

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN EAST AFRICA REVISITED¹

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Introduction

Migration has been a way of life in Africa over the generations. People on the African continent have migrated in response to demographic, economic, political, and other factors, including environmental disasters and conflicts. The issue of migration has gained currency in the global and African Union (AU) policy agenda. Migration intensities are likely to increase because of continuing strong pressures for global integration, capitalism's demand for certain types of labour, and people's desire to improve their life-chances (AU, 2018).

This paper seeks to extend the discussion started off by Oucho (2014) on the nature and extent of the changing perspectives of internal migration within the East African region. We restrict to the regions encompassing three countries: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda respectively and those that focus on the contributions of African scholars. These countries, although diverse in geophysical environment, share some similar historical, political, demographic, and socio-economic backgrounds which are important to the understanding of migration processes and systems.

Oucho (2014) concluded that the internal migration in the region has been changing with voluntary migration continuing to increase in volumes alongside forced and irregular internal migration in virtually all the countries, precipitating diverse consequences for development. This paper is an update of the discourse initiated by Oucho (2014) and reviews the changing themes of inquiry. A notable gap in the paper by Oucho (2014) was the inadequate discussion on methodologies and methods in migration research including the various paradigms of migration (Berriane & de Haas, 2012).

The rationale for the focus on migration studies is derived from the increased policy interest in recent times. The African Union (2018) migration policy framework for Africa acknowledges that African countries have witnessed changing patterns of migration, a phenomenon that has become both dynamic and extremely complex in the process of social, economic, and political transitions. However, movement within national borders is by far the most significant form of migration especially for poor people, in terms of both the volume and potential impact (DfID, 2007). This forms the rationale for being specific to internal migration.

Overview of migration studies in East Africa since independence

The early studies of migration in the East African region concluded that migration began as a result of colonial policies and practices. In particular, colonial tax systems required cash payments and therefore necessitated wage work. The colonialists also introduced cash crops but the white settlers monopolized their production (Black, Lyndsay, & Pooley, 2004). Workers from countries such as Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique, and Rwanda were recruited to Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda for employment on agricultural estates and mines in Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda (Black et al., 2004).

The immediate post-independence period in the three East African countries (Tanzania in 1961, Uganda in 1962, and Kenya in 1963) ushered in spontaneous out-migration to urban areas and to other more developed rural areas (Ominde, 1965; Oucho, 2014).² The period marks a significant change in internal migration, especially rural-urban migration that had been restricted by the colonial administration (Ominde, 1965).

The second main feature of migration within the East African region is circulation (Oucho, Oucho, & Ochieng, 2014). This process of temporary or semi-permanent migration from rural areas to another rural or an urban area for employment was also characterized by the strong links that were maintained with the area of origin. The circulation patterns have strong historical roots with schooling introduced during the colonial time in East Africa (Oucho, 1995a, 1995b). The migration flows have historical precedents in the post-colonial and colonial education systems and form an important part of historical mobility in and within Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. These patterns were maintained at least until the 1980s, despite greater availability of schools within daily commuting distance (Oucho, 1988). The system of education which was common across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania was meant to encourage the building of a national rather than ethnic identity. The migration for education also encouraged onward migration once schooling was completed, coupled with higher availability of formal-sector jobs in towns and higher wages available there (cf. Black et al., 2004).

These early studies were mainly descriptive using largely census data and focussed primarily on typologies of internal migration (Ominde, 1965, 1968; Dak, 1968; Oucho 1988, 2014; Moshi, 2010; Msigwa & Mbongo, 2013; Banyikwa, 2017, Aikaeli, Mtui, & Tarp, 2021). However, these studies were also supplemented by anthropological and sociological cases studies seeking to understand the causes of the post-independence migration (Oucho, 2014).

