

# STRENGTHENING MIGRATION DATA FOR DECISION MAKING: INNOVATIONS IN DESIGN AND COLLECTION

## Main messages

Purposefully designed migration surveys can provide data on migration processes and patterns in ways that are not possible within the time and budget constraints of more general purpose household surveys.

- The deeper probing made possible with a migration-focused questionnaire, along with the larger sub-samples of households with migration experience, enable a much richer analysis.
- These questionnaires can uncover important differences in behaviour and outcomes, for example by gender, and provide useful insights for policy makers, enabling more nuanced understanding and debate.

## Background

Researchers and policy makers are fortunate that data on migration is rapidly improving in both quality and availability. In addition to improvements in measuring international migration with census data, more and more household surveys contain questions about migration experiences and remittance flows, allowing us to test ideas more robustly, draw deeper insights and challenge myths. But household surveys typically capture small numbers of households with migrants and are limited in the richness of data collected on the experience households have of migration.

This briefing describes the approach used in Migrating out of Poverty to collect data on households and their migrants in five countries in the global South, highlighting some of the innovative features that we believe will appeal to other researchers, providing some insights from our data, and explaining how we hope to develop our surveys in the future.



*Bags of questionnaires*

## Our contribution to existing knowledge

The Migrating out of Poverty household surveys provide researchers and policy makers with the opportunity to understand the diversity of migration patterns, both internal and international, the reliance of households on migration to generate incomes and support livelihoods, and the depth of relationships between migrants and their families at home. They incorporate larger sub-samples of households with current migrants than are typically available in existing surveys, a richer questionnaire designed to capture the complexity of migration patterns and behaviour, and a definition of migration that captures a wide range of migration patterns.

## Methods

Migrating out of Poverty began conducting household surveys in 2013 with surveys in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Ghana, followed in 2014 with a survey in Ethiopia and 2015 in Zimbabwe. The surveys were designed to be as comparable as possible, with development of a similar household questionnaire and a similar approach to sampling for each country.

Each survey consists of a sample of approximately 1200-1400 households, with deliberate over-sampling of households with current migrants. For example, in Ghana, nationally representative random sampling of households would have yielded an expected sub-sample of just 100 households with current migrants. Instead, our approach gives us a sub-sample of over 1000 households with migrants.

The sample coverage was restricted to regions of each country with a history of migration, as evidenced by previous sample or census data and informed by the local knowledge of our partner institutions. While this approach to sampling means that our surveys are not nationally representative, the advantage is that we have sizeable sub-samples of households with migrants. These larger sub-samples of households with current migrants can be used to provide more robust analyses of migration processes and impacts, and a more nuanced understanding of migration patterns by gender, age and other important characteristics.

The core household questionnaire contains modules on household composition and demographics, migration experiences of current

and return migrants, remittance behaviour, household assets, subjective well-being, and income. The core questionnaire was extended in 2014 to include a consumption module. Some of the modules are similar to those one might see in other surveys such as the Living Standards Measurement Surveys but where we innovate is in capturing more depth on the migration decision making process, on remittance behaviour, and on perceptions of the effects of migration. For example, our surveys ask respondents about who was involved in the decision to migrate and the involvement of migration brokers, reasons for migration, prior contacts at the destination and financing of migration, methods of sending remittances, frequency and amounts of monetary transfer, and types of non-cash remittances. We are also able to explore the ways migration is perceived by sending households and its impact on men and women's work.

Our definition of migration follows accepted practise to identify both a spatial and a temporal dimension. We identify individuals as migrants if they have moved away from their community, usually defined as their village, for a period of at least three months, and for purposes that can include work, education, and family reasons. By using a relatively generous definition of migration – a short period, over a short distance and for multiple possible purposes - we offer researchers the chance of exploring a greater diversity of migration patterns, including short term seasonal migration to neighbouring districts as well as longer term migration to international destinations.

## What we found

Our work demonstrates the importance of exploring and testing long held theories about the processes involved in migration and remittance decisions with a gender lens. Our surveys reveal differences between men and women in a range of decisions, from who migrates and why, their choice of destination and the nature of remittance behaviour from migrants to their families. This highly gendered focus is facilitated by the relatively large samples of migrants we have in our surveys compared to

more nationally representative general purpose surveys which allow us to sub-divide our samples by gender and other characteristics. The case studies we show here provide just a brief snapshot from selected research papers.



*Field work  
team Ethiopia*

### Case study one

Our Ethiopia survey, in 2014, revealed an interesting gender dimension to migration and highlighted the role of gendered labour market niches. While men and women seem as likely to migrate, less than 20% of men migrated abroad, with over 80% of remaining within the country, often within the same region, working in a range of occupations including agriculture and construction. Among women, on the other hand, 40% migrated abroad, the overwhelming majority to the Middle East and Gulf states, where they are employed as domestic workers. Remittances from Ethiopian women working abroad are substantial, much higher than remittances from international male migrants, and much higher too than remittances from women who migrate within Ethiopia. Our data therefore highlights the importance of international labour opportunities, which are often gendered, in determining migration choices.

### Case study two

Our Zimbabwe survey revealed the importance of non-monetary remittances from migrants to their families at home. Our questionnaire asked about the types of in-kind remittances sent home and reflects a wide range of goods, including food, clothing, medicines and school supplies, which were sent home with friends, bus and truck drivers. When asked to value the items received, households record similar values for in-kind remittances as for cash remittances, suggesting significant under-reporting of remittances based only on monetary transfers. This is particularly significant as women migrants in our sample are more likely to report that they send in-kind remittances than men, and suggests a much stronger role for women in supporting their families at home.

