



Migration and Development, a comprehensive view from a gender perspective

When I was preparing for this conference I started looking at the title's session "**Gender Issues and the Contribution of Migrant Workers to National Development in Sending and Receiving Countries**". I was invited to show UN-INSTRAW's perspective on gender, migration and development, but also, to participate in a multilateral session in which issues on labour, care, rights and policies would be evaluated in relation to international migration. First, I'll present a quick review of our conceptual framework as the theoretical basis of our applied research. Then, I'll introduce a critical perspective on the paradigm of "remittances for development" supported by various evidence of our case studies, and finally I will make some remarks for further research.

In 2004 UN-INSTRAW started an applied research program on migration and development, from a gender perspective, looking at the various impacts of migration and specifically at remittance patterns. Our main objective was to achieve a better understanding of how gender factors such as the feminization of migration, gender inequalities in access to productive resources, sexual division of labour, gender roles, etc. affect and determine the relationship between migration and development, taking remittances as the key link in this connection. As a cross-cutting tool of analysis, gender provides significant insight into the multilayered affects of migration and remittances on the lives of both men and women. The ultimate goal is to advice on the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives that aim to harness the potential of remittances for development. We aim to show *that these initiatives have the ability to generate development schemes in which gender equality is a central objective*, and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

This notable female presence on migration flows is not a new phenomenon. What is new however is the economic role assumed in the migration process. Women are increasingly migrating on their own as main economic providers and heads of households while fewer are migrating as "dependents" of their husbands or male relatives. The steady and constant increase in the number of women who migrate autonomously can only be understood within the context of the current phase of global capitalist development, in which gender exists as a crosscutting variable throughout the process. Women also play an important role on different stages at migration, as caregivers for those left behind, as managers of remittances, and as emotional supporters of migrants in different circumstances.

Despite the scope and characteristics of the feminization of migration, the incorporation of gender in the analysis of migration is relatively recent. The resulting invisibility of women migrants can be attributed to: 1) the predominance of androcentric viewpoints in the social sciences, even in studies where women represent the majority of migrants; and, 2) a failure to disaggregate statistics by gender (Zlotnik, 2003). The absence of a gendered analysis of the remittances phenomenon can also be attributed to, on the one hand, the low importance that has thus far been given to the feminization of migration and, on the other hand, the fact



that only recently have theoretical models of migration begun to consider the multiplicity and interrelationships of various factors present in migrations

Remittances. Who are the beneficiaries?

The research on remittances has shifted from a focus on characterization, measurement and projection towards a wider perspective in which the focus is on productive investment, remittances' relation to microcredit, entrepreneurship and local development. Yet, the approach needs to be wider still. We need to visualize a broad spectrum of variables and relationships to better understand the complex set of changes that occur as a result of migration; such as the formation of transnational networks, the maintenance or change of gender patterns, the improvement on households' material conditions, and the globalization from "below" that some authors have proclaimed (Portes, Guarnizo and Heller 2001). Little attention has been paid to the fact that monetary resources are not the only revenue that households receive and issues on gender and remittances are generally neglected.

Most of the work on remittances uses the "remittances for development" paradigm. In this understanding monetary remittances are the cornerstone of migration's effect on development. After they are used for the purchase of basic goods for survival, remittances can be used for 'productive investment' – such starting a business. While the importance of social, collective and in-kind remittances is recognized, the focus is primarily on the increase of financial flows; specifically the sending of cash remittances; which has a positive effect on macroeconomic and local development levels, the latter of which is privileged for project implementation. The positive effects on remittance-receiving households and the entire community occur directly and indirectly. The increased availability of monetary resources, along with market-led changes in the financial system, produce a kind of 'financial democracy' that opens up a series of opportunities for those who send and receive remittances and, furthermore, for their communities. This allows these populations to start business ventures which, according to this model, are the backbone of local development.

Development needs to be understood as more than economic growth that propels vertical dropping out of monetary profits. Instead we need to understand development as a comprehensive right to fully enjoy human rights. In fact certain migration studies carried out from a human development perspective address the fact that the decision to migrate is often linked to the denial of this right *to development* (UNDP 2005)¹. Our first objective then is to expand the definition of development when referring to its relationship with migration in a more holistic view that puts the human condition at the centre of analysis and the production of sustainable livelihoods at the core of intervention.

