

## **Human Development Report 2009. Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development. UNDP; New York, Palgrave Macmillan.**

**Ajay Pradhan**

**Ritendra Tamang**

: Network for Democracy and Development

1051 Rochester Ave

Coquitlam, BC V3K 2X1 Canada

Human migration is not a new phenomenon. Large-scale and long-distance migrations occurred in the distant past, too. Population migration has had an important role in the structural transformation of economies throughout history, thereby contributing greatly to development in general and human development in particular. Despite the potential of human movement to contribute to human development, barriers to migration persist everywhere. Restrictions to movement, whether within national boundaries or across international borders, have impacts in limiting the potential of human movement to yield positive human development outcomes, in places of both origin and destination. Overcoming barriers is necessary in order to accomplish enhanced human development outcomes.

Human migration has traditionally been studied without the application of a human development approach. By using this approach to the study of human migration, UNDP's Human Development Report 2009, sets itself apart from other postcolonial studies. The report, *Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development*, gives a comprehensive analytical look at who, how, why, when, and where people move. The report discusses how mobility can foster human development, and examines barriers to movement and impacts on those who move from their place of origin to a destination. The report prescribes broad and specific policy proposals to overcome barriers and enhance human development outcomes. It sheds new light in breaking common stereotypes in popular media, among the public and in politics about the migrants and immigration. The report refreshingly avoids taking a simplistic look at the issue of migration, and addresses the complexity that is inherent to the process of migration.

Human movement occurs under varying conditions. People often move out of necessity rather than preference and the gains that migrants receive are not uniformly distributed. A major driver of movement is the unequal global distribution of opportunities for human development. People move from one place to another to access better opportunities to enhance the quality of their lives. The Human Development Report examines the important but often misunderstood linkage between human mobility and human development from the perspective of movement as a fundamental freedom. The report reaffirms that human movement can foster human development and that there is a linkage between mobility and freedom.

The report envisions human freedom as a key indicator of human development and human migration as a component of that freedom. Movement has gains and losses and involves trade-offs for those who move and for those who stay. Policies intended to promote human development, therefore, must recognize the inherent trade-offs associated with human migration. Even though more than 5 million people migrate from developing countries to developed countries, the number of people who move from one developing country to another or within their own country is much higher (p. 9). Flows of remittance, knowledge and skills that are associated with migration affect even larger numbers of people in both source and destination places; as the migration affects not only those who migrate but also people in source and destination communities.

Apparently, human migration across the world has one underlying pattern, i.e. people move to look for better opportunities. There is a common misconception that most migration flows are from the developing "South" to the developed "North". This misconception persists in the media, and among the public and politicians. Perhaps this explains why cross-border entry is constrained by barriers, mostly by policies. Despite the misconception, the fact is that most people move within their own country, a fact that is not well known to many due to lack of data. The background studies conducted in preparing the report sought to fill this data gap to some extent. Based on the census data from 24 countries representing 57 percent of the world population, the studies found that the proportion of those who move within their own country is six times higher than those who move across international borders, who constitute only 3.1 percent (214 million) of the world's population (p. 21).

It is noteworthy that, of those who do move internationally, only 37 percent move from developing countries to developed countries (p. 21). Most international migration occurs between countries with similar economic development. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the Human Development Report classifies the developed and developing nations in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) on a scale of 0 to 1, with countries having a value of 0.9 or higher classified as developed and those with less values as developing (p 21). Even though most migration flows are not from developing to developed countries, 75 to 80 percent of migrants do move to a country with higher HDI than their country (p. 23). This clearly indicates that the difference between human development potential at origin and destination can be quite significant and attractiveness of higher living standards is a strong factor that encourages people to move from places with low HDI to high HDI. Even though the migrants from low-HDI countries make the most gains by moving internationally, they are the least likely to move. Often the hurdles for them to move are insurmountable. One hurdle is the policies of developed countries to restrict entry, that makes it costly and difficult to migrate to a destination with a very high HDI.

