

Rural-to-Urban Migration and its Impact on Gender Inequality in Africa

This research will investigate the impact of rural-to-urban migration and its impact on gender inequality, comparing the “movers” and the “non-movers”.

Background and context

Urbanisation is increasingly being acknowledged as one of the defining issues of the twenty-first century (Awumbila, 2017). It is a megatrend across the world with urban areas “becoming not just the dominant form of habitat for humankind, but also the engine-rooms of human development as a whole” (Awumbila, 2017). Over half of the world’s population currently lives in urban areas, and this is expected to rise to 75% by 2050 (United Nations Populations Division, 2014). Much of this change will be driven by Africa. Although Africa’s current share of global urban residents is low, at only 11.3%, future growth of urban areas is expected to be concentrated in Africa, with a predicted rise to 20.2% by 2050.

The current transition to a greater urban concentration has been driven in Africa thus far largely by overall population growth (Lucas, 1997). However, in terms of African migration streams, internal migration from rural to urban areas has been greater numerically than international migration and is more important in terms of redistribution of wealth and poverty reduction (UNDP, 2009; Grimm, 2005).

This is as many economies across Africa undergo a demographic transition and a structural transformation from a low-productivity, Agricultural-based society to higher-productivity Industry or Services led economy. Cities thus provide a “pull” of economic opportunities from rural areas, although the cities also come with many more financial and other pressures. There is also a social “pull” of cities, with the movement of people from traditional, hierarchical, rural communities, to modern, urban epicentres. Thus, rural to urban migration can have a significant impact on social settings and social structures. Particularly where the type of people moving have pre-selected characteristics, as suggested by traditional and modern economic theory.

However, contrary to economic theory, rural to urban migration has not been accompanied by economic growth and has led to the proliferation of urban slums and poverty. Inequality in African cities remains the second highest in the world, with an average Gini coefficient of about 0.58. The economic opportunities offered by both cities and economic development have thus not been shared equally by all.

The research question

We argue that among the population, the economic opportunities available to rural-to-urban migrants are found disproportionately by men that move rather than women. This begs a few questions, including: Are there pre-determined characteristics among male rural-urban migrants which make them more likely to benefit from economic opportunities, such as being more knowledgeable, or empowered? Does rural-urban migration deepen or worsen gender inequality among migrants controlling for these differences? What are the factors associated with gender inequality among rural-urban migrants? Generally what are the key push/pull factors affecting rural-urban migration in Africa?

Objectives

The overarching aim of the study is to establish whether rural-to-urban migration offers men disproportionately more [socio-economic] opportunities, thereby worsening the gender inequality among “movers” relative to “non-movers”. Towards achieving this objective the study seeks to answer some, if not all, of the above and cognate questions. Specific objectives of the study include the following:

- (i) Review key push and pull factors affecting rural-to-urban migration in Africa;
- (ii) Review factors associated with women’s empowerment and gender inequality in Africa;

- (iii) Establish whether rural-to-urban migration leads, at least in the shorter term, to higher gender inequality among the migrants relative to the non-migrants;
- (iv) Explore whether this relationship changes as migrants stay longer in cities;
- (v) Discuss factors associated with gender inequality among rural-to-urban migrants.

Theoretical framework

This research will investigate whether rural-to-urban migration benefits males more than their female counterparts. Theoretically, the movers boast a “modest” socio-economic status and/or level of empowerment necessary to facilitate moving but are motivated by better economic opportunities in urban areas. Although there are also other socio-cultural reasons, particularly among women who may be looking to escape or break away from their low status among the rural communities and the traditional hierarchy it offers. Therefore, the urban areas remain attractive, at least offering opportunities for wage employment, independence and higher status. However, the “new life” in the urban areas tends to favour men rather than women. Thus, more female movers may end up in informal and/or unpaid employment, particularly compared to their male counterparts who are more likely to end up in wage employment. This favour comes from gender bias and discrimination that occurs, largely through employment. Movers rather than non-movers are more at risk of such discrimination due to their little knowledge of the urban environment and extra disadvantage of having grown up in traditional rural areas.

In contrast, women left behind in rural areas (non-movers) may have at least higher socio-economic and status and decision-making opportunities as disproportionately more men migrate to urban or other areas, thereby reducing the inequality in rural areas between men and women. Similarly, gender inequality in urban areas is often lower, as the modern epicentres offer more progressive attitudes, and greater access to health and education. Thus, those women who grow up in urban areas are likely to be more equal to their male counterparts who also grow up in that environment.

The afore-described state-of-affairs is likely to lower the status of migrant women relative to their non-migrant counterparts and, consequently, lead to higher gender inequality among the “movers” population.

Data and Methods

Data for the study will be obtained from Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) collected by ORC Macro in collaboration with respective NSOs and MOHs. We will examine data for countries in sub-Saharan Africa for which the DHS was conducted within the last five years i.e. after 2014. This will be a cross-country micro study complemented by a difference-in-difference where the data allows.

The countries will be divided into three categories (high, medium and low) according to the percentage of GDP that is due to agriculture (to explore whether the relationship is impacted by level economic development). However, we can do both an inter-country and intra-country study. Within each country a gender inequality index will be devised for various regions. This provides more data points and variance to identify patterns that may be occurring, and to compare regions that may be more similar between countries than within countries. For example, Afar, a more rural area of Ethiopia, may be more similar to parts of rural Kenya than Addis, a more urban area of Ethiopia.