However, accumulative empirical experience has confirmed our statement that 'Gender plays a fundamental role throughout the migratory process and therefore affects remittance sending and spending patterns, as well as the character that development processes adopt in places of origin as a result of the received remittances'². The case studies conducted in Dominican Republic, Colombia and the Philippines have shown that women are privileged as the recipients and

¹ 2005 Dominican Republic Human Development report.

² Crossing borders Gender, migration and Remittances.



administrators of remittances, regardless of whether the remitter is a man or a woman. Women's role as protagonists in the sending of remittances is a true reflection of labour's feminization process, where migrant women largely engage into the feminized sectors of economy. When analyzing these labour markets one has to realize demographic shifts, educational level, class belonging and career perspectives occurring in developed countries (such as Spain, Italy and Greece). The expansion of the middle class has created a growing labour market for domestic work, care, services and catering. Therefore, migration is deeply connected with the consequences of the development model both at countries of origin and destination. Perhaps the most notable feature of female migration is the extent to which it is founded upon the continued reproduction and exploitation of gender inequalities by global capitalism.

In addition, the evidence shows that this virtuous circle of remittances, investment and development rarely happens. Most of the remittances are used (either by men or women recipients) to guarantee the minimum subsistence levels; spending on housing and food. From the human development perspective education and health are investments in human capabilities. The case studies on Africa, Latin America and Asia show that investing in health and education are associated with macro structural reforms that reduced the public offer. Although it varies between countries, health care coverage in all of the places of origin studied is deficient. To receive adequate care households have to pay for private services. Therefore, this becomes a priority expense when monetary resources increase as a result of remittances. Ensuring children's access to higher education is one of the migrants' primary objectives in several of the migratory flows analyzed.

Before talking further about investment I want to highlight that remittances also work as a substitute for social security services which are often not provided by the State in countries of origin. Remittances serve as retirement funds for parents of migrants, unemployment or disability insurance for siblings, support for widowed mothers etc. Women are the primary beneficiaries in this respect, as they suffer greater vulnerability in terms of becoming widows and are left with maintaining a family without support and have been historically excluded from formal employment (thus, to a pension)

The key role that women play as remitters: recipients and managers of remittances, results in a greater use of remittances in the areas of food and education. This supports the hypothesis, already sustained in other areas such as food security, that the greater women's control over the household's monetary resources (whether it is as remitters which maintain strict supervision over the use of the remittances they send, or as administrators of remittances received), the greater the tendency to invest in the overall well being of the household. Nevertheless, its essential to understand the role of the migrant inside the household, and the relationships, commitments and responsibilities regarding those left behind. Then, issues as marital status, offspring, educational level and other sources of income are important to look at when understanding remittance patterns.

These elements are inserted into social, economic and political contexts that are rooted in patriarchal ideology and organized around the sexual division of labour. Therefore, each one of these elements influences and is influenced by the different roles that each society attributes to men and women.



In some cases, such as the Dominican one, it has been demonstrated that there is a greater tendency amongst men who act as remittance administrators to consider these as private resources and, therefore, to spend part of these resources for their own personal needs, such as leisure activities. This behaviour has led many women to opt for sending their remittances to their mothers or sisters in order to ensure that the remittances are completely invested in the well being of the entire household. In the case of Colombian migration, class divisions have a greater impact than gender on the expectations associated with the migration projects, together with the willingness and possibilities for return, and their (individual and collective) views on their contribution the economic development in the region of origin.

Sending patterns

The sex of the migrant affects remittances' volume, frequency and sustainability over time. Although the amounts sent by men and women are basically similar, women send a larger part of their salary than men do. For all of the cases analyzed, this implies a greater effort on their part, given the wage discrimination which they suffer in their destination countries. Women's remittance strategy is sustained by keeping a tight control over expenses (while men reserve greater amounts of money for personal spending) and often requires perseverance in their jobs as live-in domestic workers, in order to save as much of their salaries as possible. This is detrimental to projects of a more personal nature, such as advancements in their careers as professionals, investments in education or capacity-building which would allow them to access other labour sectors outside of domestic service. This also affects their own construction of social capital which would help improve their integration into the society of their destination country. This strategy implies high costs for migrant women in terms of their personal well-being -even more, so than for their male counterparts- and responds to the differential gender roles within households that make women those which are ultimately held responsible for the households' well-being.

