The Internal Migration in Arab World “Reasons, Policies and Aspects” Evidence from Egypt

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Abstract

The majority of the world’s population is comprised of urban dwellers living in developing world cities and this is reflected by high rates of urbanization in these countries, by 2030, 78 per cent of urban dwellers are expected to live in the developing world. The internal migration is a demographic process that affects the growth and structure of the geographic areas of any country. As a means for regional population redistribution, it constitutes a useful mechanism in the process of developing socio-economic welfare strategies. In recent decades, some literature tried to discuss the internal migration in most developing countries including the Arab countries. For example some migration studies dealt with the determinants of Egyptian internal migration in general and labor mobility in particular. The objective of his study is to examine the factors that affect the individual’s decision with respect to internal migration, and to estimate the magnitude in which each factor exerts its influence on labor supply adjustment. The multivariate association between reasons for migration, sex of the migrant and the level of education for both urban and rural areas. Another important point that this paper aims to focus on is the governments’ policies which aimed at reducing their population growth rate. These policies include: promoting the use of modern family planning methods; raising the legal age for marriage; and reducing immigration. These policies are aimed at easing the mounting pressures on renewable and non-renewable resources, combating climate change, preventing food insufficiency and providing decent employment and basic social services to all their citizens.

Keywords: Urbanization. Internal migration. Arab countries. Egypt.

Introduction

Because the Arab Region has undergone rapid urbanization since 1970, it is now more highly urbanized than developing countries as a whole. Today, half of the Arab Region is urban, compared to 45 per cent for developing countries. However, there is significant diversity in the urbanization levels reached by the countries in the Region. While Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon and Qatar have levels of urbanization above 85 per cent, the level of urbanization is around one third of the total population in Comoros, Somalia and Yemen. The Region’s urban population is highly concentrated in a few countries. In 2010, two-thirds of the Region’s 181 million urban dwellers lived in six countries. In many developing countries, natural increase (the number of births minus the number of deaths) accounted for at least 60 per cent of urban population growth, with internal migration and reclassification accounting for the rest.

The reasons for high population growth rates are very high fertility rates in the region, combined with decreasing mortality rates. In 2009, the highest fertility rates were in Yemen at 5.5 births per female, Palestine at 4.6 and Saudi Arabia 3.9; Economic prosperity in the region from oil revenues has had an effect on urbanization and
migration in MENA. The region experienced increasing elasticity of GDP growth with respect to poverty reduction during the oil boom, leading to urbanization and internal and international migration [1].

Today on Earth, there are 19 megacities (urban agglomerations with at least 10 million inhabitants). Cairo with a population of 12 million inhabitants is the Arab Region’s sole megacity, and the 13 largest megacity in the world. By 2050, Cairo is projected to have a population of nearly 16 million. At present, other large urban agglomerations in the Arab Region include Baghdad, Iraq (5.1 million), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (4.5 million), Algiers, Algeria (3.4 million) and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (3.1 million). In 2005, the Arab Region had some 43 million slum dwellers. Northern Africa has the lowest slum prevalence in the developing world, 15 per cent [2].

Internal Migration and Urbanization in Arab Countries

Urbanization is both a consequence of a country’s economic development and a factor of socio-economic change. The distribution of the population over rural and urban areas, together with the tendency to move from one area to the other, has significant effects on labor markets and migration pressure. The effects stem from the fact that homogenous labor is likely to be distributed by population in different location. The countries of the North Africa and Senegal have been rapidly urbanized and this phenomenon is likely to be sustained. In the early nineties, the urban population accounted for 53 per cent of the total population in Algeria, 57 per cent in Morocco and 68 per cent in Tunisia.

Figure 1: Urban population in North Africa
Source: Forecasted using data from National Statistics office

Changing of Migration

The problem of development related to migration in the region is exacerbated by the fact that migration from rural to urban does not result from the anticipated economic forces of migration. For instance in the development theories such as Lewis Model, rural-urban migration is thought to be a natural process in which surplus labor is gradually withdrawn from the rural sector to provide needed manpower for urban industrial growth. The process is deemed socially beneficial because human resources were being shifted from locations where their social marginal product was often assumed to be zero to places where this marginal product was not only positive but also rapidly growing as a result of capital accumulation and technological progress. To the extent this view is correct points to the process of development that moves a country from rural based and perhaps agrarian economic structure to an urban based and modern industrialization stage.