Towards the end of the 19th Century, many countries started imposing restrictions on migrants' entry for various reasons, including saturation of labor market and depletion of unsettled lands. Despite such restrictions, international migration was much higher than it is today. The post-World War II period saw a rapid multilateral liberalization of trade in goods and flow of capital. Corresponding liberalization in human migration was not seen. Some countries did enter into bilateral and regional agreements to address labor shortages, notably in the U.S., Europe and Australia. These bilateral and regional labor programs came to an end by the 1970s.

The report asserts that movements are largely influenced by policy constraints. In order to understand these constraints better, it is necessary to have the correct historical perspective on the bedrock principles on which modern nation states are founded. Since the concept of the modern states began in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the international legal system has been built on two bedrock principles - sovereignty and territorial integrity. Based on these bedrock principles, states have established legal systems to exercise their right to restrict entry. The policies used by governments to control immigration are motivated largely by their perceived right to assert sovereignty and national interest. The Human Development Report suggests that developed countries would be motivated to ease restriction on entry, allowing large numbers of immigrants to come in if they could limit access to fundamental rights. This suggests that governments of many developed countries often perceive the issue as being a mutually exclusive binary choice: "Allow high numbers of immigrants to come in but limit their fundamental rights, or provide immigrants full access to fundamental rights but limit immigration" (p. 37).

The UNDP's analysis has found that there is some correlation between negative public perceptions about immigration and government's immigration policies. Often, in countries where the public appears to favor greater restrictions, the governments have introduced restrictive immigration policies. Interestingly, however, the study has found that public opposition to immigration is not as massive as it appears (p. 37). High-skilled workers are welcome in developed countries. Some developed countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand have introduced objectivity in determining who is high-skilled and who is not, by using point systems based on a number of qualifying criteria. A comparison of immigration policies of developed and developing countries indicates that, while the developed countries welcome both permanent and temporary high-skilled workers, developing countries show resistance to welcoming high-skilled workers on a permanent basis.

The Human Development Report emphasizes that the main concern of the policy makers is the future of global economy. As in the last 50 years, we can expect to see the demographic trends to continue to drive human movement between regions. In addition to the traditional drivers of movement, new phenomena such as climate change are likely to place an added impetus on human migration as climate change is expected to negatively impact certain regions of the world, most notably the countries like Maldives that are at or near sea level. Environmental factors have always played a key role in driving human movement, but climate change is likely to cause unprecedented impact on human migration. Climate change is likely to drive changes in rainfall patterns, desertification, sea-level rise, and more frequent storms. All of these can play a significant role in human movement.

The report critically looks into the current intense debate on migrants' success in achieving positive outcomes from movement. Migrants move in search of better opportunities and for prospects of better access to work, education, health care, civil and political rights, and security. Most often, they do make significant gains from such opportunities.

People who move from poor countries to rich countries potentially make the most gains; but it is unclear how it will influence human development on a global scale as migration from poor to rich countries constitutes only small proportion of total migrations. For those who move, there are many different positive and negative impacts of moving, which depend on various factors. The most obvious positive impact of moving is, of course, the improved income. The study has found very large differences in income between those who stay and those who move to wealthy countries. The biggest difference is seen for those who move from a low-HDI country to a high-HDI country. Also, income gains tend to improve over time with the acquisition of local experience and language skills. Gains can be large for both high-skilled and low-skilled workers. The report states that how migrants reap benefits often depends on how well they are able to use their underlying resources such as their skills, education, money and networks. In general, the skilled people have wider access to opportunities, but for low-skilled people, barriers to accessing opportunities restrict choices and reduce gains from moving.

The report states that the proportion of people going to developed countries has increased significantly over the last 50 years (p. 20). The gaps in opportunities have correspondingly increased. The report does not address certain impacts that are exacerbated by periods of economic recessions and slow economic growth. For example, in the current recession-driven global economic crisis, migrant workers often are the first to have been laid off from work. Among the reasons given by the report for this trend is that migrant workers have a profile of typical workers who are most vulnerable to recession; i.e., those who are less educated, young, and working in seasonal and temporary jobs. The report does not, however, address the difficulties faced by high-skilled professional migrant workers who often face barriers to professional integration and acceptance in host countries, and who often have to start from the bottom despite high level education, significant experience and marketable skills.

