Impact of Male out-Migration on Rural Women's Livelihood in Limpopo Province

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Abstract

This paper examines women's mobility and internal migration, and the impact it has on providing socio-economic and educational opportunities for survival among the rural marginalised. The livelihoods of the women in Pfananani are dependent on migrant remittances from husbands, sons and families working in the urban cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg. However, with the advent of rapid urbanisation, those who depended on agriculture and livestock breeding saw their incomes dwindling as land is being 'grabbed' to build rural townships. Faced with unemployment, poverty and the triple burden of taking care of the children, the home and the land, the women of Pfananani in the Limpopo Province have become mobile in order to uplift them, through out-of-home employment.

Keywords: mobility, rural-urban migration, economic empowerment, co-operative, livelihood

Introduction

The focus is on internal migration and its impact in terms of providing socio-economic opportunities or acquiring education for survival among the rural marginalised and unskilled women who are left on their own to fend for their families. In addition, the paper examines the socio-economic challenges confronted by women in the rural areas in their endeavour for integration and adaptation. There is a growing proportion of rural female headed households

in the Pfananani community who, in the absence of males, endeavour to secure their livelihoods by engaging in sewing, art and craft. The author argues that a woman's status is not simply one of a dependent as she can offer contribute to the family. The paper argues that there is a direct link between rural-urban migration, poverty, economic development as well as social and political change. Cornwell and Inder (2004: 2) argue that urbanisation go hand in hand with industrialisation and development. Consequently, this movement promised 'a better life' for both the old and young people on one hand. However, the other hand, such migration enormously depopulated the rural areas and therefore robbed, impoverished peripheral areas its able bodied people (men) more particularly to take care of their wives and families.

The debates in this paper are located within 'push and pull' factors especially when deliberated during the apartheid as well as in the new political dispensation. It is argued that during the apartheid regime, due to legislation such Group Area Act, Land Act and the whole 'separate development' model embedded within the apartheid and homeland systems people especially the blacks were restricted to homelands or so called reserves. Most interestingly, the dawn of democracy since 1994, has expedited free movement of people within and across provinces and beyond South Africa. Despite the freedom brought through democracy, the poor remain marginalised. The bottom line is that for the majority of people, especially the young; the city centres become centres of frustrations and disillusionment without socio-economic opportunities to make their dreams come true. Women in the rural areas are the hardest hit by the lack of economic opportunity, hence the rates of high unemployment and soaring poverty. This situation compels women to venture into illegal activities such as prostitution, crime, drug and alcohol abuse.

Migration, Internal Migration and Male Out-migration

Migration, according to Marshall (1994: 415) involves the (more or less) permanent movement of individuals or groups across symbolic or political boundaries into new residential areas and communities. From time immemorial people have always been moving either within or across borders. In Africa as elsewhere around the world, both internal and external migration

are essentially a response to a wide range and complexity of economic and social conditions, but the main driving force is the search for economic well being of the migrants and families left behind. Both internal and external migration has been recorded mainly in countries or communities where people are unable people to satisfy their economic, social and political aspirations within their region (Adepoju 1998). While it is important to understand migration in Africa, it is important to remember that the history of migration cannot be understood in isolation from previous colonial and post colonial regimes. In Africa, the inception of colonial regime which brought along the capitalist system, with forced labour migration and the dispossession of the land resulted in inequalities within and between countries and communities (Human Science Research Council, 2006). In response to these economic and political conditions under which people in Africa were subjected to, they engaged in mass migration to urban areas in search of new opportunities that have been created by the colonial regime. In this context migration became a means of livelihood for many households in developing world and mainly in Africa (Adepoju, 2000).