The changing perspectives

The publication of Todaro study in Kenya in the 1970s saw a paradigm shift from mere description to modelling of migration movement based on individual decision-making (Todaro, 1969; Harris & Todaro, 1970). It formed the first fundamental shift in methodology and methods for migration analysis. However, early application of Todaro hypothesis to guide the theory and explanation of internal migration was initially done by non-African scholars in the 1970s. The main hypothesis was that the migrant bases his or her decision on the discounted present value of the difference between urban expected income (taking into account the probability of finding a job) and rural expected income, less the cost of moving. The major conclusion from these studies was that economic motivators are the primary determinant of the quantity and direction of migration flows. That is expected urban and/or rural incomes influence the migration of rural dwellers to urban areas (Agesa & Agesa, 1999; Agesa, 2000, 2001). Secondly, they centred on explaining rural to urban migration reflecting traditional two-sector models of development (Wineman & Thomas, 2017). Most studies, however, did not consider migration

as a household decision (Agesa & Kim, 2001) nor did they consider migration from rural to other rural areas.

Despite criticisms, this paradigm of migration (neoclassical approach) has been the most influential explanation of the internal migration in East African migration (Agesa, 1996; Msigwa & Mbongo, 2013; Oyvat & Mwangi wa Githinji, 2017). The popularity stems from its ability to combine the micro-perspective of individual decision-making and macro counter-part of structural determinants. Simply stated, migration results from the uneven geographical distribution of labour and capital. In some regions where labour is scarce relative to capital, its price – the wage level – is correspondingly high, while in other regions it is the opposite. As a result, workers tend to move from regions where labour is abundant and wages low to labour-scarce regions where wages are high. In so doing, they contribute to the redistribution of the factors of production and to the equalization of wages between countries in the long run, thereby redressing original inequalities. It can be concluded, thus, that in the neoclassical view, the origin of migration is to be sought in disparities in wage rates between regions, which in turn mirror income and welfare disparities (Arango, 2019).

The neoclassical model was often augmented by the ‘push-pull’ hypothesis which contends that some areas attract or pull migrants where the benefits are perceived to exceed costs, while other areas propel or push migrants out where costs are perceived to exceed the benefits. Researchers have identified a number of ‘push-pull’ factors relating to migration: these include geographic, socio-demographic, economic, climatic, and environmentally related (see Pirani, Marino, & Alessandra, 2019 for a more recent study for the case of Tanzania).

Other than the neoclassical approach motivated by Todaro models, there has been a shift from merely understanding the migration process to focussing on individual migrant agency. Such studies include the conscious reliance on social networks in influencing the decision to migrate (Muto, 2012) and also the application of human capital theory. The human capital theory approach argues that individual characteristics play a bigger role in determining the likelihood to move or not. These individual characteristics include education, skills, age, risk-taking capacity, capacity to face new situations, entrepreneurship, and ethnicity. These individual characteristics cut across different analytical traditions (Ginsburg et al., 2016).

The age-selective nature of migration in most studies and different contexts has led to the conclusion that young adults are the most mobile group in East Africa (Mwegallawa, 1984; Mercandalli & Losch, 2017). Awuor, Odipo, and Agwanda (2018) used census data to explore the age patterns of intra-provincial migration flows in Kenya and observed that the peak age at migration that occurred between age 18 and 24 was different by sex but similar to those observed in East Asian countries. The recognition of age as a factor in explaining the migration process and associated systems has led to a number of studies that focus on youth migration and associated impacts (Barratt, Mbonye, & Seeley, 2012; Nzabona, Asimwe, Kakuba, Tuyiragize, & Mushomi, 2019).

Another important individual characteristic is educational attainment which is usually taken to represent an individual’s human capital. Education is assumed to act as an enabler of migration by improving employment opportunities and the likelihood of securing work (Ginsburg et al., 2016). But human capital acquisition may be a driver or a consequence of movement and in the last decade, studies on migration and education linkages have produced results that are rather divergent (Ginsburg et al., 2016).

Some studies have used the household rather than the individual as a unit of study (Oniang’o, 1995). These studies have generally concluded that many households consider migration as a strategy to improve their livelihood, minimize their risks, and diversify their income sources (Mercandalli & Losch, 2017). Rural families tend to increase their livelihood security by splitting

the locations of the family, most often by one member of the family migrating to an urban area. This observation was highlighted in marginal areas because of insufficient economic capital in these rural areas to diversify sources of income without migration (Oniang'o, 1995).