Several decades later it has been found that migration in developing countries do not seem to obey such theory. In fact labor migration has tended to exist without any link to the stage of development in the urban areas. There is usually more movement than the potential employment opportunities. In some cases the labor from the rural areas does not match the reference of labor demanded in the industrial urban areas.

The same situation is observed in the Northern Africans where rates of rural-urban migration continue to exceed rates of urban job creation and to surpass greatly the absorption capacity of both industry and urban social services. In a situation like this migration tend to fuel rather than mitigate economic problems. The imbalance in population between rural and urban is viewed as resource misuse since the rural areas are sometimes left with less than required labor and in the urban areas there exist un called for labor surplus leading to huge urban unemployment and underemployment.

Population Policies in the Middle East

The population growth rate in the Middle East was very low until the mid-1950s. Rapid growth
occurred after 1950 with declines in mortality due to widespread disease control and sanitation effects. According to Omran and Roudi [3], the Middle East countries can be grouped according to their demographic situation in the following four categories:

- **Persistent high fertility and declining mortality with low to medium socio-economic conditions** (Jordan, Oman, Syria, Yemen, the West Bank and Gaza);
- **Declining fertility and mortality in countries of intermediate socio-economic development** (Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran);
- **High fertility and declining mortality in high socio-economic conditions** (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates).

Note that this set of national comparisons omits Egypt’s North African neighbors have some close similarities to Egypt in terms of demographic and economic indicators. Probably Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia should be added to the second grouping of countries listed above, whilst Libya would join the oil-rich third group [4, 5].

High infant and child mortality tends to remain a problem throughout the Middle East, with the exception of Israel and the Gulf States. Contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) is low in the region, with the exception of Turkey and Egypt and among urban and educated populations [3].

The fast-growing population of the region is regarded as a problem in most countries of the region except the Gulf States and Iraq. The region includes three of the largest urban agglomerations worldwide; Greater Cairo, Istanbul and Tehran contain between them 30-40 million people (depending on where the urban boundaries are drawn). Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Oman, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza have an annual rate of growth of 3 percent. Iran has 60 million people, Iraq 18 million, Saudi Arabia 16 million, Yemen 10 million, and other countries in this group 22 million, totaling 126 million. Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates comprise 123 million people growing at a rate of 2-3 percent per year. Only Cyprus with less than 1 million people has a lower rate of natural increase of 1.1 percent. The total fertility rate for the region is close to 5 children. In 1992, the TFR in Yemen was 8 children; in contrast, Cyprus had 2.4. The region has a young age structure, where about half of the people are under 20. Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Turkey have policies to lower fertility and subsidize family planning services. Yemen recently adopted a national population policy to reduce the TFR to 4.0 by 2018. Iraq, Kuwait and Cyprus want to raise fertility by providing incentives to families, such as child allowances, greater access to housing, and tax breaks. Kuwait provides cash child allowances, maternity benefits, and subsidies to families of government workers. Saudi Arabia restricts access to contraceptives by banning their advertising [3,6].

From this brief description of the population trends and policies in the Middle East, and despite the relatively similar geography of the region, it is clear that population situations vary in the region from overtly pro-natal countries in the Gulf to more anti-natal countries such as Egypt and Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean basin.

**Migration in Egypt**

**Theorizing Reasons of Migration**

The relation between distance and the flow of migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo is very weak which means that Ravenstein’s distance dimension of migration or the Gravity Model principle are not relevant to the case under study. The pull and push factors of Lee [7] are more fully relevant to the Egyptian case, where migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo is mainly stimulated by the push factors of rural poverty and the historical isolation of Upper Egypt from national development plans and resource allocation. This situation of permanent structural backwardness has increased the unemployment rates and decreased the life opportunities in the region, which in turn has led its residents to seek pretty much any other sources of better living conditions and income generation. For that we can say that migration is stimulated by push pressures “in origin” rather than pull factors “in destination”. The knowledge of migrants about opportunities in
Cairo is not, however, complete or certain.

