

MOVING IN AND OUT OF VULNERABILITY: INTERROGATING MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY ALONG A RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM IN INDIA

Drawing on life history interviews with migrant and non-migrant families in rural Karnataka, South India, to explore the role of migration and commuting in addressing livelihood vulnerability, and their implications on intra-household wellbeing and adaptive capacity.

WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

Migration and risk management studies, especially in the context of environmental change, typically examine households as male- and female-headed and rarely unpack how migration and commuting shape, and are shaped by, intra-household dynamics.

This paper addresses this gap by interrogating how and why men and women move. It also considers the implications of these choices on intra-household wellbeing and adaptive capacities.

Reflecting on structural deficits that constrain agricultural livelihoods is key to understanding drivers of migration. There is a need for challenging discourses that put the onus of risk management on migrants. While it is important to recognise and build upon migrants' resilience, it is symptomatic of their resourcefulness in extremely unfavourable conditions than it is a signal of factors enabling their success.

KEY FINDINGS

At an intra-household level, migration and commuting can alleviate vulnerability for some family members while exacerbating the vulnerability of those left behind. At a larger scale, migration that is adaptive at a household scale can be maladaptive at a system-scale where cities are unable to provide for or absorb migrants who often live in highly vulnerable conditions. Finally, on a temporal scale, migration and commuting affect livelihood trajectories and choices beyond the migrants alone. Understanding how these strategies affect household vulnerability over time is crucial for adaptation.

We found migrants are doing better but rarely show upward mobility. Remittances supplemented household income and helped repay existing loans, but did not necessarily increase adaptive capacities to deal better with climatic risks, thereby questioning the "remittances euphoria" (Bettini *et al.* 2016:6). In some cases, moving did not necessarily mean people moved out of existing social structures and norms. Thus, informal settlements were typically segregated based on religion or caste, in a similar way to rural settlements.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The paper makes key methodological and theoretical contributions to the migration and climate change adaptation literature. First, by capturing temporal vulnerability, livelihood pathways, and intra-household wellbeing outcomes along a rural-urban continuum, it forefronts the dynamic context of risk and livelihood shifts within which households operate.

Second, it demonstrates that binaries defining migration as 'a failure to adapt' or 'successful adaptation strategy' do not accurately depict the pathways of marginalisation, inequity, and aspirational shifts that shape migration outcomes. This highlights the importance of unpacking the implications of migration decisions on intra-household wellbeing.

Third, it highlights that causal patterns of vulnerability in the rural are often replicated or enhanced in the urban. The rural-urban continuum approach helps capture this by focussing on examining flows of people, ideas, and materials between rural, urban, and dynamic peri-urban areas.