The changing nature of perspectives of migration has also seen attempts to establish new and more inclusive concepts aimed at describing the complexities of migration (Kuhnt, 2019). It has been observed that migration cannot be explained by the neoclassical approach alone or even with augmentation of push-pull theory. In the new perspectives, concepts such as 'determinants', 'drivers', and 'causes' of migration have emerged in literature. The use of these terms reflects different study approaches and disciplines. The term 'drivers' of migration has recently gained prominence alongside 'determinants' and 'causes' (Mercandalli et al., 2019). The recognition of environmental influences on migration has generated greater attention to the concept of drivers of migration because environmental change could shape migration in significant ways given the complex interactions with socio-economic diversity.

Within East African countries, the renewed focus on environmentally driven migration (Oucho, 2002; Borderon, Raya, Endale, Kebede, & Sporer, 2019) amid socio-economic factors has been motivated by the fact that for all the East African countries, the majority of the population relies on agriculture as a primary source of livelihood with very low levels of irrigation and technology in agricultural production and vulnerable to climate change.

A study supported by the World Bank noted that climate change is a growing driver of internal migration in this region (Rigaud et al., 2018), especially with increasing crop failure and water stress (Kubik & Mathilde, 2016; Rigaud et al., 2018). The significance of the studies on migration induced by climate change lies in the fact that there is an increase in the chances of migration under distress which creates the growing challenges for human development and planning (Borderon et al., 2019). Thus climate-induced migration has become not only of academic concern but also of increased policy discourse (Nyakaana, Sengendo, & Lwasa, 2007; Ocello, Petrucci, Testa, & Vignoli, 2015; Farley-Kiwanuka & Farley-Kiwanuka, 2020).

The issues on the determinants of migration are now being examined more broadly than before. Mercandalli and Losch (2017) consider any spatial movement of people from rural areas to urban or other rural areas, within or between countries, for social, economic, political, and environmental reasons, and implying or not a change of residence, on short-term or long-term bases as rural out-migration. The fact is that circumstances have changed from the past; there is a blurred demarcation between rural and urban and the growing importance of rural-urban linkages, with mixed lifestyles and socio-economic behaviours related to the intensifying rural-urban relations; thus, rethinking and modification of future research on internal migration areas are required (Mercandalli, Rapone, Bourgeois, & Khalil, 2017). In their conceptualization of rural out-migration, Mercandalli and Losch (2017) use the 'driver configuration' to identify five major dimensions (shown in Figure 30.1) that influence local migration, including global factor modifiers.

Earlier studies, especially Ominde (1968), noted that land utilization and acquisition may have been the key initial causes of migration immediately post-independence; however, in the 1980s, this issue was largely neglected. The significance and magnitudes of land inequality and per-capita land's impact on migration is gaining attention (Oyvat & Mwangi wa Githinji, 2017; Wineman & Thomas, 2017). Oyvat and Mwangi wa Githinji's (2017) study using the Kenya Household and Budget Survey of 2005 notes that unlike the previous studies on Kenya, both higher land inequality and lower per-capita land in the home districts of Kenyan households' heads increase the household heads' probability of migrating. But the significance and magnitudes of land inequality and per-capita land's impact on migration is different depending on destination and sex of the migrant (Oyvat & Mwangi wa Githinji, 2017). They conclude that

