

Promoting Gender-Responsive Co-Development in the Context of Labour Migration

Increased coordination and cooperative planning between countries of origin and destination for labour migration are needed to boost its potential benefits for all actors involved, including migrants themselves. The initial goal of co-development was to unlock the development potential of labour migration by connecting migration and development policies of destination countries. Nowadays, a stronger emphasis is placed on the mutually beneficial nature of both migration and co-development policies, as the contributions of migrants to destination countries are increasingly recognized. Acknowledging the shared interests of countries of origin and destination can help shift the focus of co-development beyond simply on containing and/or reversing migratory flows. A more holistic approach to co-development recognizes that protecting the human rights of migrants is necessary to strengthen their role as agents of development in both countries of origin and destination. As the number of women migrants and the remittances they send home continue to grow, there is an increasing need to promote gender-responsive co-development policies. Two issues merit particular attention in this regard: the working conditions of women migrants in destination countries (particularly domestic and care workers), and their participation in Diaspora organizations.



Co-development remains an elusive concept that is applied to a broad range of initiatives

Co-development may refer to programmes undertaken at the national, regional and/or local levels, may involve a variety of government and non-government actors, and may pursue widely divergent goals, from promoting the return of retirement-age migrants or easing deportation procedures for undocumented migrants, to developing income-generating opportunities in communities of origin. Likewise, the spirit of cooperation and shared goals that originally gave rise to the idea of co-development too often gives way to unilateralism on the part of destination countries, as they have the economic and political clout to impose their own policy objectives on countries of origin. Finally, it must be kept in mind that 'development' itself is often defined in different ways by social actors and policy-makers, which adds an extra layer of complexity to the understanding of what constitutes co-development in any given context.



The full development potential of migration remains unrealized

Although migrants make important contributions to the development of both their countries of origin and destination, the full development potential of migration remains largely unrealized due to current approaches to development policy in labour migration contexts. Contrary to the stated commitment to articulating migratory and development policies in order to maximize the development impacts of migration, development objectives have not been adequately integrated into national migration policies. Thus, both countries of origin and destination continue to pursue uncoordinated and often contradictory efforts. Destination countries emphasize border controls and the restriction of immigration flows, as well as balancing the needs of their labour markets and the interests of both employers and native workers. Countries of origin, on the other hand, may or may not seek to facilitate the migration of nationals to other parts of the world, in order to protect their workers' rights while abroad, and to effectively promote remittance-based



development. Countries of origin typically focus their efforts on increasing the total amounts of remittances sent home by migrants and, to a lesser degree, on preventing 'brain-drain,' or the loss of skilled workers to outside labour markets. In both cases, the original promises of co-development continue to go largely unfulfilled, while its so-called 'hidden agenda' dominates the policies of destination countries – that is, the control of migratory flows, the repatriation of undocumented workers, the promotion of voluntary return, etc.

The contradictions between migratory and development policies are best illustrated by the continuing recruitment of health workers from developing countries

Many developed countries face severe shortages of both doctors and nurses due to inadequate health-sector policies and to their rapidly aging populations. The cheap and easy fix to this problem has been the large-scale recruitment of doctors and nurses from developing countries. These professionals are afforded a privileged migratory status (automatic work and residency permits, family reunification, fast-track to naturalization, etc.). Given the low salaries and poor working conditions faced by health professionals in many developing countries, large numbers have migrated to OECD countries in recent decades and many thousands continue to do so. Meanwhile, their home countries lose desperately-needed health professionals, as well as the economic and social resources invested in their training. Those same countries who promote the recruitment of scarce health personnel are often simultaneously engaged in development assistance programmes that target HIV/AIDS, maternal and child mortality, and other health problems

made worse by the scarcity of local health personnel.

