

Migration from rural areas of poor countries:
the impact on rural productivity and income
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Migration from rural areas of poor countries: The impact on rural productivity and income distribution

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Abstract

Evidence is presented elsewhere²⁶ that *intra-rural* inequality is a major cause of rural-urban migration: that better-off villagers tend to be *“pulled”*, and worse-off villagers *“pushed”*, from the same subset of relatively *“unequal”* villages. This paper argues that townward emigration, and its after-effects (remittances, return migration), in turn increases interpersonal and inter-household inequality within and between villages. As for rural labour productivity, the neoclassical expectation (that townward migration increases it) rests on special definitions and doubtful assumptions. Fortunately, in most of the *poorer* developing countries, rural-urban migration is much smaller, less permanent and more likely to set up countervailing economic-demographic pressures restoring the rural population share, than received opinion about *“the urban crisis”* suggests. Migration does not equilibrate between urban and rural sectors,

largely because of externalities and compositional factors; but it does smooth itself, largely because individuals behave rationally and learn quickly. As so often, the lesson for development studies is not that “markets fail”. It is that, under conditions of both poverty and structural inequality, they function” but with generally unacceptable, misery-preserving consequences.



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