The report states that migrant workers often face labor market discrimination. The report tells us that migrant job applicants with foreign-sounding names receive low callbacks from prospective employers. The report points out that non-recognition of foreign credentials and skills is a problem: "One problem facing many migrants on arrival is that their skills and credentials go unrecognized. Coupled with language and other social barriers, this means that they tend to earn far less than qualified local residents" (p. 52). The problem varies in degree across employment sectors, with information technology firms showing more flexibility on foreign credentials while public-sector organizations are not quite open to those with foreign credentials. This is a lose-lose situation. It neither benefits migrant workers nor does it benefit the economy. For example, as the report tells us, "The Migration Policy Institute recently estimated that up to 20 percent of college-educated migrants in the United States were unemployed or working in low-skilled jobs, and in Canada, despite the point system, this problem is estimated to drain US\$1.7 billion a year from the economy" (p. 52).

The discussion so far has focused on economic gains. However, people move not only for positive economic and social gains; significant migration is due to negative pressures, such as insecurity and violence in the home country. People fleeing from their regions due to conflict and violence often endure collapse in their human development outcomes, but movement does provide them respite from violence and brutal killings. In many regions of the world that are prone to civil war and conflict, the unstable political situations have displaced massive numbers of people, many of whom end up in other countries as refugees. Also, ill-planned large development projects often cause human displacement. Human development outcomes are often negative when residents are involuntarily displaced by large-scale development projects. The most notable of such projects are large dam constructions that create large artificial water storage reservoirs that can inundate farms and homes. While such projects may provide positive gains for wider economy from electricity generation, irrigation and water supply, they do cause involuntary displacements of local indigenous populations.

In addition to addressing the impact of movement on those who migrate, the report also analyzes impacts on others at the countries of origin and destination. The report suggests that in general the outcomes for those who stay are often positive, especially in terms of income, consumption, education, health, broader cultural and social processes. However, the report cautions that there are concerns about negative outcomes, which need to be explored. Household level effects can be both positive and negative. Positive impacts are remittance-supported improved economic conditions, whereas a negative impact is the family separation and the associated painful consequences. Increased income for the family of those who migrate is often a source of enhanced social status. However, at the national level, remittances have also been seen as "resource curse" as remittances can contribute to undesirable currency appreciation, which often leads to reduced competitiveness. At the community and national level, the effects of migration are economic in nature.

Social and cultural changes associated with migration often have significant impacts on entrepreneurship, community norms and political transformations. Brain drain and its effect on a nation's economy have been a topic of much attention and discussion for a long time. Brain drain occurs mostly due to a perceived lack of opportunity in the home country. Another concern in the communities is that the departure of able-bodied youth will lead to labor shortages, which will lead to a reduced productivity in labor-intensive sectors like agriculture. The report, however, suggests that migration of youth from agricultural areas to urban areas is an important structural transformation and "attempts to curtail these movements without addressing underlying structural causes are unlikely to be effective" (p. 76).

Unlike the impacts at the origin, impacts at destination are often a subject of more contentious debate among the public, in the media and in politics. Much academic and media attention has been placed on the impacts at destination. In the countries of destination, immigration and immigrants in general are seen in a negative stereotype. For example, immigrants are often viewed as those not only placing a burden on job markets and public services but also as a source of social tensions and increased criminality. However, the evidence indicates that the stereotypes are exaggerated and often without merit. However, public perceptions, with or without merit, often influence politics and, therefore, must be investigated and analyzed carefully in the policy process and proposals.

The impact of immigration for the host countries is in general favorable, with gains shared by both the immigrants and the host communities. The report speaks of economic theories as predicting that significant aggregate gains from movement for movers as well as destination countries. The reason for this is that, like international trade, migration allows people to specialize and take advantage of their relative strengths. Based on the findings of the report's background research using a general equilibrium model of the global economy, "destination countries would capture about one-fifth of the gains from a 5 percent increase in the number of migrants in developed countries, amounting to US\$190 billion" (p. 84). Gains are not limited to economic gains; migration is linked to higher rates of innovation, too. In the U.S., for example, a 15 percent rise in number of patents was seen with a 1.5 percent rise in number of migrant university graduates between 1950 and 2000 (p. 84).

