INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that international migrants comprise 3.1 percent of the world population, international migration is at the heart of societal, economic and political debates. This may be attributed, in part, to the fact that the estimated 214 million international migrants are not evenly distributed among countries and regions. Citizens in some countries comprise a minority compared to expatriates. The case of the Arab Gulf countries is a classical model of this demographic imbalance. Moreover, while females comprise 49 percent of international migrants, sex composition of international migrants is imbalanced among countries and regions.

Because of the economic nature of migration, keeping aside forced migration, some members of families leave their origin for better-paid jobs in destination countries. This phenomenon contributes to family breakdown between origin and destination. Family breakdowns are associated with an array of socio-economic correlates and result from major problems related to child rearing and female-headed households, in the case of household head migration. Acknowledging the important positive economic impact of migration, negative socio-economic impacts of migration should be considered and explored, and policy interventions at the micro and macro levels should be introduced.

In this short article, an attempt is made to explore the socio-economic correlates of migration on the left-behind family members and introduce some policy recommendations at the micro (family) and macro (national) levels to minimize hazards and to maximize benefits associated with migration that result from family breakdown.
MIGRATION AND FAMILY: A THEORY

My earlier account of economic approaches to migration, the "new economics of migration," posits that migration is less determined by isolated individuals than by other social units—especially families and households—than potentially larger social aggregates such as communities, lineages, etc., where social norms regarding migration behavior may be deeply embedded. This approach was pioneered by Oded Stark in many writings (Stark, 1978; 1991). According to Stark, and others who have summarized his arguments (e.g., Massey et al. 1998, Skeldon 1997), migration must often be seen as a family or group decision which seeks to minimize risks and diversify resources rather than to maximize cash income alone. This strategy, akin to a "portfolio investment" of the labor of the various members of the family in various "niches" in the region of origin and elsewhere (abroad, or in another town or city in the home country), involves widening the focus of the investigation away from the single, individual migrant. The emphasis is on channeling investment and consumption of goods back to the home country.

Hence, the migration of one or more members of the family to work abroad should be regarded as a household strategy to minimize hazards and maximize benefit of the available household labor. Moreover, migration, according to this theoretical background, is a family/household decision rather than an individual decision.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CORRELATES OF MIGRATION ON THE LEFT-BEHIND FAMILY MEMBERS

Despite the positive impact of migration on families, such as better material quality of life, improved housing conditions, better health status, education, and investment opportunities, negative impact increases in the case of migration of a key member of the family when they leave the rest of the family behind in the country of origin. The following are the most salient ramifications of migration of one or more key members of the family, which reflect the social cost of separated families:

1. Single or Zero Parental Families
   Migration of one of the parents or the two of them is the most prevalent pattern that prevails in many sending countries' household. The absence of one parent adds an extra burden on the remaining parent in order to replace the consequences of the absence of the other parent. Moreover, the absence of the two parents in a family leaves the children without their care takers which affect the social behavior of the left-behind families and expose them to many hazards. Children in this case may suffer problems in their education and in many cases suffer psychological problems that cannot be mitigated by remittances.

2. Lack of parental guidance
   Associated with the single or zero families, is the lack of parental guidance which may not be replaced by relatives and the new caretakers of the left-behind families. The new communication technologies make it easy for the migrant to communicate with his/her family in origin while in the destination countries, but such technologies are not available for all migrants and their families in all destinations and origins, and even if they are available they cannot by any means replace personal interaction.

3. Dependency on remittances
   Despite the fact that remittances are the most viable development-related aspect of migration, but remittances themselves make for a sort of dependence on them among the family. Remittances make for increasing the length of migration of the key family members to sustain the current economic welfare, which in turn increases the problems related to the absence of the key family member. In some cases, and after a long time...
of dependence on remittances to fulfill immediate family needs, families consider the migrant person as just a source of income.

