

For the traditional suppliers of unskilled labour to Southern African and national economies, emigration had adverse effects on families and national economies. Emigration denuded families of heads of households who wielded all controls on family socio-economic welfare, young able-bodied males who could help in the development of rural areas, including providing farm labour and social disruption for formerly cohesive family units. These consequences precipitated poverty at the household and community levels, which culminated in under–development at the national level. Indeed, recruitment of young unskilled labour curtailed educational ambitions of youth, in the process of perpetuating low educational attainment, which denied the labour-exporting countries opportunities to improve human resource development.

Selectivity of males in Southern Africa's labour market has produced an increasing population of female-headed households and single parenthood, which tend to adversely affect family welfare. As women are disempowered in practically all family and community decision-making even while their spouses stay away for several years, they are compelled to become liabilities in their societies. They have no powers to cultivate crops, rear and sell livestock without the men's approval, and this leads to impoverishment hence women's desire also to emigrate or out-migrate from their areas to urban areas in-country.

Surprisingly—and depending the question asked—equal proportions of males and females interviewed in a SAMP study perceived the impact of migration on them to be positive, on their families, on their communities and on their countries (Dodson, 1998:26). While such responses are informative, they cannot claim to be representative because the respondents do not know perceptions of communities and countries.

Emigration of unskilled labour has led to stagnation of agriculture in rural areas in countries of origin, causing food shortages and declines in both production sale of commercial crops and plunging the communities into deeper poverty. In Lesotho, large herds of cattle bought from remittances led to overgrazing and soil erosion, consequently causing poverty instead of wealth (Russell et al. 1990:89). The same could be true of Swaziland. In this country and true to the rest of Southern African countries, migration tends to engender a vicious circle of mutual support between the modern capitalist sector and the traditional rural sector. Rural production does not adequately support subsistence, nor are wages at places of employment sufficient to meet the needs of the families left behind(de Vletter et al.1981:720.

Finally, the policy of "internationalisation" of mine labour curtailed the flow of migrants' remittances and deferred pay, plunging migrants into the abyss of poverty in countries such as Malawi(Chirwa,1997), Swaziland, Mozambique and Lesotho.

Positive Effects of Migration

The argument that migration has contributed to development in countries of origin dominates the literature. Studies of migrants since the 1940s in Malawi—Zambia area, in South Africa and research undertaken by the International Labour Organisation (Bohning, 1981) and SAMP (since 1997), there is overwhelming evidence of the positive contribution of migration, including its alleviation of rural poverty.

Both remittances and deferred pay prove this point. Emigration has been a means of improving the migrants' life and their families' welfare. That only 10 percent of Basotho miners sent money home through their employers by the 1970s suggests that the bulk of remittances was by other means. A substantial proportion (about 60 percent) of migrants' deferred pay was not touched by the employer or their families until their return(Gordon,1981:120). For a long time remittances to Lesotho represented between 25 and 50 percent share of the GNP; in 1994 above Basotho miners remitted R162 million in compulsory deferred pay and a further R168 million voluntarily (World Bank, 1998:66; Sechaba Consultants, 1997), and in Lesotho, Botswana and Malawi remittances increased herds of cattle as well as crop production (Russell, et al. 1990:24). Between 1992 and 1994 compulsory deferred pay of Mozambican miners in South Africa increased from R156 million to R200 million compared with voluntary remittances which increased from R5 million to R21 million in the same period. Both remittances thus increased from R161 million in 1992 to R222 million in 1994(de Vletter, 1998:15) Malawian returned min workers boasted of having TEBA radios, watches and grocery shops, TEBA (The Employment Bureau for Africa)- the recruiting agency being the foundation upon the migrants built. Improved rural housing and investments in rural micro-enterprises were other development undertakings (Chirwa,1997:634-5). In January 1995, TEBA headquarters in South Africa reported that R1.3 million was paid to the Malawi government as the returned migrants' pension and retrenchment benefits (TEBA, 1995, quoted in Chiwa, 1997:646-7). The message from these statistics and accounts is loud and clear: remittances have contributed significantly to southern Africans labour suppliers, and without them rural poverty would have been greater. With the reduction of the number of Basotho, Swazi, Mozambican and

Malawian min workers in South Africa, remittances have been dealt a serious blow and these mineworkers' countries denied the surest source of income.