Given the socio-economic and the educational background the migrants do not have the knowledge and the degree of awareness which make them able to rigorously compare or evaluate the expected costs and returns of their migration decision over time and to study other alternatives -if there are any of- their decision to migrate.

Sjaastad's human investment theory [8] is not really relevant to the Egyptian case. The movement of unskilled laborers who represent the surplus of the agricultural sector may be explained as a survival mechanism rather than an investment strategy.

Todaro's model of rural-urban migration, which helps to explain reasons for continued migration to urban areas even with high urban unemployment rates “which is the case of Cairo “ is perhaps marginally more relevant to the Egyptian case. This model helps us to understand why migrant laborers move from their villages to Cairo despite its high unemployment rate. These unskilled migrants enter the traditional, not modern, sector of the city’s labor market, and their incomes, whilst significantly higher than those that are yielded from agriculture and other uncertain rural activities, are not those of the modern urban wage sector, but derive from insecure and tough unskilled labor in the marginal and informal sectors of the city’s sprawling economy.

The systems approach of Mabogunje [9] is a theoretically elegant and attractive model for explaining the phenomenon of rural-urban migration but it is difficult to be tested in reality. This may explain why this model has hardly ever been applied to real data. Also, the model represents a precise and rigid system that cannot be applied to human behavior with a lot of intervening factors that explain variations in the phenomenon of migration that researchers cannot control for. The model can be taken as a theoretical template for the migration phenomenon; only some parts of the framework can be usefully referred to, especially to explore migration networks and describe the control subsystems.

**Data & Method**

This paper is based on the author’s PhD dissertation's survey- still in process- on studying the rural to urban labor migration in case of Egypt. It’s also based on the labor force survey (2010) that made by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). The survey has 88,000 respondents and designed over 60 questions organized on three sections Demographic and professional status; Employment characteristics and Unemployment characteristics.

Another source; is the different data got from the international and some Arab governments’ institutions and organizations, through their web sites and published rapports.

**Egypt's Migration Decisions' Reasons**

The dual economy model of development and migration and migration is considered as an equilibrating mechanism which, through transfer of labor from the labor-surplus to the labor-deficit sector, eventually brings about wage equality in the two sectors. The model is based on the concept of a dual economy, comprising subsistence, agricultural sector characterized by underemployment, and a modern industrial sector characterized by full employment. Bearing in mind the limitations of this model Upper Egyptian laborers certainly do migrate to benefit from the difference in wages between rural and urban sectors. On the other hand, what does not seem to happen is any significant narrowing of the gap between Upper and Lower Egypt, the two parts of the two-sector model. This implies that the rural-urban labor transfer is not (yet) an equilibrating mechanism for wage differences, but rather a fundamental structural element of the geographically divided dual-sector economy, where the two economies remain both functionally and spatially apart yet connected by migration channels which, as we will see later, are partly circulatory but partly also very long-term.

Other reasons include bad living conditions in the village, need for money/contribution to the family income, seasonality of work in the village, the
Fig.2: Internal migration rated in Egypt
Source: CAPMAS labor force survey 2010 [10]

- Temporary nature of the work at the village, landlessness, to lessen the burden of a big landless family, work in the village does not afford enough food, escape from family pressures and troubles, and some other reasons such as being with no occupation, facing tough conditions at home, and disability to work in farming. Although it is not difficult to appreciate that most of the reasons are basically saying the same thing: that living conditions in the village, at least for the migrants, are desperately poor, with extremely low incomes and limited access to work. Hence, and especially if migrants come from families which are landless and have many family members, there is scarcely enough to eat. What we seem to be dealing with here, therefore, is a migration for survival or, at its most extreme, starvation migration.

Many of the studies on Egypt’s internal migration mention the following push factors:

- Mounting Demographic Pressure: Mounting demographic pressure is often inferred from the rising population density and rapid population growth in the twentieth century. Demographic pressure is not in itself a cause of migration; it becomes a causal factor when mediated through a relationship with economic resources such as employment, income, or land. In Egypt, high population density is assumed to interact most significantly with the extent of cultivable land. As the pressure increases, a population increment which cannot live off the land has to go somewhere; migration thus acts as a ‘safety-valve’.