Women also demonstrate a greater willingness to respond to unexpected situations in their households of origin. Additionally, they show a tendency to favour more members of the extended household, as they are often responsible for providing numerous family members with different levels of financial maintenance. In many cases, such as the Dominican one, supporting the extended family, implies prolonging their stay in the destination country beyond the period of time they had initially planned. It also means delaying, if not giving up, certain objectives upon which the migratory project was originally based³. In the case study of Filipino migration to Italy, the pressure that women come to put on themselves in order to cover the extended family's needs leads them to ask for credit. The high interest rates attached to such services put their own survival at risk in the destination country.

Finally, women prove to sustain their remittance sending practices over a longer period of time. Male migrants tend to leave behind their household of origin much more easily, as they establish new relationships in their destination countries.

³ The following testimony from a Dominican woman is especially illustrative of a reality that continuously emerges in the interviews with migrant women: "given the amount of time I've been here, I should have money. If I'd had a smaller family and if they had needed less, I would be able to say 'I have a car, I have a chalet, I have money in the bank', but with such a large family..."



However, migrant women who also opt to separate from their spouse in the place of origin continue to send remittances for the financial maintenance of their children until they are able to reunite with them in the destination country.

Which investment?

Only a small percentage of households, however, use their remittances to make investments of a productive nature. This calls into question one of the principal assumptions of the dominant paradigm, since it confirms that remittances function as a type of salary and not as capital.

Thus, paying for these studies represents a large part of the entrepreneurial investments made with remittances. Our case studies show interesting differences in investments, when approached from a gender perspective. In general:

- Women's generally lower educational levels imply less entrepreneurial skills and result in additional barriers to accessing credit
- Because women tend to spend a higher proportion of remittances on household consumption (especially health and education), and have less access to credit, their investments are usually very small
- Given the small amounts available for their investments, women's businesses tend to be more dependent on unpaid family labour, have a very limited capacity for generating employment, and generally operate within a strategy of family survival rather than market dynamics.
- Following gender norms, women tend to invest in businesses that are considered 'appropriate' for women, such as hair salons, and small food, clothing, accessory stores

All of the above means, business low profitability and compromised mid-term feasibility (i.e. many businesses fail shortly after being started).

Investing in housing and land is also an important item. In Colombia, The government has promoted international fairs where the housing offer in Colombia is available to the Diaspora. On the one hand it has greatly propelled the construction sector in the regions of origin, but has also pushed up housing prices. Since the Colombian migration model leads to family reunification, migrants must also invest in housing in Spain. This, of course reduces the remittances pattern in terms of costs, frequency and amount, promoting the economic development in Spain. (In fact, some people often refer to migration impacts when explaining the rise of the construction and real state in Spain).

In the case of Philippines investments in the purchase of land and technology for agricultural production and in the education of migrants' children and siblings are clearly marked by gender and have differing effects on local rural development from a gender perspective. We found that there is a tendency to give the land to sons, while daughters' education is a must.

In addition when considering general impacts on rural development, one must take into account the increase in social inequalities, including the transfer of inequalities from some groups of women to others. These increases are taking place as a result of migration and remittances' positive impact on the ability to consume and invest. Only those households which receive remittances are the ones which are currently able to confront the mechanization/ technological changes to farming, while those



which do not have a household member working overseas continue to apply traditional cultivation methods, making it difficult for them to compete. In terms of gender equity, the Philippines study revealed that high rates of female migration tend to generate job opportunities in care giving for children and the elderly left behind in the communities of origin. It is important to note, however, that these jobs are generally informal and poorly paid positions occupied by women from the poorest households.

The investment of remittances in cultivable land is not prevalent in all cases. In some communities, such as those found in Batangas, investment primarily relates to the purchase of residential properties or small businesses. In some cases, it reduces cultivable land and contributes to a growing disinterest in agricultural activities amongst migrant family members and their surrounding communities.

Changes in gender relations

The role that remittances sent and managed by women play in the balance of power within unequal gender relationships is a key element to be considered in the evaluation of development and social change processes. As has been determined, monetary remittances contribute in a decisive manner to the improvement of women's economic status in both countries of origin and destination. But in addition to money, ideas, images, beliefs, and values also circulate between these countries. These additional elements are what Peggy Levitt (1996) has called "social remittances," and although they are more difficult to value and estimate than monetary remittances, they can also have a profound impact on development and the promotion of equality, including gender equality. The roles played by migrant women in the maintenance and redefinition of transnational networks have attracted growing attention in the research on migration. Gender not only influences physical movement across national borders, but gender relations are themselves reaffirmed, negotiated, confronted and reconfigured within transnational contexts. Migrant women who send money to their households acquire new roles and transmit new images, which have an effect both on their families and their communities. Women who stay behind also experience changes in their roles, as they assume more responsibilities and acquire greater autonomy in deciding how remittances are to be used. Any attempt to analyze the link between migration and development cannot exclude the impact that migration, and more specifically remittances, have had on social relations, gender roles and on the empowerment of women.