It is not surprising that South Africa, since majority rule in 1994, has embarked on a policy of making investments in the traditional labour-supplying countries, in the whole of SADC and elsewhere in Africa. The assumption is that by investing in other countries, South Africa would create employment opportunities and stem the flow of all types of immigrants from the rest of Africa. Yet such a policy is flawed because the numbers likely to be employed in South African—initiated investments are likely to be too small to make any impact on employment creation.

Apart from remittances, migrants have also spearheaded development in their countries of origin. They have purchased agricultural implements to modernise agriculture, acquired new skills to deploy on return, expanded the international market for goods from their countries and showed glimpses of the advantages of regional integration. Nonetheless, these positive developments, which have contributed to poverty alleviation, are being threatened by xenophobia in the countries of immigration—a response likely to curtail the gains already made. As Southern Africa is a highly mineralised region and SADC is fast integrating the member states, it is to be expected that internal migration will assume greater importance than previously, involving return migrants as well as prospective emigrants.

Policy implications

SAMP research has revealed some important perspectives of international migration, which interrelate with poverty in Southern Africa. As opposed to the ILO research (Bohning, 1981), it delves into issues beyond just mine workers—issues such as the impact of "internationalisation" on migration to South Africa; immigration into all Southern African states and the citizens perceptions of and attitudes to it as well as immigrant groups; the migrants' comparison of good vis-à-vis bad things in their countries vis-à-vis countries impact of migration at origins and destinations; of immigration; and policy implications of all these. The SAMP research initiative provides impetus for systematic research on migration and poverty. Better still, SAMP and SARPN should undertake collaborative research on migration and poverty, investigating the interrelationship at individual, family, community, national and regional levels. Available research findings do not provide us with answers that such a collaborative would do.

Research, discourse and policy making on the two phenomena must of necessity underpin the interrelationship between migration and poverty. One or the other perspective is riddled with prejudice, biased measures and interpretations likely to produce spurious results. Researchers should collect good quantitative and qualitative data, which should be subjected to more rigorous analytical techniques than intuitive interpretation as we have done in this discussion. The latter is inevitable where data do not permit statistically robust techniques. In addition, carefully selected qualitative techniques can provide useful insights into issues that require interpretation of broad perspectives rather than accurate measurement. A combination of qualitative and qualitative analyses is even better, yet it is tricky unless properly executed. Discourse based on research findings can only be balanced if analyses of research results are balanced. Unfortunately, statements by the political establishment perpetuate rhetoric at the expense of the situation of ground; to say the least, the statements are unfounded simply because they ignore research results or come before any research is ever undertaken. Policy making suffers the same fate because often it is based on outdated data—and in some cases none at all. In the next few years, policy makers will have to revisit their stand by commissioning research on migration and poverty whose results would form the basis for meaningful policy making. Again, SAMP and SARPN are already on the ground to be of service to policymakers in Southern Africa.

All Southern African countries suffer from one or so aspect of poverty: in terms of income measured by GDP or GNP, human resources and so on. Definitions of poverty provided in this paper confirm this fact. It is therefore, inadvisable for anyone country or a group of countries to discriminate against others whenever migration reflects the various types of inequality. A better move would be bilateral arrangements between any two countries affected and multilateral initiatives under the auspices of SADC. As migration and poverty are dynamic, their magnitude, causes and effects should be monitored at all times to keep abreast of changing circumstances. Historical facts, while useful as a backdrop to appreciate current circumstances, are anachronistic and discordant with current efforts to analyse the ramifications of migration and poverty in Southern Africa. Since the formation of SADC, Southern Africa is a new entity with a new vision and spirit to foster regional integration and to play a key role in the whole of Africa.

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