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Session 3.1: Policy and Institutional Coherence: latest data and research findings

A PERSPECTIVE FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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INTRODUCTION

This paper suggests that one of the major barriers to migration having beneficial developmental outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region is a lack of institutional and policy coherence. It is argued that this lack of coherence is evident in three contexts – within origin countries, within destination countries and in the relationships between origin and destination countries. These are discussed briefly before there is a consideration of the types of initiatives that are required to overcome this lack of coherence. In particular best practices within the Asia-Pacific region are discussed with respect to improving the empirical basis on which policy and practice regarding migration and development are based. Currently much policy decision making on migration is not

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based on timely, accurate and relevant information on the scale, nature and causes of that movement and its effects on development.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE IN LOW INCOME COUNTRIES

The dimensions of a lack of policy coherence in Asia-Pacific countries which send migrants to other countries include the following:

- Lack of articulation between migration and development plans and strategies
- Dispersal of migration policy and practice among several government departments – labour, immigration, foreign affairs, security, etc.
- Lack of the development of a cadre of career public servants with continuing skills, experience and background in migration let alone migration and development.

This situation is exacerbated by a lack of relevant data to quantify the scale, composition and impact of permanent, and especially temporary, migration from these low income countries. This is partly because of a universal bias toward collecting information on *immigrants and not emigrants*. No country in the region includes questions on emigration in their census while most include birthplace (immigration) questions while only a handful of nations collect and analyse information on persons departing the country. Seeking information and understanding on how migration influences development in origin countries is hampered by the destination bias in data collection. This bias also has a flow through impact on research which is also strongly destination biased. It is argued that there is a *need* for cultural shift in data collection toward more focus on emigration.

There has been a general failure in the region to integrate migration into national economic development strategies and plans and the paper discusses two examples:

- In Indonesia some of its poorest regions experience substantial inflows of remittances but these are not factored in at all to regional development plans and strategies.
- An examination of 11 Climate Change Action Plans in Asia and the Pacific shows that migration is mentioned in only 3 but is not dealt with in detail in any.

Nevertheless there are some examples of best practice ...

The Philippines have developed a comprehensive suite of policies and programs targeted at emigrants, temporary labour migrants, second and later generations, the marriage partners of Filipinos overseas and Filipino Youth overseas.

China has also become very active in using its skilled diaspora as a source of expertise to assist in its development efforts and in effect encouraging 'virtual return migration' among its diaspora (Wescott 2005 and Biao 2006). In the 1980s and 1990s China's main policy direction toward its skilled expatriates who had remained overseas after graduation was 'huiguo fuwu' or exhorting them to return and serve the motherland (Zweig 2006). At the turn of the century however there was an important change in policy direction (Biao 2006, 3; Wescott 2005, 272) which is articulated in the term 'weiguo fuwu' which encourages 'flexibility mobility' rather than permanent return. There are a range of policies and programs at regional and national level to encourage well placed expatriates to maintain strong contacts in China and act as conduits of knowledge transfer.

One of the most comprehensive efforts by an emigration nation to develop a coherent migration policy has been India. In 2004 the Indian government established the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) which is headed by a Cabinet Minister and has a larger mission of 'development through coalition gang borders' (MOIA 2008, 5) and to engage India's vast diaspora.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE IN HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES

Most of the discourse and policy attention on migration and development has centred on how origin nations can use policy intervention to maximise the development benefits of migration. Nevertheless, in the Asia-Pacific region it could be argued that there has been a failure in many destination countries to realise the benefits which migration could deliver for development. This failure has been in two areas. Firstly in a number of destinations there has been a failure to recognise that migration is a crucial structural part of local economies and is necessary for the maintenance and enhancement of their prosperity. Secondly there has not been a widespread realisation that coherence of migration and development assistance policies can be achieved so as to deliver development dividends to both origin and destination countries and communities.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE BETWEEN ORIGINS AND DESTINATIONS

In the Asia-Pacific region there has been little dialogue on migration between pairs of origin/destination countries or at a regional or subregional level. Regional governance of migration remains weak and in its earliest stages. In fact a decade ago there were virtually no regional fora for discussion of migration issues, let alone development of coherent regional migration policies and institutions within the Asia-Pacific region. Coherence in international migration and development policy requires not only integration and harmonisation relating to migration and

development activity and policy within nations but also *between* nations, especially pairs of origin/destination countries.

There are some promising developments including the beginnings of a dialogue on migration and development in regional bodies like ASEAN and APEC and the growth of regional migration consultative processes. There are also growing indications of bilateral negotiation and agreement being a useful first step in gaining better migration outcomes. However where discussion has occurred it has overwhelmingly been of higher skilled migrants and little dialogue is evident regarding low skilled migrants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made regarding three issues.

Capacity Building

One of the major constraints on governments in the Asian region in the development of efficient and equitable migration systems which work for the benefit of development in countries of origin and destination as well as the migrants is a *lack of capacity* – both in institutions and human resources. Effective development and management of migration and development policy requires considerable capacity and infrastructure, including the following:

- A well trained cadre of migration officials who are not general public servants but have specific background and experience across the full range of migration activities. Such a group are fundamentally important to the setting up and running of an effective migration management system as well as in the development of migration and development policies.
- Integration and harmonisation of all of the government activities concerned with migration – customs, police, labour, border officials.
- Appropriate migration management systems. Appropriate hardware and software have been developed at a rapid rate, especially since September 11 and the adopting and use of these is important.
- Setting up an appropriate information system. Effective migration management is impossible without timely and relevant measurement of the scale and composition of migration into, and out of, the country.
- A body of policy-relevant research which is essential not only for the continuing surveillance of the impact of migration and to make evidence-based recommendations for

migration policy and practice but also to develop policies which can maximise the beneficial impacts of migration on development.