According to Zeleza (2002), a central defining feature of both internal international migrations is that the migrating people are doing so mainly to sell their labour power, suggesting that migration patterns, and labour procurement and utilization are shaped largely by the capitalist ideal. For instance colonial economic activities in Francophone, mainly in West Africa and its forced labour migration legislation sparked internal and cross-border clandestine migration of unskilled labour force which was required for infrastructural development mainly in transport network and plantation agriculture for sugar cane, cocoa, and peanuts (Adepoju 2000). Placing migration into the South African context, one would argue that, the migration patterns during apartheid and before the discovery of mines, internal and regional migration dynamics were different from the rest of the continent (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006). The apartheid government with sealed border control and racial discriminatory laws and the Aliens Control Act of 1963 made it impossible for internal and external movements (Shindondola 2002). With the discovery of gold and diamond, despite restricted migration laws, South Africa was compelled to open up its borders and also allowed rural to urban movement of people to meet labour demand by mines (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006).

There is a reason to believe that the increase in labour demand warranted the movement of people into South Africa from Southern African countries (Adepoju 2000). As aforementioned, both internal and cross borders migration seems to be a response to economic and political challenges in the country or the community of origin. Migrants' remittances to their homes played a very critical role in the upliftment of the economic condition of many poor households (Adepoju 2000). For instance, countries like Lesotho and Swaziland, whose National economy depend on South Africa, the migration to South Africa remain the main form of livelihoods and survival for many households in these region (Adepoju 2000). Households benefiting from relatives who migrated to South Africa were often much better off than non-migrant households (Sechaba 1997 in Human Sciences Research Council Report, 2006). In rural South Africa, in 1986 as result of economic hardship due to the colonial taxation laws and which were inherited by the apartheid regime resulted into an influx of males migrating to urban areas in search of work opportunities and many South African work seekers from rural areas preferred to leave their families behind in rural areas (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006).

However, migration of males from rural areas into urban areas, presented a number of challenges to both migrants and families left behind. Given the economic conditions in urban areas and the new form of 'culture' these migrants were subjected to, resulted in a situation where many of the migrants were not able to return home. Thus out-migration of men resulted in considerable social costs to households and communities, as families were fragmented and women and children left behind had to bear additional burden of traditional male work (Human Sciences Research Council Report 2006).

Research Methodology

This paper used participant observation and in-depth interviews with a small group of ten (10) women. The interviewees' experiences contributed to a more balanced understanding of women's struggles in accessing resources to generate incomes. The paper illuminates the fact that rural women, the elderly and children lead a precarious existence without assistance from male supporters. The choice to focus on the Pfananani community centre was motivated by the authors' search for information that could shed light on the

changing landscape in rural areas in terms of women's mobility and employment statuses. The interviews were conducted for six consecutive days with the author spending a maximum of 3 hours in each visit. The interviews took place between 12 pm and 14h00 pm in order to allow women to get on with their work without disturbances.

The interviews were conducted in the Venda language and then translated into English. The transcripts were then analysed by content analysis of various themes which provided the structure of the paper. In addition quotes from the interviews were incorporated to highlight and enable a deep understanding of some of the key issues on the impact of out of home employment and female mobility.

Linking Pfananani Community Centre to Rural Women's Livelihood

Pfananani Community Centre is a community based centre situated at former Venda in the Limpopo province. This establishment came into existence through the missionary and philanthropist initiative of the Roman Catholic nuns based at the village of Tsianda way back in 1972. One of the respondents said that:

> The centre has been established from the need to facilitate the development and consolidate livelihood strategies through the income generating projects for rural women. It started with a group of women coming from villages such as Tsianda, Tshakhuma, Ha-mutsha, Tshifulananani and Lwamondo.

In 1987, with the help of Wilgespruit Community Centre, the group was transformed into a co-operative community based centre promoting co-operative ideals and principles with specific mandate to create job for rural women. Faced with rising unemployment, soaring poverty coupled by the triple burden of taking care of the children, the home and the land the women of Pfananani envisage the centre as the symbol of hope and new dawn for economic prosperity. In the Limpopo Province with the aid of nuns from the local Catholic Church embarked on a project that saw their livelihoods being uplifted.