Remittance flows' impact on the empowerment of women:

In the majority of the cases, the increased importance of women's role as providers through remittances has led to greater negotiating and decision-making power in their households. However, this positive effect is not so automatic and is often mediated by other factors. On the one hand women win recognition and bargaining power into the household and community. On the other hand In several of the cases analyzed, in those places where women have fundamentally been the ones to migrate the social perceptions present are ambivalent. They range from valuing the role that these women have played in guaranteeing certain levels of well-being, which otherwise would not have been reached, to blaming them for the abandonment of their children and the possible negative effects that this is



considered to have on them. Valuing the role that female migrants play as 'saviours', in some cases, such as the Filipino one, leads households to praise them for their heroism. This feeds into the vision that these same women have for their migratory Project, understood in terms of self sacrifice and self exploitation and, overall, strengthens the gendered ideology that women's priority is the family, over and above their own interests.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As I have presented, our empirical basis and theoretical perspective encourages us to critically question how approaches must go beyond the limited economic perspective that looks solely at monetary benefits of women and men. Our aim is to qualify in terms of gender the specific consequences of remittances reception and sending, while amplifying the view over development aspects such as;

- Transnationalism, or the fluid interaction between countries or origin and different places where Diaspora lives.
- Codevelopment, or the recognition that migration can be fully integrated with the agendas of cooperation and development in sending and receiving countries
- Global care chains, or looking at the transnational networks formed for the purpose of maintaining daily life

We see that economy goes beyond markets and work is more than employment; the need to incorporate a gender perspective into the analysis of remittances' development potential is apparent, given the current undeniable fact that gender is central to all analysis of social processes.

When conceptualizing the feminization of migration one recognizes two major phenomena: the net increase of female migration in certain regions, and the fact that more women are migrating independently in search of jobs rather than as 'family dependants' traveling with their husbands or joining them abroad. In addition to this change in the pattern of female migration, the other significant change concerns the level of awareness of the significance of female migration and the role of gender in shaping migratory processes and most importantly, the significant role of women as remittance senders and receivers.

This definition implies considering a transnational approach as the methodological framework that looks at how development impacts countries and communities of origin and destination, while stressing the fluid and continual nature of exchange. In this sense, we acknowledge that migration itself affects the very definition of the rights and who, how and where can these be enjoyed. This wider notion of Human Development can not be understood on individual terms; hence, our unit of analysis is the transnational household: a moulding structure which is territorially dislocated but shares responsibilities, commitments and projects. This is the very place where gender roles, differences on power and age, determine the decision-making dynamics. Then households are not harmonious and homogeneous units where men and women naturally perform their socially assigned roles, but the micro sphere where social, economic and political changes happen.



Our perspective aims to incorporate different levels of analysis that should influence intervention and policy making. Addressing the migration-development nexus from a gender-sensitive approach involves considering a broad range of issues, including: (a) Gender acts as a systemic axis that structures the socioeconomic system as a whole, conditioning dynamics at the micro level (e.g., individual lives, households and entrepreneurial projects); at the meso level (e.g., labour markets and the performance of welfare states); and at the macro level (e.g., a new and sexualized international division of labour). (b) Consequently, this multilevel analysis is needed to evaluate the interrelationships between migration and development, while allows for a better understanding of the interconnections between global, national and local processes, as well as between intra-household decision-making processes, institutional arrangements and macroeconomic conditions. (c) A gender perspective must take into account the fact that women are not a homogeneous group. Gender must be understood as a subordinating variable qualified by other power relationships, such as class, ethnicity, nationality, migratory/citizenship status, sexual orientation, etc.

Finally, I want to remark that development should focus on guaranteeing the human rights regardless class, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, age, etc. If we want to consider development due to migration, we must look at the improvements that the work of migrants provide in destination countries and highlight the almost null recognition on the growth (or at least maintenance) of the well-being in developed countries.