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Educating for Migration: The Indian/Kerala Experience

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Over the last 12 years, the Centre for Development Studies has conducted five large-scale migration surveys covering 15,000 representative sample households in order to monitor and assess the migration situation in terms of education, employment and remittances for policy formulation at the state level. The surveys were financed by the Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs, Government of Kerala and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Government of India through its research unit on International Migration. Using the Kerala experience, I briefly discuss below the role of remittances in enhancing the investment in the education sector and its implications for both countries of origin and destination for Working Group D.

The total population of Kerala is 34 million; of this, 2.2 million are emigrants (residents of Kerala who left for studies or work abroad), 1.2 million are return emigrants (those who worked or studied abroad and returned to Kerala) and 3.4 million are non-resident Keralites. Emigrants account for 7 per cent of the total resident population. Each emigrant, on an average, supports a minimum of four persons (the average household size in Kerala is 5 persons). In other words, 2.2 million emigrants provide livelihoods for 8.8 million persons left behind in Kerala – women, children and parents. It simply means that 32 per cent of Kerala’s population is either directly or indirectly benefited by the international migration alone. About 90 per cent of the emigrants live in six countries in the Gulf region, namely, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.

According to the World Bank’s estimates, India attained the top position in the world in terms of remittances with US\$ 52 billion in 2008. Our estimates indicate that Kerala received about 20 per cent of remittances which come to India, and Kerala’s remittances are equivalent to 30 per cent of the state domestic product. One out of five households in Kerala received remittances.

Households in Kerala make use of remittances for many purposes. The proportion of households that used remittances for education is about 40 per cent. However, if we

consider emigrant households with children, then all emigrant households invest heavily in their children (Table 1).

Currently, Kerala has the highest human development index in India in terms of education and longevity. As emigrants tend to invest a large chunk of their remittances on education (one of the key indicators of human development), this has led to the unprecedented growth of educational institutions in Kerala funded by private agencies. For instance, there were no private self-financing college in Kerala during the 1980s, there were 16 such institutions at the beginning of 2000, and their number increased to 70 in 2008 – almost five times in 10 years. This is also true of other institutions of higher learning which specialised in nursing and medicine in Kerala. Due to the incidence of high migration and remittances in Kerala, the neighbouring states, particularly Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, set up institutions of higher learning to attract the students from Kerala.

Table 1: Proportion of Emigrant Households that used remittances for various purposes in Kerala, 2008

End Use	Per cent of Households *
Subsistence	78.4
Education	38.9
Repaying Debt	36.7
Bank Deposit	14.6
Buying/building houses	9.4
Purchase of Land	8.2

**As the HHs use remittances for more than one purpose, these proportions will not add to hundred, and the sum will be greater than 100.*

One significant aspect of internal migration of Kerala in recent years is the increase in out-migration of students. In 2008, one fourth of internal migrants were students. Among them, forty per cent went to Karnataka and 24 per cent to Tamil Nadu. In addition, there was also a large flow of Indian students to several countries of the developing world such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia. We have no estimate on the outward remittances from Kerala to other parts of India and the world, that went towards paying for the higher education of Indian students abroad. Due to the private investment in education and health sector in Kerala, the cost of both education and health has skyrocketed so much that that non-migrant households are not able to afford educational and health facilities or have to borrow or take loans from financial institutions for the purpose.

One of the direct consequences for the countries of destination is that they receive good quality manpower (brain gain) from the countries of origin (brain drain) without making any investment in the countries of destination on education or capacity building for future migration.

Let us compare the educational attainments of migrants (emigrants and internal migrants) to that of non-migrants (Table 2). Migrants are, on the average, better educated than the general population. One measure of the level of education is the average years of schooling. According to this index, emigrants on an average, have 8.9 years of schooling compared with 7.7 years of schooling among non-migrants (general population). About 58.5 per cent of out-migrants have completed at least the secondary level of education as against 34.7 among the general population.

Table 2: Distribution of Migrants and Non-Migrants by Educational Attainment, 2008

Educational status	Emigrants	Internal Migrants	Non-Migrants
Up to primary	14.7	21.1	29.0
Upper primary	38.6	20.4	36.4
Secondary	26.7	31.9	24.4
Degree	20.0	26.6	10.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average Years of Schooling	8.9	8.7	7.7

Among the emigrants, 20.0 per cent have a degree as against 10.3 among the general population. Over the last 10 years, the quality of emigrants and out-migrants has improved (Table 3)

Table 3: Percentage with Secondary or Higher Levels of Education, 1998-2008

Trend in Educational attainment of Migrants				
Year	Secondary +		Degree	
	EMI	OMI	EMI	OMI
1998	40.5	69.3	10.8	13.4
2008	46.7	58.5	20.0	26.6

KEY MESSAGES

- (i) Parents in the countries of origin invest heavily in education by way of loans to send their children as future emigrants/workers (brain drain) to the countries of destination without analyzing the required skills required. In the end, some of the skilled acquired in the countries of origin are not needed either in the countries of origin or destination (brain waste).
- (ii) Emigrants invest their remittances on quality education in both countries of origin or countries of destination or so called developed countries (student emigration). Inward remittances to the countries of origin are well known, thanks to international organizations such as the World Bank. However, the countries of origin have no estimate of outward remittances to the countries of destinations in terms of student fees, accommodation and other logistic expenses.

- (iii) The countries of destination attract large numbers of skilled migrants (brain gain) from poor and developing countries without having to make any investment in the countries of origin, and the skilled professional move between countries of destination depending upon wages and favourable working conditions (brain circulation).

POLICY SUGGESTION

Countries of origin and destination should jointly frame policies on the skills required and develop the required manpower. Countries of destination should invest in the countries of origin to develop additional manpower for their own needs and for the needs of the countries of origin. Developed countries should refrain from acquiring skilled migrants from poor countries with their own investments and if they do, they should pay back the funds by investing in educational and health institutions in the developing countries.

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