### Case Study three

In Bangladesh, we explored the role that individual, household, and community characteristics play in influencing whether or not someone migrates. We found that there is a striking difference in how household wealth influences decisions for men compared to women. Wealth, measured by the value of land owned by the household, is negatively correlated with the probability of migrating for men, but there is a positive correlation for women. These results suggest two explanations. First, land is an important asset in rural livelihood strategies: men whose families are relatively well endowed with land may prefer to remain at home in order to protect it as well as to exploit it, while men who are less fortunate may be motivated by the need to build up household assets. Women, on the other hand, in a context where female ownership and inheritance of assets is not common, are more likely to migrate if their families are relatively wealthy, perhaps reflecting the ability of their family to finance their migration costs.

### Looking to the Future

An important development in the Migrating out of Poverty surveys is to add a longitudinal dimension by re-surveying the original samples of households. This will not only provide a richer picture of the dynamics of migration patterns in each country but will allow us to explore the impact of migration in a more rigorous way. We have already started this work in Ghana, with a re-survey of around 1100 of our original households in 2015, and we hope to continue our work with partners to re-survey our Zimbabwe and Ethiopian households.

One innovation we plan to roll out further is to track migrants to key destinations. We have already done this successfully in Ghana, tracking over fifty migrants to Accra and we plan to widen this in future surveys to a number of international destinations. This tracking helps to plug the gap between households' knowledge of what their family member is doing at destination and what the migrant really is doing, as well as providing additional

data to try to understand why some households are more likely than others to gain from migration.

We are also innovating in our data collection methods, moving from paper-based data collection to using computer aided personal interviewing (CAPI) for faster and more accurate data capture. Our experience using CAPI in Ethiopia has been very positive, allowing faster transmission of data to researchers, scope for quality control on interviews, and more secure data storage. But there are challenges for data collection with CAPI in rural areas, where there may be limited access to a reliable electricity supply to recharge equipment and to an internet connection to upload data to servers. We have found that these difficulties can be resolved by careful planning of the fieldwork such as factoring in logistical support for field work teams. Our experience suggests that the benefits of CAPI outweigh any of the difficulties in implementation.

## Recommendations

While nationally representative household surveys are invaluable in exploring many themes related to poverty and development, the small sample sizes typically captured of households with current migrants preclude deep analysis of migration issues. We recommend that such national sample surveys develop approaches to over sample households with migrants, with suitable re-weighting to enable reliable estimation of population figures, in order to allow researchers and policy makers to understand the important phenomenon of migration.

Our work with our quantitative data reveals significant differences in migration and remittance behaviour by gender, and this work is consistent with other work undertaken by Migrating out of Poverty, for example on the migration recruitment industry and intra-household dynamics. We recommend that researchers seek to explore these gender dynamics and probe sources of differences where they exist in order to provide nuanced analysis and policy recommendations.

We recommend that policy makers be cognisant of the likely differences between men and women as current or potential migrants and remittance senders, and how these differences may play out differently for families at origin. For example, policy around access to public services and , financial services at destination as well as the design of international migrant visa legislation, should avoid assuming similar behaviour and processes at play and be aware of gender differentiated impacts.

## Public Access to MOOP data

We are keen for the wider research community to use our data and have therefore created public use versions of our first five household surveys, anonymised by removing personal and village identifiers, and are committed to continue this with our future surveys. Our survey data and supporting documentation are available to download for free, and can be obtained in either STATA or SPSS format. Please see <http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/research/migrationdata> for more details.

## Further reading

Abdelmoneim Y and Litchfield J. (2016) Does Migration Improve Living Standards of Migrant-Sending Households? Evidence from Rural Ethiopia, Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper 41

Awumbila M, Teye JK, Litchfield J, Boakye-Yiadom L, Deshingkar P, and Quartey P. (2015) Are Migrant Households better off than Non-Migrant Households? Evidence from Ghana, Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper 28

Bilsborrow R, Oberai A, Standing G. (1984) Migration surveys in low-income countries: Guidelines for survey and questionnaire design. London: Croom-Helm

Dzingirai V, Egger E-M, Landau L, Litchfield J, Mutopo P and Nyikahadzo K. (2015) Migrating out of Poverty in Zimbabwe, Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper 29

Litchfield J, Mahmood R, Siddiqui T, Egger E-M, and Ansari S. (2015) Migration and Social Networks: Evidence from Bangladesh, Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper 31

Mahé C and Naudé W. (2016) Migration, Occupation and Education: Evidence from Ghana, UNU-MERIT Working Paper 2016- 18

Yen KC, Platt M, Yeoh BSA, Arlini SM, Baey G, Lam T, Sukamdi, Litchfield J and Sugiyarto E. (2014) Gendered Migration Patterns, Processes and Outcomes: Results from a Household Survey in Ponorogo, Indonesia, Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper 22

## Contact

This policy brief was written by Julie Litchfield, Theme Leader on Quantitative Research, Migrating out of Poverty. We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Migrating out of Poverty partners in making these comparative surveys possible and for contributing to the ongoing analysis. We also acknowledge the teams of survey enumerators in each country who engaged so enthusiastically and professionally with the field work. Particular thanks are due to Mr Asmelash Haile Tsegay for managing the CAPI data collection in Ethiopia and providing us with such an excellent introduction to this technology. Please contact Julie on [j.a.litchfield@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:j.a.litchfield@sussex.ac.uk) for further information.

## About us

Migrating out of Poverty is a research programme consortium funded by the UK's Department for International Development. It focuses on the relationship between internal and regional migration and poverty.