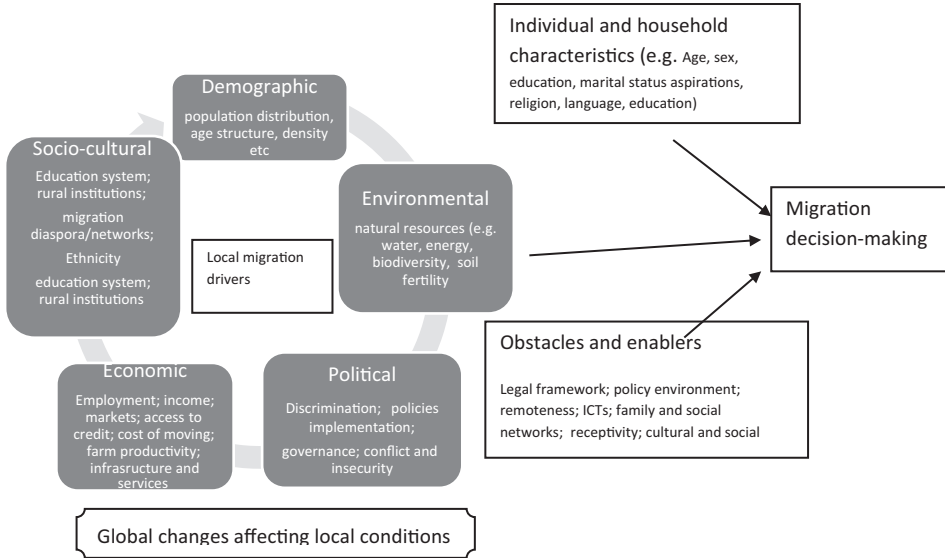


Figure 30.1 The multifaceted drivers of rural migration.

Source: Mercandalli et al., 2017

higher land inequality pushes rural dwellers to other rural areas and less-populated cities/towns. The rural out-migration intensity may be increasing but the drivers observed during the 1970s may differ from those drivers in the 2000s.

Mercandalli and Losch (2017) have revisited circular migration which had been cited in earlier publications but not studied. In their study of temporary migration, short-term movements from smallholder farming areas is an important means of supplementing incomes and raising the productivity of subsistence agriculture through investments in capital, seeds, and irrigation. Circulation is in fact part of a household strategy to maintain or improve the traditional livelihood base such as farming. Wineman and Thomas (2017) investigate whether intra-rural migration enables migrants to access more land, higher quality land, or greater off-farm income generating opportunities that may, in turn, translate into improved well-being. They conclude that across all destinations in Tanzania, migrants are more likely to draw from off-farm and non-farm income sources, suggesting that even intra-rural migration represents a shift away from agriculture and this is likely the dominant channel through which migrants benefit.

The other perspective which was rarely examined in the past but is gaining prominence is the gendered nature of the migration process. Migration literature on sub-Saharan Africa has highlighted differential patterns of migration by sex and has emphasized the feminization of migration streams (Adepoju, 2008). Family-related migration especially for marriage reasons is also an important determinant of female migration (Oyvat & Mwangi wa Githinji, 2017). Females move at younger ages in connection with marriage, while movements amongst males may be prompted by economic opportunities or employment (Agesa & R. U. Agesa, 1999). In Southern Tanzania, a research study by IIED suggests that male migration to save and invest in rural areas is common. In contrast, in Northern Tanzania, opportunities for migration appear to be important for marginalized women (cited in Black et al., 2006). The effects of education on the propensity to migrate for females have been mixed (Ginsburg et al., 2016).

Until recently there have been few studies that focus on the linkages between internal migration and poverty. The DfID supported the University of Sussex's research consortium in Kenya and other countries that link migration and poverty (Oucho et al., 2014). Another set of studies was reported in the World Bank staff-supported study across several countries in the developing world (Tanzania among the countries). In addition to linkage between migration and poverty, the linkage between migration and inequality has attracted a number of studies (see Muyonga, Odipo, & Agwanda, 2020 for extensive review). Using World Bank Remittances Survey data, several studies have assessed the impact of remittances on inequality (Bang, Mitra, & Wun-nava, 2016 for Kenya; Mushomi, Ntozi, & Rutaremwa, 2017 for Uganda; Hansen, 2012 for Tanzania).

Research and policy implications of changing perspectives

The renewed research interest in migration can be said to have been driven by national and regional policy interests (AU, 2018). Current policy literature widely views migration³ as having the potential to contribute to development and poverty alleviation (AU, 2018). Therefore, governments are being encouraged to seek ways to maximize the benefits of migration (AU, 2018). However, the policy concerns and direction need to be supported with evidence from research (see Oucho, 2014 for elaboration).

Scholars of migration ought to think of ways of framing migration research to account for an increased variety of movements together with their policy implications. Until recently, migration and development have been treated as very separate policy areas. Migration management has been focussed on policy measures that control movement of people and integrate regular migrants into national labour markets and wider society (DfID, 2007). To development practitioners, especially rural development and urban planners, migration has been viewed as a failure of development, since people leave their communities despite programmes and projects to help them improve their lives in their home areas (DfID, 2007).