Table 1: Projects housed at Pfananani Community Centre

Name of Project	Economic Activities	Project members
Hulisani	Knitting & sewing-school uniforms, jerseys, traditional Venda clothes	9 members
Khwathelani	Weaving and Sewing	6 members
Thusanani	Pre-school-teaching project members' children including those from those community	2 Pre-School Educators

It can be argued that the establishment of the centre was to explicitly respond to the plight of women in the area due to socio-economic vulnerability and marginalisation amongst rural women. The centre adds to the tradition of collective self-help in which Hart and Macfarlane (1999: 41) state such activities are either meant to increase household income or reduce household expenses. Among its objectives, the centre was established to:

> 1) Ensure the mobilisation of rural women with the aim of forming them into an income generating project.
>
> 2) Empower people particularly women with technical skills, knowledge and competency in order to sustain their meagre income.
>
> 3) Promote the co-operative principles by encouraging community people to form themselves into income projects (Pfananani Constitution 1987).

From the above mentioned objectives of the Centre, it is clear that the Centre ends to become a mobilising force behind the unemployed, unskilled and illiterate women. Broadly, the Centre through the involvement of the women and its engagement with community economic development endevours aimed

at advancing local economy and thereby addressing women economic exclusion, marginalisation and vulnerability. The centre's commitment to address socio-economic vulnerability through fostering diverse, resilient and more localised self-reliant economic demand the optimal utilisation of human capabilities and natural assets and resources. For Pfananani to be self-reliant in promoting community economic development (CED) Seyfang (1999: 126) argues that it should aim to:

> deliver economic benefits to the whole community, but also to strengthen social capital by re-stitching the social fabric, ethical capital by nurturing a sense of civic responsibility and community spirit.

Interviews conducted with women at Pfananani showed that even though these women come from different families, what bonded them together was their commitment to secure livelihood and therefore mitigate the hard reality of poverty and marginalisation and their courage to break down cultural norms by engaging in out of the home paid employment. The establishment of the centre was out of the desperation foe a woman like Tendani to contend that:

> It has been more than two years since my husband left and he has not yet found a permanent job. He does temporary work here and there and he tries to send us some money whenever he has enough to spare on top of the bills he has to pay for his accommodation, food and clothing. I heard of Pfananani co-operative from my neighbour's mother in-law. I decided I had to join the club because things were bad at home and I desperately needed to learn a skill in order to clothe and educate my children. It has been hard bringing up school going children on very little and who at many times have gone to school without eating anything. However ever since I joined the club I learnt to sew school uniforms and now I can earn a little without having to depend on the little that my husband sends.

Despite their efforts to supplement the remittances from their de jure husbands, the reality dawns for the women that the money obtained from the

sales was not enough for them to meet all their needs. In the case of Trifinna (43 years old), her situation deteriorated immediately when her husband got retrenched from work in Pretoria. She lamented that:

> At home things became bad that I had to be resourceful in finding ways to feed my children. As a result of our misfortune the children had to be withdrawn from their good school and had to enrol them to the government public schools. With the money we had saved I began to buy and sell second hand clothes. In the beginning I managed to make a decent living, however the trade was flooded by cheaper but new clothes from China. It was luck for one to even make R300-00 a month. Being part of Pfananani community centre therefore meant I could supplement the little I was making selling clothes. I ended up assisting in cooking for the children at the crèche.

Though their economic benefits are minimal Oberhauser and Pratt (2004: 210) argue that:

> ... through their collective efforts community projects have the potential to expand women's livelihood opportunities. In an area where employment prospects are limited, women are earning some cash income, acquiring skills, and developing a sense of ownership through community economic groups ....

In order to remedy this dire and desperate situation, women make a decision to take turns in taking care of the centre's work. Part of the plan was that those interested in communal gardening got involved in ploughing vegetables for their consumption and selling to the community members, other women were deployed to advance the spirit of credit union where they do bulk buying and selling basic commodities to community members in order to supplement their meagre income. In summer especially when closed for December holiday, women encouraged each other to till their private fields (maize, groundnuts, etc.) in order to supplement food at their respective homes. In this regard (Carney 1998) posits that livelihood depends on the capabilities, assets and activities and in the case of the rural women, the

improvement and maintenance of livelihood was further enhanced by the pragmatic application of co-operative principles such as open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, co-operation among co-operatives and concern for community (Davis and Donaldson 1998: 133-134, The International Joint Project on Co-operative Democracy 1995: 10-11). Their vision was based on expanding and enhancing their livelihood thereby optimal utilisation of their inherent abilities, capabilities and the available resources.