The case of Filipino women working in Italy as domestic and care workers provides another example of the shortcomings of co-development policies, while illustrating the many opportunities available for improving the lives of migrants through bilateral coordination. Many Filipino migrants spend years paying into Italian pension plans that they are later unable to benefit from. On the one hand, they may not manage to work the minimum number of years required in order to receive their pensions. On the other hand, for those that do meet this requirement, no bilateral agreements exist between Italy and the Philippines that would allow them to receive their pension benefits upon their return to the Philippines. Hence, these migrants must choose between staying in Italy in order to collect their pensions and returning to their countries of origin as financial dependents in their golden years.

Asymmetric power relationships between countries of origin and destination

The disparities between countries of origin and destination are often blamed for the utilization of co-development projects as little more than Trojan horses, designed to further the destination countries' main goal of controlling and/or reversing migration flows. Co-development agreements generally include programmes that promote circular and return migration, and require countries of origin to implement measures aimed at reducing illegal flows. Two other common components of such agreements are: a) Measures aimed at increasing the development impact of remittances (for instance, by reducing transfer costs, or by promoting the banking of remittances and productive investments



in communities of origin); and, b) Measures aimed at strengthening Diaspora organizations to enable them to play a more active role in remittance-based local development strategies. In line with the remittances-to-development paradigm, co-development policies have tended to focus exclusively on the benefits to countries of origin, particularly the role of economic remittances sent home by migrants. Perhaps the most effective means to challenge the unilateralist stance of destination countries and improve the coherence of their migratory and development policies is to emphasize the shared interests of both countries of origin and destination, and to acknowledge the many ways in which migration also benefits the latter; i.e., by reducing demographic problems, increasing productivity, and providing cheap labour in sectors where it is desperately needed, such as domestic and care work, among others.

Co-development policies emphasize the leading role that migrants can play as agents of development in their communities and countries of origin

While co-development projects must involve the mutual cooperation of diverse actors or stakeholders in both countries, migrants themselves are expected to be leading players in these programmes because of their strategic position as transnational actors. That is, most migrants maintain close ties with their countries of origin while building a wide network of relationships in their destination countries. This places them at an advantage for achieving greater understanding of both contexts, thus improving the suitability and effectiveness of development initiatives. As a result, co-development projects favour the direct involvement of Diaspora associations

in the design, funding and implementation of local development projects. This involves the use of collective remittances supplied by migrants' associations abroad – often leveraged with development aid from the destination country – for use in community projects such as building roads or schools, setting up an infirmary or public library, etc. Co-development projects often seek to increase the development impact of collective remittances by channelling them into productive investments – i.e., investments that will create employment and provide sustainable livelihoods, thus reducing the pressure to migrate.

Though families and communities depend on female migration and remittances, female migrants are not always the ones to benefit from their efforts

Even as women provide for the needs of parents, spouses, siblings and children, their own needs are often left unattended. For example, women migrants frequently find that after long periods of overseas employment, they are unable to secure their own livelihoods upon return to their countries of origin. One important reason for this is that remittance-based investments may not lead to the creation of stable, well-paid employment for women returning to their places of origin. In the case of rural agriculture-based economies, traditional customs may prevent women from owning land. In other cases, gender norms may prevent them from participating in more lucrative (but male-identified) economic activities, relegating them to low-paid service jobs or unpaid work in family-owned businesses. It is for this reason that co-development projects must pay special attention to the needs of women.



Gender-based exclusion is often observed in Diaspora associations and collective remittances projects

Case studies show a general pattern of strong male domination of the agendas and planning processes of Diaspora associations, which can result in male-centered projects that exclude women or prevent them from benefitting on equal terms. Many factors can contribute to this, such as gender norms that assign positions of authority to men while relegating women to subordinate status, as well as time constraints that prevent women from being active participants in migrant associations. In addition to full-time paid employment, migrant mothers are overburdened with house work and rarely have access to child care. The high proportion of women migrants employed as domestic and care workers also face time constraints as they may work as live-ins, or work multiple jobs to compensate for low wages). Finally, women migrants may be additionally affected by the social isolation that characterizes domestic employment. Male migrants, on the other hand, tend to be employed in sectors with regular hours where work is performed in groups, such as construction or agriculture, and thus are more easily mobilized. In addition, they are not expected to share housework and child care in equal terms with women, thus giving them more time to attend meetings and participate in Diaspora activities.

