

Report on
International Workshop on
The Impacts of Migration on the “Left-Behind” in Asia

Sofitel Plaza Hanoi, Hanoi, Vietnam

10 – 11 March 2005

Co-Organised by

Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis, and
Institute for Social Development Studies, Vietnam

By

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The workshop on “The Impacts of Migration on the ‘Left-behind’ in Asia” was held in Hanoi, Vietnam (10-11 March 2005). This workshop, which was co-organized by the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis (AMC - National University of Singapore) and the Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS - Vietnam), explored the health and social impacts of emigration on the left-behind family and community. The workshop was attended by about 50 experts including scholars, development agents, policy makers and NGO workers.

On behalf of the local host ISDS, Dr Le Bach Duong warmly welcomed participants to the fascinating city of Hanoi, following which Assoc Prof Brenda Yeoh explained the motivation behind the workshop. The MetaCentre had in the last few years organized several workshops on different aspects of migration. It was in working on aspects of health and well-being of migrants that the MetaCentre realized that while migration research in Asia was growing rapidly, and interest in all manner of migrants – skilled diasporic individuals, labour migrants, transnational elites, migrant contract workers, undocumented migrant workers – was also developing, much less was known about those who are closely associated with migrants but who did not or chose not to move.

In total, nineteen papers presented at the workshop covered case studies based on various Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The key issues discussed were:

- 1) Migration and the health status of the left-behind,
- 2) Child health, education and experiences in migrant sending areas,
- 3) The impact of household labour allocation and social inequality,
- 4) Socio-economic implications of migration for the left behind, and
- 5) Social, cultural and economic negotiations among the left-behind family and community in the wake of migration.

A number of papers took into account questions relating to gender, generations, class, ethnicity and social networks.

In the final wrap-up session, Prof. Elspeth Graham and Prof. Paul Boyle summarized the key discussion points raised at the workshop: While the population “left behind” is increasing as migration and mobility become commonplace phenomena in Asia, who the “left behind” are is still an unanswered question. Clearly, the term “left-behind”, while a convenient shorthand, is also problematic. Are the “left behind” really left behind? Does the term connote people in stasis, who lacked something, or who missed out on the opportunity to go somewhere else?

1. While there are a few studies on the socio-economic impacts of migration on the population left behind, the number of studies on the psychological impacts of migration on the population left behind is even scarcer.
2. It is important to take into account the way migrants, the “left-behind” and migration are socially constructed as this influences how they are perceived.
3. The scale of migration and the contexts in both the places of destination and origin strongly influence the impacts of migration on the population left behind.
4. Gendered migration and its implications, especially gender roles, are important in the context of Asian countries as female migration is increasing due to the higher demands for female labour in the receiving countries.
5. Migration is a complicated process that involves not only the migrants but also other members of the household as well as those who are not members. Hence, studies that look at the impacts of migration on the population left behind may want to look at not only the migrants but also the structure of the complicated relationships that link migrants to the related individuals.
6. Selection effects are crucial in migration studies as well as in studies on the impacts of migration on the population left behind.
7. The methodological questions of the trade-offs between longitudinal and cross-sectional approaches, as well as between quantitative and qualitative approaches in migration studies require further attention.

In addition, discussion from the floor and the discussants challenged presenters at the workshop and questioned existing academic knowledge on migration. Further investigation points to be explored in future research were identified as follows: Beyond the contextual effects influencing migration and the “left-behind”, researchers should also pay attention to the structural effects as well as the effects of globalization.

1. There is a need to look at historical perspectives of the effects of migration on the population left behind.
2. Research on the impacts of migration on population left behind should not limit itself to those within national boundaries, but to look further at cross-national comparisons. This may help in enhancing our understandings of contextual effects.
3. The voices of the vulnerable have not been sufficiently heard and more needs to be done to provide space to the vulnerable.

Inasmuch as participants agreed that migration is not an event but a process, the workshop organizers would also like to consider the workshop an on-going process where the participants may continue exchanging ideas to further deepen their

understanding of the “left-behind”. Another outcome of the workshop is the submission of Special Issue proposals to two internationally recognized journals. The papers on the impacts of migration on health, the population and wellbeing of children left behind, will be submitted to the *Asian Population Studies*, published by Taylor and Francis. The second proposal which includes papers on the socio-economic implications of migration on the population left behind, with a special focus on gender, elderly and social networks, is submitted to the *Population, Space and Place*, published by Wiley.