Challenges and Opportunities of Rural-Urban Migration among Women

The mobility of people in South Africa is similar to other former colonies. The colonial set-up of the city was meant only for male labourers who were forced to migrate from the rural areas in order to earn real money to pay for hut and land tax to the chief. However, democracy promises of bringing opportunities closer to rural areas have not been realised since the post-apartheid era in 1994. Rural areas face particular constraints as employment in industry and mining have declined and households increasingly depend on diverse sources of income (Oberhauser & Pratt 2004: 209). In Limpopo much of the land reserved for farming which normally provided much of the rural employment have been bought by real estates for either game parks for tourism, or other types of development. This has led to many able bodied men to become mobile in order to survive. Their mobility does not necessarily mean the survival of the women and children left behind. Many men find themselves moving from one city to the other seeking employment. A good example is of thirty eight (38) year Ellison who moved far as Upington in the Northern Cape to seek employment. According to Azwidhowi, Ellison's wife, he has been gone for almost a year moving from city to city until he got a contract job at a vine farm working as a driver. Azwidohwi adds that in that year he has been gone, he has been unable to assist his family financially.

This scenario forced Azwidohwi to join the Pfananani craft project in order to acquire skills while generating an income so that she could take care of her three children and aging in-laws. According to Florence:

> Pfananani is one of the economic strategies in Limpopo that provide economic opportunities for rural women, however due to the impact of the global recession business has been very slow.

Pfananani is on the Limpopo tourist route and generates much of its income through the sale of its curios to foreign tourists mainly from Europe and The USA whose countries have been hard hit by the economic meltdown. As a result, the centre has been hard hit by the decrease of tourists in Limpopo and it is proving hard to sell products as there is a trickle of visitors and buyers which does not significantly improve the centre's financial situation. Azwidohwi and the women at the centre are now faced with a dire situation, historically their economic opportunities were embedded in cultural practices and material realities have always historically marginalised them but now they are being forced to join their men folk to move from one place to the other. The difference here however, is that men's mobility pattern is different from women's mobility because the latter is bound within Limpopo.

The changing landscape of the socio-economic situation of the women at Pfananani has thus led to the feminisation of migration. The socio-economic impact and failure of tourism is forcing women to challenge cultural practices that demand that women should stay at home regardless of the problems they face; they are the custodians of the community and culture. Women at Pfananani are moving around Limpopo seeking seasonal jobs on the remaining farms and some as chambermaids in bed and breakfast motels in the game reserves while some are absorbed in the domestic informal sector in the suburbs of Thohoyandou, Makhado and others. Women like Florence and Azwidohwi have become mobile, a trend that is unheard of particularly among the Venda. The historical and cultural marginalisation of women in Limpopo and indeed the rest of South Africa are linked to cultural norms and patriarchal institutions which denied women employment opportunities and access to land and financial resources (Lipton *et al.* 1996; Fairhurst *et al.* 2000) have put women in a cultural predicament. From the study it clear that women at Pfananani are negotiating their mobility around traditions without upsetting culture significantly by seeking work within their ethnic spatiality. Similarly to a study by Buijis (1999: 187) on stories of indentured Tamil men and women to immigrate to South Africa, agents found it harder to recruit women. This shows that cultural norms hinder women's mobility the reason

why Limpopo women prefer to stay in the province where they have an understanding of the culture.

Mobility and Internal Migration: Financial Deprivation or Women Economic Empowerment?

Pfananani Community Centre among women engenders community mobilization for collective action due to changing socio-economic and political landscape; women's migration become an empowering force as women are able to move were compelled to collectively to mobilise themselves and their assets from within and sometimes with a little help from local businesses and local institutions. Despite the challenges explored previously, through the women's courage and commitment to use their skills and knowledge to make a difference in their villages. Even though the centre benefited few financially, it has transformed itself to be resourceful for their entire communities. It was through the centre's initiative that surrounding communities were mobilized for technical skills training. Consequently, this stimulated and instilled the spirit of working together in tackling socio-economic challenges of poverty and unemployment.