Controversies concerning migration's impacts on labor markets in developed countries do exist. The public often perceives immigrants as having an effect in lowering the labor wages and increasing unemployment and competition. However, the background study conducted for the report did not find correlation between immigration and unemployment (p. 86). Political and public concerns are based on the perception that immigrants put a burden on governments' fiscal position through increased demands for public welfare. Whether immigrants take more than they give is a contentious issue among the public and in politics. For example, the report tells us: "In the 2008/09 recession, rising unemployment and hardship among migrants can be expected to impose additional costs on public finances, although the degree to which this happens in practice remains to be seen" (p. 86). On the other hand, migration is often perceived as a solution to the looming labor shortage caused by the ageing population. Also, some countries like Canada impose additional fees on immigrants, apparently based on the idea that immigrants receiving public services and benefits must pay more than local taxpayers. Canada imposed a permanent resident fee of US\$838 per person in 2005. The report suggests that whether positive or negative, the net fiscal impact of immigration is not significant.

Despite the fact that migrants do not cause disproportionate fiscal impact, migration remains a controversial issue in many countries. The report identifies three types of interrelated concerns: security and crime, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors. Security concerns have received the highest public and political profile following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Immigrants started to be seen as lacking loyalty. Public perception also persists of immigration as a source of increased crime. Data, however, does not support this stereotype. For example, among men aged between 18 and 39 in the U.S., the incarceration rate of the locally born in 2000 was 3.5 percent compared to 0.7 percent among immigrants (p. 89). Even though the economic recession of 2008/09 was not caused by immigrants, the recession did stoke anti-immigrant rhetoric. Recognizing the negative stereotypes attached to migration and restrictive policies based on such stereotypes, the Human Development Report makes broad and specific policy proposals intended to enhance human development outcomes. The report suggests that improved policies towards movers would lead to large gains in human development and that would benefit everyone affected by migration. The report proposes reforms that allow migration to enhance people's freedoms. Currently, many migrants have limited rights and they face uncertain futures (p. 94).

The report suggests that the policies to restrict entry to immigrants and demands for high-skilled labor are inconsistent with each other and must be addressed. The report claims that the proposed policy reforms will improve outcomes for individuals who move both in their original communities and their host communities. However, the report realizes that the acceptability, design and timing of the proposed policy will depend on a realistic appraisal of the political and public concerns as well as social and economic conditions. The core reforms proposed focus on six key areas: (i) removing barriers to immigration by opening up entry channels; (ii) providing basic rights to migrants; (iii) lowering the transaction costs of migration; (iv) finding solutions that benefit both migrants and the communities of their destination; (v) making it easier for people to move within their own countries; and (vi) mainstreaming migration into national development strategies.

These core reforms proposed are intended to help human development, but not all are in practice today and they will require decisions at the political level to be implemented. The proposals are meant for longer-term reforms and not intended to increase migration, which, the report concedes, is best left to individual nations to decide. The policy proposals involve new processes and the goal is to enhance the positive outcomes of migration in terms of human development. Most importantly, asserting that governments often respond to migration with inadequate or even inappropriate policies, the proposed policy reforms are intended to address stereotypical misconceptions about migration and human development and to leverage migration to aid human development.

The first policy proposal recognizes that liberalization and simplification in the immigration process is necessary to save millions of migrants from facing irregular and uncertain status, which is a source of frustration for migrants and tension for destination communities. The proposal specifically aims to help two categories of migrants: seasonal migrants and unskilled migrants. However, whether to ease up on the process of entry for these two categories of migrants is likely to be seen by destination countries as a matter of national policy. Therefore, whether the destination countries will accept this proposal remains to be seen. However, the intention of the proposal to resolve the uncertain status of millions of migrants is both a desirable and a practical proposal, as leaving the status of immigrants unresolved is beneficial neither for the migrants nor for the destination countries.