Past studies viewed the link between migration and poverty more negatively (Black et al., 2006). In addition, studies relating migration and poverty had been rare (Oucho et al., 2014). The studies which claim that migration is a selective process often report that migrants are often not from the poorest regions, since remoteness may make migration more difficult, and usually not from the poorest households, because the cost of migration may be too high (Deshingkar & Start, 2003). Few studies that have examined migration and poverty conclude that the poor move shorter distances, perhaps to neighbouring regions because they lack social capital to move long distances (Awour et al., 2018). However, the counterclaim is that often researchers base their assumptions on poverty of the place and not poverty of people (De Haan & Yaqub, 2010). In addition, such studies may be lacking simultaneity of both origin and destination. De Haan and Yaqub (2010) conclude that different migrants have different motives, reflecting different opportunities. Secondly, there is a lack of estimates of the scale of internal migration and its impact on rural livelihoods (Black et al., 2004) in trying to understand migration, poverty, and development linkages.

The policy impetus requires in-depth understanding of the drivers of migration within each context that will help to clarify policy choices (UNECA, 2017). The most challenging tasks for exploring policy options are the need to establish circumstances in which some drivers of migration are more important than others, and which combinations of drivers are more potent than others. However, as long as people's changing lifestyle preferences and increasing material expectations cannot be met locally, this will typically translate in increasing aspirations to migrate (UNECA, 2017).

Researchers have particularly called for more in-depth study of rural-to-rural migration or more broadly, rural-out migration. For example, Wineman and Thomas (2017) conclude that intra-rural migration merits greater attention in the discourse on rural development and structural transformation. Rural-rural migrants are in the greatest need of support because they are often poorer, invisible to the official regulatory system, and much more vulnerable to abuse and hazardous living conditions (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005). But little is known about those who do not move and the increasing invisible forms of movement such as child migration; volume and key factors that perpetuate the phenomena are still unknown.

While reasons for out-migration are relatively well understood, there is inadequate information on why people return to their rural origins, a phenomenon described as 'return migration' (Oucho, 2014; Deshingkar & Grimm, 2004). The temporary nature of this type of migration within East Africa manifests by the number of migrants who return to their rural homes because they may have failed to secure employment or to retire (Oucho, 1996). Further, Oucho (1996) notes that first-time migrants have a bias to return to their rural areas, but we do not know the experience of generation migrants and their choices. Return migrants embody a valuable resource for sending areas because they often bring back skills, funds, and different values which could help in, say, improving agricultural practices (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2004). Further studies are needed in understanding the constraints and opportunities faced by return migrants and what policy can do to help.

A recurring paradigm over the past years has been the 'feminization of migration'. The term feminization refers to the increasingly active participation of migrant women in the processes of mobility. The initial analyses of migration assumed that most migrants were young males, and that women would only move to reunite with their family members (associational migration); however, census data from these countries show that female migration is becoming more evident (see KNBS, 2012 for Kenya). The gender-sensitive migration studies are less prominent and further insights are needed to assess how gender relations are socially constituted (and therefore changeable), including gender as a social dimension that interacts with migration processes in many ways. Further, it is important to explore how migrant femininities and masculinities are transformed by (post-) migration processes.

In addition to under-researched areas of critical policy importance, the studies have generally under-acknowledged the role of migration in the structural transformation process until recently (Mercandalli & Losch, 2017). Rural-urban migration remains a prominent feature which coexists with rural-rural or urban-rural migration, either short- or long-term, as well as persistent and growing circular movements consisting in recurrent migration between a place of origin and one or more places of destination, both at internal and continental levels (Mercandalli & Losch, 2017).

Although remittances have been cited as an important aspect of the contribution of migration to development, the focus has largely been on international migration. However, data from Kenya have indicated that internal remittances may out-number cross-border transfers (Muliro, 2012; World Bank, 2013 cited in IOM, 2013). This reflects the magnitude of internal migration, a topic hardly studied or discussed despite larger poverty reduction potential than international remittances for an even larger number of people. While this is generally true, it is also true that semi-skilled and low-skilled workers move to areas where remittances come from (IOM, 2013). This is one factor driving rural-urban migration but there are few comprehensive studies to invalidate or support it. This calls for revisiting some of the under-researched areas in which scholars can demonstrate the different ways to address a range of empirical questions.