In the presence of dwindling socio-economic opportunities due to the absence of industries and formal sector employable skills and competencies, women have to improvise and rely on their talents and skills in sewing, clay pot making, bead making and gardening, thus acknowledging their indigenous knowledge and using it for socio-economic survival. In the areas of knitting and weaving, the knowledge already possessed by the women serves as the prominent base for the centre to operationalise its project mandate. In addition, new skills such as sewing, beadwork and managerial skills have helped in sustaining the projects. From their financial hardships and deprivations, women who could not dream of providing for themselves had to learn the hard way especially in strengthening and valuing cultural and traditional values and norms of Ubuntu. In 1987, with the help of Wilgespruit Community Centre, the group was transformed into a co-operative community based centre promoting co-operative ideals and principles and the women with no or little managerial skills and leadership found themselves at the centre of managing the centre on their own. One of the senior woman interviewed commented that:

> As new leaders we learn that we do not denigrate people but involve them in the running of the local associations and institutions where every citizen has a right of veto. By standing on its own, the centre plunged us in a situation whereby we have do things for ourselves with little help from the outside (Wilgespruit, Akananani, Kagiso Trust, etc.) more in areas such as information exchange and excursion as well as capacity building. The women's willingness to get involved has further increase their awareness of the strengths as well as the weaknesses. Through adhering to the collective leadership inspired by co-operative philosophy and principles, the centre managed to build centre as well as the community leadership at large.

It is relationship driven in particular between local dwellers, local associations and institutions. In the case like Pfananani where the majority of the staff survives on limited business or management skills and competencies, women did not only rely on their skills and knowledge, but also on the support and solidarity coming from local associations and traditional institutions. From the centre and the financial difficulties encountered, women were determine to stick together thereby tapping into a varied of menial jobs as part of discouraging dependency on their husbands by instilling interdependence among each other. Empowerment in the case of women at Pfananani as Kaplan (1996: 53) argues is grounded on struggling through their dependence on their meagre remittances from their migrant husbands to move towards independence based on acquisition of both technical skills and management know-how. The migration and mobility of women did not only render women interdependent of each other but also enable them to take on more responsibility, especially in decision making both at home and at work. Their interdependent phase of their empowerment meant that women could rely and count on natural, human little financial resources at their disposal for sustainable use. The socio-economic survival of women was dependent on the exploration and optimal utilisation of their human capability (Sen 1995; Nussbaum 2002) which is mainly concerned with comparisons between quality of life and living standards. The approach recognises the multidimensional nature of human beings and appreciation role of information in development and consideration of human beings as

both participants and agents. It is also concerned with equality and group disparities. According to the approach, the objective of development is to take people not as a means but an end within the process of development that is contributory towards expanding people's capabilities or freedoms to pursue quality lives. For the centre to survive it has to rely on its inner strengths and further strengthening of its social and economic ties particularly in working in partnership with local as well as international associates and networks.

Concluding Remarks

This paper specifically explored the effects of migrant labour in Pfananani and showed how some of the women are surviving in the absence of male and family support. The paper examines economic livelihood strategies women engage in, in the face of adversity and the challenges they face in sustaining their knitting and weaving co-operative projects. The paper is based on a case study of women's co-operative projects. Despite the multiplicity of socio-economic challenges faced by rural women, the findings from this case study demonstrate that women's co-operative projects provide potential for social and economic livelihoods and women's mobility has contributed in supplementing their meagre income. The findings also reveal that rural women are becoming more economically independent compared to older women who solely depended on migrant remittances. Although male out migration (migrant labour) has a negative impact on many rural women, this paper has highlighted that it was not all doom and gloom. The community centre has provided an income through indigenous knowledge, learning process and skills that assisted in uplifting some women lives in Limpopo province.

It is true that research on social mobility has previously excluded women from its purview. In older literature, women's mobility has always been placed on a secondary level to that of men even though they contribute as much as men in the household. The paper illuminates that the exclusion of female should be included in research debates as highlighted by the Pfananani women, who despite the taboos associated with female mobility, have managed to negotiate their work and home duties.

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