- A competent well-trained national research capacity to inform policy development on migration as well as migration and development issues.

These are all areas in which countries like Canada, United States, Australia and New Zealand have many decades of experience in these areas and there is considerable potential to 'fast track' their accumulated expertise and experience to Asia-Pacific countries.

The details of the specific recommendations in this area would need to be the subject of a targeted investigation and to some extent they would differ for each of the countries involved but there are some initiatives which would seem to be urgently needed which apply across the region. In particular it is recommended that a formal training program is set up at Masters level which aims to train a cadre of government officials and researchers in the whole area of migration (its measurement, nature and theory) and its potential effects on poverty reduction and development. The program should be university-based and credentialed but have a strong 'hands on' element involving considerable input from immigration and development agencies at every stage as well as one semester 'on the job' component within relevant sections of relevant agencies federally and regionally which is an assessed part of the program. Such a program could be very quickly set up in a country like Australia for example (Hugo 2007). The development of a substantial group of migration professionals is a *sine qua non* for the development of effective migration and development policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Similarly the transfer of experience regarding institutional mechanisms, management systems, bureaucratic processes, cross-ministry articulation and cooperation etc. can be transferred quickly. The training of personnel would be an important part of that transfer.

Compilation and Exchange of Better Information on Migration and Development

Relevant, comprehensive, accurate and timely data and information are necessary for the development and operationalisation of migration and development policy. Firstly, dealing with data collection there are two areas which need immediate attention:

1. *Improving Migration Data Collection:* The reality is that most data on international migration in the Asia-Pacific region is incomplete so that data sets of international migration maintained by international agencies are inaccurate for many countries in the region.

2. *Making Better Use of Existing Migration Data:* While there is a pressing need to improve migration data collection practices and methods in the region there is considerable scope for innovate and careful analysis of existing data.

Regarding improvements in data collection, the following recommendations are made for countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

- (a) To utilise contemporary developments in electronic data capture and processing to gather timely and comprehensive data on persons entering and leaving each country.
- (b) Regarding populations censuses there are still several Asia-Pacific nations which do not collect international migration data in their population censuses. In all cases the data collected are immigration data and there needs to be some careful experimentation in the region on the development of questions which relate to emigration.
- (c) Most nations' statistical authorities carry out national surveys, especially of their labour force. Such surveys are generally a poor vehicle for collecting information on migration because their very small sample size and hence the limited number of migrants they detect except in countries where a large proportion of their workforce is made up of migrants. Nevertheless there may well be opportunities in selected situations to include questions on migration into existing household surveys. The DHS (Demographics Health Survey) program is active in more than half the countries of the region and could include modules on migration (both in and out).

Moving to recommendations relating to existing data sets on migration within Asia and the Pacific which remain underutilised there are a number of initiatives which could draw out insights without resorting to new data collections. These include the following:

1. While it is too late to change the census questionnaire to include appropriate international migration questions in countries that will be carrying out enumerations in 2010 it may not be too late to include them in enumerations planned for 2011 and 2012.
2. In all censuses, however, it is crucial that the coding and analysis plans include a comprehensive breakdown of the full range of potential answers. In the past there has been a tendency to lose much information at this stage by collapsing answers into generic categories such as 'all overseas-born'.
3. The most important initiative, however, is for plans to commence immediately for planning a *Diaspora Censuses Program* (DCP) for the 2010 round of national censuses. This would include the following:

- Identifying a list of the main origin countries of international migration in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - Identifying the main destinations for emigrants from each country.
 - Arranging in each destination country to create separate unit record files of census results for each origin country birthplace group which contains all information collected on the individual and their household.
 - At a centralised location the unit record files for each origin country for all destinations are to be fused to create a single Diaspora Census. This will require having some core characteristics which are available for all destinations such as age, sex, education, occupation etc. and others which are available for only some of the origin countries.
4. There is a pressing need for a targeted program of analysis of migration data collected in the 2010 round of population censuses in conjunction with other migration information available. A coordinated regional program to coordinate, assist and facilitate national analyses of migration data collected at the 2010 round of censuses.
5. There needs to be a substantial program set up to ensure that the migration data which is collected is interpreted and analysed in conjunction with other evidence in order for policy making to be informed in an effective way.

Linking Research and Policy

In the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere, the linkages between the migration research community and those engaged in policy and practice are weak and underdeveloped. On the one hand there are few mechanisms whereby the knowledge needs of policy makers can be transmitted to the research community; and on the other, the results of research are conveyed in a timely and understandable way to the relevant government and semi-government agencies. Two strategies of facilitating two way communication which need to be considered are:

- One model involves the setting up of a Bureau of Immigration Research (Fincher 2001) which as part of its structure involves a close connection between researchers and policy makers. Models could operate at both regional and national levels.
- Involving the NGO sector in a tripartite linkage with policy makers and researchers is also suggested as a means to encourage timely and effective interchanges.

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