The second proposal, which is ensuring the basic human rights for migrants, is unlikely to be questioned by anyone on moral grounds. Human rights are fundamental and migrant workers' rights are part of human rights. The intent of this policy proposal is to expand freedoms for migrant workers and their families. Not all migrants enjoy the same kind of freedom as the local populations. The six core international human rights treaties that have been ratified by 131 countries all contain non-discriminatory clauses intended to protect human rights of migrants. However, the most comprehensive seventh international treaty, the U.N. Convention of Migrant Workers' Rights, which entered into force in 2003, has not been ratified by any of the Western developed countries, which are the major destination countries preferred by most migrants. Therefore, unless the seventh convention is more widely ratified, it is unlikely that we will see significant progress.

The third policy proposal relates to reducing transaction costs of moving. The proposal assumes that governments can help reduce costs by considering six priority areas. Some of these proposals are feasible, while others are unlikely to be adopted by destination countries. For example, introducing immigration procedures and open corridors to allow free movement is unlikely to be seen as realistic. It is possible that entry fees are imposed less to generate revenue and more to put restrictions on inflow of migrants. Increasing access to and reducing cost of obtaining official documents like passports are issues that have to be dealt at countries of origin, not at destination countries. Reducing this cost is not likely to make a significant difference in increasing movement; rather, easing entry restrictions by destination countries will likely have much more significant impact. Empowering migrants by enhancing their access to information, rights of recourse and stronger social network is important in helping migrants settle well, but this is already happening in countries like Canada. Regulating private agents and recruiters is also an important policy measure, but this is also not something entirely new. Agents and recruiters are already regulated. Another policy proposal concerning direct administration of recruitment by public agencies is not likely to be adopted in countries where conservative governments tend to restrict the size of bureaucracy. Intergovernmental cooperation is another policy proposal which is obviously important but is not something that is entirely absent.

The fourth policy reform proposal concerns improving outcomes for migrants at destination countries. This proposal consists of measures including providing access to basic services like schooling and health care.

Where schooling is mandatory, free access to schooling is already available in countries like Canada and the United States. However, access to health care is not uniformly available in all countries and is unlikely to be available without significant fees. It depends on the types of health care delivery systems countries have. Canada has a universal health care system financed by taxpayers but the United States has a largely private health care system. Helping newcomers acquire language proficiency and allowing people to work are also good policy proposals. Most immigrants who enter a country with English as an official language already have skills in English language. More important probably would be to quickly and effectively remove hurdles for high-skilled and foreign-trained professionals. Many foreign-trained professionals like engineers and doctors with foreign work experience who come to Canada as permanent residents end up having to drive taxis or work as security guards for a living.

The fifth policy proposal pertains to enabling benefits from internal migration. This is more appropriate and applicable for countries with a legacy of central planning, such as Russia, Belarus, China, and Mongolia where there are restrictions for citizens to move and live anywhere they wish.

The final policy proposal is to make migration a part of national development strategies. This is certainly important in realizing full benefits from migration and obtaining positive outcomes for everyone affected.

In conclusion, the Human Development Report 2009 takes a pioneering human development approach to studying human movement. Traditionally, this approach has not been used by postcolonial researchers studying human migration. The study considers human freedom as a vital indicator of human development and human migration as an integral part of freedom. Since an important part of human migration flows, if not so much in numbers as in significance for economic development, from developing countries to developed ones, the report uses the Human Development Index for the sake of objectivity in analysis. A key finding of the study is the correlation between negative stereotypical public and media perception about immigration and governments' immigration policies. Where public perception about immigration is negative, governments have implemented restrictive immigration policies. As long as such restrictive public policies concerning immigration are in place, only limited positive outcomes will be achieved from human migration.

Therefore, governments ought to be courageous enough to remove the barriers to migration and remove common negative stereotypes. Resistance to liberalization of immigration policies is strong and real and is primarily due to four reasons: first, people often perceive immigrants as causing decreased employment opportunities for the local people; second, people often consider migrants with uncertain or illegal status as representative of the overall migrant population; third, popular misperception exists about the negative consequences of migration, such as decreased wage, increased crime, and social disharmony; fourth, policy-making is complex and immigration policy-making often involves policy-makers with diverse interests and agenda. The proposals, as the report tells us, are all feasible, but only if there is political will to accept migration without the traditional negative stereotypes attached to it by the uninformed or misinformed public, media, and politicians.

### ***Reference***

UNDP. 2009. Human Development Report. Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.