4. **Psychosocial problems**
   The absence of key family members may lead to some psychosocial problems such as juvenile delinquency, divorce, and many other problems. In addition, and in the case of the absence of the husband, wives are exposed to stress resulting from taking over the role of the husband in addition to their role in child-bearing and rearing. Wives are also expected to participate in economic activities, especially in the agricultural sector.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations regarding migration and family can be classified into two groups: recommendations at the macro level and recommendations at the micro level. The macro level recommendations are mainly directed to the governments and global actors, while the micro level recommendations are directed to actors who work closely with the families of migrant workers in the countries of origin or the left-behind families.

1. **The macro level recommendations**
   The macro level recommendations regarding the mitigation of the migration of family members can be summarized in the reinforcing of international agreements around the protection of migrants and their families, harmonizing the relationship between politics of migration and the economy, promoting outsourcing and job migration, promoting policies and regulations related to family reunification, and promoting circular migration to decrease the duration of absence of migrants from their families in the country of origin. A brief description of each recommendation is given below.

2. **Reinforcing international agreements for the protection of migrants and their families**
   The 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families by the United Nations is considered the main international document relating to the protection of migrants worldwide. This convention entered into force in July of 2003. The main objective of this convention is to ensure the protection and respect of fundamental rights of migrants. However, it is noticed that the Arab Gulf countries, which host more than 15 million of international migrants, have not ratified this convention. In terms of Arab countries, only six have ratified this convention: Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Syria and Mauritania. Moreover, to date, no European Union Member State has signed or ratified the convention. It is also noticed that most of the countries that ratified the convention are sending, rather than receiving countries. Hence, an effort should be made to push for convention ratification by major receiving countries.

3. **Harmonizing the relationship between politics of migration and the economy**
   In a globalized world, political leaders play with the card of migration in their electoral campaigns. However, one can confidently say that migration policies are determined by economists rather than politicians. International economies stimulate most of contemporary migration streams, legal migration as well as undocumented. While international economies depend on undocumented migration to recruit cheap and unskilled labor needed for casual works, head hunting and the highly-skilled migration programs are utilized to recruit highly-skilled migrants. Hence, countries and the international community should harmonize the relationship between the politics of migration and the economy.

4. **Promoting outsourcing and job migration**
   In order to decrease the abstinence duration of the caretaker or the breadwinners in the migrant families, outsourcing and migration of jobs, instead of the physical migration of the labor force, should be promoted. Labor-intensive businesses can be outsourced and moved from receiving countries to sending countries. This tendency will decrease the
cost of labor and reduce the breakdown of families due to the migration of one or more of the family members. Outsourcing and migration of the jobs to developing countries could be regarded as an economic aid for developing countries with no extra cost.

5. Promoting policies and regulations related to family reunification

Encouraging family re-unification and lifting barriers on migrants to bring their families will help decrease the percentage of families left behind in their countries of origin and make it possible for migrants to achieve high standards of balance, which will manifest as high productivity levels in destination countries. It will also encourage policy/decision makers to review international rules and norms around family re-unification.

6. Promoting circular migration to decrease the duration of absence of migrants far from their families in the countries of origin

Circular migration could be a remedy that makes for shortening the duration of absence of a key family caretaker. This type of scheme ensures that migrants would be closer to their families than the regular type of migration that entails long absences. Circular migration is also beneficial for receiving countries since the cost of labor in this type of migration is usually less than in cases of long-term migration.

7. The micro level recommendations

By the micro level, I mean the immediate help that national institutions can provide to help families cope with the absence of one or more key member of the family. Governmental and non-governmental organizations can convey such assistance schemes. A brief listing of the micro level recommendations is given below.

8. Strengthening the role of origin country institutions to substitute the absence of the household head

It is important at the micro level to encourage the governmental institutions working in the fields of social support, family welfare, and the national councils for women and children to set plans and programs to provide psycho-social support for immigrant family during the absence of household head or key members of the family due to migration to maintain the family structure and to provide support to the left-behind family members. A database of families with migrant members should be established to facilitate providing support to such families.

9. Amplifying the role of NGOs and migrant associations in supporting left-behind families

The role of NGOs and migrant associations should be amplified to support the left-behind families. NGOs usually work with the grassroots, and thus they can play a crucial role in the support of migrant families. NGOs can play a crucial role in providing assistance to the left-behind families in the fields of health, education, and many other socio-economic services.

REFERENCES