In this review a few caveats are warranted, given the growing complexity of the migration process, its spatial nature, and the need to understand the individual migrant agency and

associated structural processes that drive migration. Firstly, methodological issues are generally studied by non-African scholars. Secondly, several disciplines contribute to understanding the nature of the process, its drivers, and its consequences. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach to migration inquiry is inevitable. Thirdly, there are various innovations that have been adopted to improve the study of internal migration including use of mobile service data, use of GIS technology, and mixed methods that use qualitative and quantitative analyses to nuance the discourse. Furthermore, there is a need for advocacy for migration surveys just like demographic and health surveys with comparable methodologies across countries. Such options would greatly satisfy policy needs to shape and harness migration-related opportunities.

An overarching observation is that there are many studies done by African researchers especially at higher learning institutions (such as the PhD and master's thesis) which are largely invisible, giving a false impression that researchers in the region are not active in the discourse. However, what may be of concern is the inadequate dissemination of such useful works to broader audiences and inadequate use of digital platforms.

Conclusions

This review attempts to draw the attention of scholars and students of migration regarding the constellation of migration literature, which is heterogeneous with almost-different concerns, different conclusions, and possible flaws in explaining why migrations occur in the region. Internal migration is still the dominant form of migration, and labour circulation has persisted ever since independence. Studies generally conclude that many households consider migration a strategy to improve their livelihood, minimize their risks, and diversify their income sources. Thus, people in East Africa migrate to improve their livelihoods and in search of a better future, which includes the need to escape poverty, food insecurity, and lack of employment opportunities, as well as ethnic, gender, and other forms of discrimination and marginalization. The continued climate change adds further complexities, since the combination of climate events and socio-economic factors are causing more and more people to leave agriculture and rural areas (Oucho, 2002, 2007; Rigaud et al., 2018). But rural people also move for other reasons related to access to better and higher education, as well as other services, and often due to family matters (Mercandalli & Losch, 2017). At an individual level, the search for employment still dominates the desire for movement, but only for the youth. There has been an increase in the volume of female migrants, but analyses show that different factors influence male and female propensities to migrate.

Despite these conclusions, the prospects for identifying appropriate policy measures may be hampered by the limited understanding of some aspects of internal migration which has received scant research. The policy framework suggests that migration is important for development and poverty alleviation; but there are few nationwide studies about the poverty reduction potential of internal migration. While reasons for out-migration are relatively well understood, little is known about why people return (especially to their rural origins). Furthermore, intra-rural migration merits greater attention in the discourse on rural development and structural transformation (Mercandalli et al., 2019). Moreover, current public policies still fail to recognize the spatial and occupational complexity of rural and urban livelihoods (Mercandalli et al., 2017). Gender issues have been incorporated in the human development policy literature but gender-sensitive migration studies are, however, less prominent. In particular, further insights are needed to assess how gender relation is socially constructed and how its changing nature interacts with migration processes, including how they are transformed by (post-) migration processes.

Notes

- 1 This paper is dedicated to the late John Oyaro Oucho, Professor of Demography at the Population Studies and Research Institute, University of Nairobi, who spent his entire academic work on migration research, not only in Kenya but also many other African countries.
- 2 According to Oucho, early post-independence migration studies in East Africa can be traced to 1) Southall's (1961, 1969) anthropological work; 2) Monsted and Walji's (1978) study on rural-rural migration due to land shortage, environmental hazards, unemployment, migration selectivity, and family structure; 3) Hirst's (1969) study of net migration patterns in Tanzania; 4) Dak's (1968) spatial analysis of migrants in Uganda; and 5) Ominde's (1968) work on land and population movements in Kenya, which was concurrent with Soja's (1968) comprehensive study of Kenya's geography of modernization (J. O. Oucho, 2014; DfID, 2004 for details; Black et al., 2004, 2006).
- 3 See International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2013. Migration and development within the South: New evidence from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. ACP Observatory on Migration. IOM Geneva

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