We will consider the population within the productive age bracket (15-64 years) that are out-of-school. Thus we will identify those who are part of the workforce. Within this population there are three groups (see attached diagram). We will carry out two scenarios which will compare the “movers” to each of the other groups.

Scenario 1

The first scenario will compare gender inequality among the “non-movers” (in rural areas) to that of the rural-to-urban “movers” (in urban areas).

Scenario 2

The second will compare gender inequality among the “non-movers” in urban communities to that of the rural-to-urban “movers”(i.e. sort of ‘control’ scenario).

Regression

Thus, the equation will be as in Equation (1) below. A dummy variable will be used which will take 1 if the person is a mover, and 0 if the person is a non-mover. Individuals will be aggregated by region. The variable of interest is β which is the difference in gender inequality between the movers and non-movers. The dependent variable, gender inequality, will be an index devised for the region. The difference in gender inequality between movers and non-movers will be looked at across many regions and countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

We will add controls for both the socio-economic differences between male and females in the region, and for socio economic differences between regions. This is to ensure that the inequality differences that are observed between movers and non-movers are not determined by socio-economic differences, but rather through gender bias that is experienced by movers. That is to say, that women movers with the same socio-economic status as male movers may not benefit from the same economic opportunities.

$$\text{Equation (1)} \quad GI_i = \beta M_i + \delta Controls_i + \varepsilon_i, \text{ where:}$$

GI_i is a measure of gender inequality constructed from the DHS for regions and countries

M_i is a binary index for mover or non – mover where non – mover is either in the rural or urban area depending on the scenario

We will also explore the interaction of being a mover with duration as in Equation (2) below. This will explore whether the relationship changes with the length that the mover has been in the city. For example, movers who have stayed longer may have lower gender inequality as women get more comfortable in the new environment and find some type of income work. On the other hand, gender inequality could be greater among movers who have been in the city longer as unemployment due to loss of skill and mental and physical effects of low-income or unemployment.

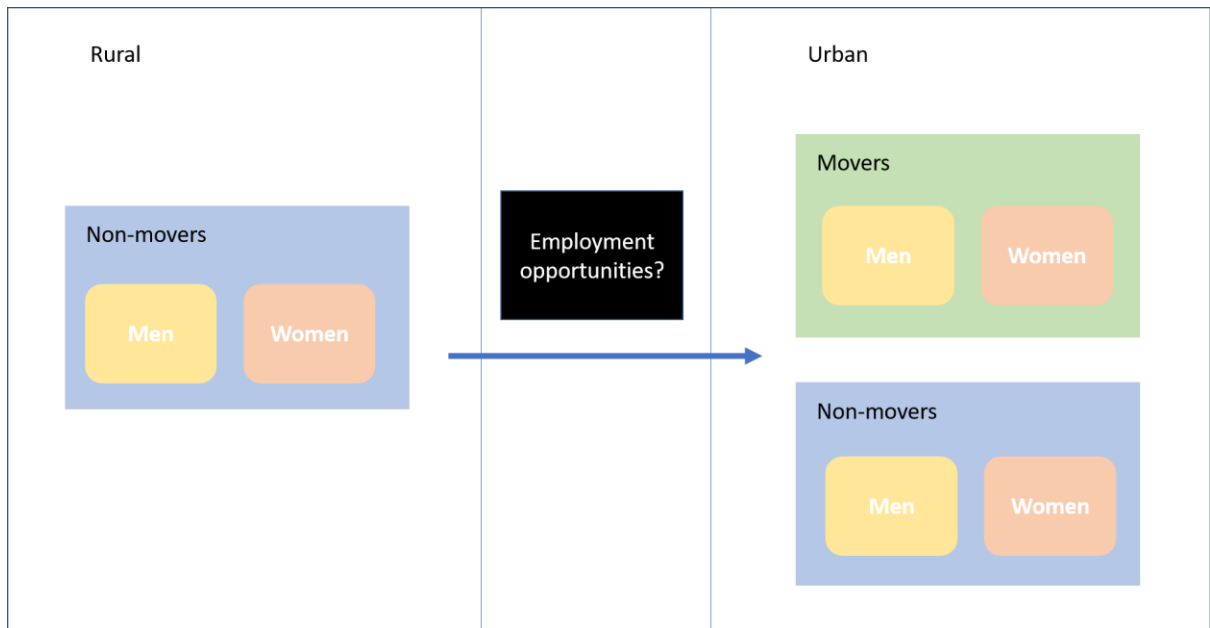
$$\text{Equation (2)} \quad GI_i = \gamma M_i * Duration_i + \delta Controls_i + \varepsilon_i$$

As well as carrying out a cross-country and cross-region comparison of the relationship, for some countries where there are two data points (we would thus extent beyond the last five years), we can carry out a difference in difference as in Equation (3). This would automatically difference out the time-invariant factors, thus only factors that vary with time would need to be controlled for.

$$\text{Equation (3)} \quad GI_i = \beta(M_{i,t} - M_{i,t-1}) + \delta Controls_t + \varepsilon_i$$

Expected results

It is envisaged that the evidence adduced will show significant disparities in the gender inequality index between movers and non-movers. We believe that we would find greater gender inequality among movers compared to non-movers due to gender bias in economic opportunities found by rural-to-urban migrants.



References

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