Key Policy Recommendations

1

Co-development initiatives must be based on common goals and equal partnerships

The true potential of co-development for maximizing the development benefits and minimizing the negative impacts of migration

remains for the most part untapped, leading to calls for a broad reassessment of implementation practices that too often deviate from the original spirit of the co-development proposal. Of particular importance is overcoming destination-country unilateralism in the definition of policy and project objectives, and strengthening the dialogue and mutual cooperation of actors *in both countries* as the basis for policy definition. Successful co-development initiatives would benefit from equal partnerships, and advances in this regard require that all actors involved acknowledge the many positive contributions of migration to both origin *and destination* countries, as well as the common interests and responsibilities they share. Strengthening dialogue and political cooperation leads to more sustainable partnerships, which are more capable of overcoming current challenges such as those arising from the isolated nature of some efforts or from contradictory policies.

Protecting the rights of migrants should be recognized as a common interest for both origin and destination countries

2

Co-development policies have been criticized for limiting the development role of migrants to project implementation in their communities of origin, while disregarding their living conditions in destination countries. The development benefits of migration are maximized by improving the living and working conditions of migrants in destination countries, as those who perform legal work and receive decent wages can contribute more to the development of their communities of origin than those who are exploited and marginalized. Furthermore, the successful development of migrant associations is linked to such factors as stable employment, recognition of labour rights, legal status and citizenship rights among migrant communities. Hence, policies that lead to greater recognition and protection



of migrants' rights not only improve their quality of life - which in itself constitutes 'development' - but also increases the development impacts of migrants in communities of origin. This positive effect can occur in several ways: i) by allowing migrants to remit larger amounts of money to their families, thus improving their standard of living and also increasing the likelihood that some of the money will be used for productive investments; ii) by contributing to the growth of Diaspora associations, which are then in a better position to undertake development projects with collective remittances; and iii) by allowing migrants to develop job-related skills, attend training courses, etc., that will increase their human capital, which is then transferred to communities of origin through social remittances and upon the migrant's return.

3 Place women at the centre of the debate on migrant's rights and working conditions

As women have been incorporated into migratory flows mainly as domestic and care workers – employment sectors characterized by informality, low wages and poor working conditions – attention to their rights is of particular importance. Research shows that despite their lower salaries in relation to male migrants, women tend to remit a higher proportion of their wages to their families. This is often done at great personal cost, as it may involve renouncing leisure time and training opportunities in order to take on a

second job, or renouncing health care and adequate nutrition in order to save additional money for remittances.

Co-development projects must give careful consideration to gender equality and the inclusion of women

4

Recognizing that men and women's development priorities may be different is fundamental to ensuring that co-development is gender-responsive. Gender-based power differences in the family, in local governments and community organizations, and in Diaspora associations often lead to male-centered decision-making that does not take women's needs and priorities sufficiently into account. Thus, the question of who participates in the decision-making processes that lead to project design and implementation is critical to ensuring that women's needs and preferences are taken into account. Traditional gender roles that assign income-generating work to men and unpaid family labour to women require particular attention, as they can result in development projects focused on male employment and resource-ownership that reinforce women's exclusion from productive resources. Also to be considered are gender differences in access to agricultural lands and employment opportunities; in the types of productive investments favoured by men and women; and, critically, in the distribution of unpaid work, both in the domestic sphere and in family-owned (and often male-controlled) businesses.



Enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty



Filipino Women's Council

This policy brief was produced as part of a joint project between UN-INSTRAW, the International Fund for Agricultural development and the Filipino Women's Council.