

Youth on the Move: Welfare effects on originating households in Malawi

A Policy Brief

May 2019

By Emmanuel Tolani

Background

The world is now experiencing high rate of migration in human history which is dominated by rural-urban migration. Thus, there is frequent movement of the people from rural to urban areas in most parts of the world arising from various developments, particularly among the Youths. In 2013, United Nations habitant estimated that more than half of world's population is now living in urban areas and a continued increase is expected in the next four decades. Developing countries constitute a large proportion of people living in rural areas in the world and it is in these countries where there is increased urban population growth rate. Most of these countries depend much on agriculture for their economies. Furthermore, most households in developing countries depend on farming as their main source of livelihood with family labour as the main labour source. Therefore, migration of family members from rural to urban areas might have implications on the household members left behind.

Migration is also common among Sub-Saharan African countries and Malawi is not exceptional. In Malawi, migration dates back to the 1960s after attaining independence. People have been moving from rural to urban areas within the country looking for better living conditions i.e. to earn income to supplement what they get from agricultural production. This is usually common among the Youth. The government of Malawi has put in place strategies to address migration problem in the country. For instance, The National Youth Policy and Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III particularly highlights the need of reducing rural-urban migration. However, there is dearth of information on the determinants of rural-urban Youth migration and how the developments of rural-urban Youth migration affects the welfare of originating households in Malawi. With funding from International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, a study was commissioned in 2018 in the rural areas of Lilongwe and Zomba districts to elicit the determinants of rural-urban Youth migration and its impact on the welfare of originating households so that the policies developed are scientifically evidence based. This policy brief gives an overview of the findings from this study.

Key Finding 1: Why Rural Youth Migrate?

We randomly sampled out 651 households which were categorised into two groups. Thus, 263 households had at least one Youth household member who migrated to an urban area and 388 households had no any Youth urban migrant. We found that Youth migrate from rural to urban areas due to the following factors:

Agricultural Shocks

Our study found that rural households faced with agricultural shocks have higher chances of sending their Youth household members to an urban area. These shocks include floods, droughts, prolonged dry spells, pests and diseases. Rural households depend much on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. The aforementioned agricultural shocks lead to low levels of production and as such household members including the Youth migrate to urban areas to look for other means of getting income.



Figure 1: Maize field affected by prolonged dry spells

Total Livestock Units

Our study further found that households with productive assets such as livestock are less likely to have Youth household members who migrated to an urban area. Livestock may be used as source of income. Unlike urban households, livestock ownership for rural households reflect wealthness and provide manure which improves soil fertility. In times of agricultural shocks when crops have failed, households with large livestock size are less vulnerable to food insecurity which reduces the need of encouraging Youth household members to migrate to an urban area.



Figure 2: Cattle

Education level of the most educated household member

It was also revealed that the higher the education level of the most educated person in the household, the more likely the household will have at least one migrant to an urban area.

Distance to nearest water source

Our research also found that increasing the time it takes to reach the nearest water source, increases the probability of having an urban youth migrant. Closer distance to nearest water source increases on-farm productivity which subsequently increases household income. This reduces the need of diversifying income through ways such as migrating to urban areas.



Figure 3: A woman fetching water

Presence of other household members living in an urban area

We also found that the presence of other household members staying in an urban area strongly influences the propensity of Youth migration among rural households. This is not surprising considering the crucial role that social networks play among Youths. Thus, friends and relatives staying in an urban area provide connections (direct or indirect) to their rural friends by assisting them in various ways such as securing jobs and providing accommodation.

Location

Our findings also showed that households located in Zomba rural were more likely to have a Youth household member who migrated to an urban area than households in Lilongwe rural. Zomba is one of the districts that is usually affected by a number of natural disasters such as floods and prolonged dry spells hence justifying these results.

Age of household head

The likelihood that at least one Youth migrates from their rural family to an urban area increases at a decreasing rate with the age of the head of their household. This confirms the need of assistance that old household heads require from the energetic household members, in this case the Youth.

Indebtedness

We further found that most rural households in debt send their Youth household members out with the expectation of paying back the outstanding debts using remittances.

Key finding 2: Welfare implications of rural-urban Youth migration on originating households

Aside from assessing the determinants of rural-urban Youth migration, our research also investigated its impact on the welfare of originating households. Household welfare was looked at in two perspectives which are Maize yield and Poverty status. Maize yield was computed as the amount of Maize harvested per hectare (Kg/ha). Poverty status was determined using poverty head count ratio where total per capita expenditure was used. A household was considered to be poor if their total per capita daily expenditure was less than USD1.9 which is an internationally recognized standard measure of poverty set by world bank.

It was found that households with urban Youth migrant were producing less amount of Maize per hectare (almost 13 bags of 50 Kg) compared to their non-urban Youth migrant counterpart. This can be attributed to the fact that migration of Youth household members was leading to loss of labour for agricultural production which was not compensated by hired labour using the remittances received. No significant differences were observed between the two household categories on poverty status.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The more unexpected crop losses a household suffered due to agricultural shocks, the more likely at least one Youth will have out-migrated. On the other hand, possession of productive assets by rural households seems to help them to be resilient to various shocks. We also found that households possessing more productive assets, such as livestock, were less likely to have a Youth out-migrant. These findings suggest that programmes that encourage productive asset accumulation such as livestock production, for example, might have the good side-effect of reducing outmigration. While the effects of such programmes on rural-urban Youth migration remain to be tested, they may be most effective when targeted to locations prone to natural disasters such as prolonged dry spells or other shocks that impedes crop production.

Failure of migrants to remit enough to compensate for productive family labour lost due to their migration is an indication of low wages received by most of these urban migrants. Our study is also calling for more and better employment opportunities such as revising the minimum wage

rate that will enable them to improve their living standards and be able to remit enough to their household members in rural areas.