- Declining Economic Opportunities: Declining economic opportunities are explained in the case of rural areas in terms of 1) the increasing number of landless families; 2) the increasing fragmentation of land-holdings because of inheritance, thus making it progressively more difficult for a family to support itself; and 3) the low level of wages for those who can find employment locally.

- Scarcity of Services and Other Social Amenities: Several authors have collected data to show the relative deprivation in some areas of Egypt in terms of education and health services. The greatest differentials are obviously between rural and urban Egypt. But even among the urban centers, Cairo and Alexandria have a disproportionate share of these resources as opposed to provincial capitals and smaller towns.

Table 1: Reason for migration (by gender and by directions)
(Units %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Migration</th>
<th>By Direction</th>
<th>By Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural-Urban Migration</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Work Only</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompany</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: designed by author depends on CAPMAS survey
Egypt's Family Planning Program

Egypt's national family planning program, in existence since 1965, has been fairly successful in increasing the use of family planning methods and lowering the population growth rate in Egypt. Governmental efforts in the field of population and family planning activities became widely noticeable in the 1950s after the establishment of the National Commission for Population Matters in 1953. The National Charter, which was proclaimed in 1962, contained the first official government support for family planning: Population increase constitutes the most dangerous obstacle that faces the Egyptian people in their desire for raising the standard of population in their country in an effective and efficient way. Attempts of family planning deserve the most sincere efforts by modern scientific methods.

Recently, governmental efforts to deliver family planning services have been strengthened. Political leaders frequently speak out in support of family planning and its utmost necessity for curbing rapid population growth [11]. The most recent development carried out by the Ministry of Health and Population is the integration of family planning services within the umbrella of reproductive health and women's status.

The role of the non-governmental organizations was greatly strengthened and appreciated after the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo. Contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) is one of the most important indicators in evaluating the success of population policies and programs. Egypt has achieved a remarkable success in promoting contraception. The percent of women using any contraceptive method, increased from only 24.2 in 1980 to 56.1 in 2000. Hence, the total fertility rate (TFR) declined from 5.3 live births per woman in 1980 to only 3.5 live births per woman in 2000. TFR was cut by about 1.8 live births within 20 years "a remarkable achievement [12]. Total fertility rate is a useful summary measure of recent fertility levels and is interpreted as the number of births a woman would have on average at the end of her childbearing years if she were to bear children during those years at the currently observed age-specific fertility rates.

Regional disparities in contraceptive prevalence rates and fertility level show that rural Upper Egypt has the lowest and highest, respectively, in the country. CPR in rural Upper Egypt is still rather low (40.2 percent), the lowest among all regions in the country, in fact. As a consequence, the TFR in rural Upper Egypt is the highest among all regions, 4.7 live births per woman in 2000 (it was 5.5 in 1995).

Economic, Socio Aspects of Rural- Urban Migration

It is well known that migrants are often extremely reluctant to divulge any details of their financial circumstances in surveys of this kind. A great proportion of migrants' savings goes on supporting their families in Upper Egypt and satisfying family members' basic needs: food, clothing, children's education etc. About 90 percent of migrants declared that the main thing they do with the money they save is to support their families. Building a new house or a new housing extension to the family's house is regarded as a main objective to save money. One fourth of migrants said that they were saving money primarily to build a house. Other plans were to devote extra resources to educate children, to buy land, or buy home appliances and durable goods, or cover the costs of marriage.

By and large, the expenditure patterns reflect a commitment to (and above all the need for) survival rather than investing for a more enterprising future through the development of new businesses. Once basic needs of food and clothing were provided for, the general preference was next for improving housing conditions and purchasing household goods in order to enhance the immediate quality of life for the rural family.

The socio-demographic effects of migration are various. Amongst these effects "in the Egyptian case "are the migrants' exposure to urban behavior, norms, and traditions; women's empowerment and involvement in economic activities as a result of husbands' absence through migration; change in..."
fertility levels and attitudes; and shifts in valuing children’s education and participation in labor force.

Most migrants were attracted to migrate by stories from older migrants. Nevertheless, the effect of migrants' exposure to urban patterns and lifestyles was not strong in changing their traditional way of life and attitudes, and in a few cases it was even negative, reinforcing their rural conservative values as an antidote to the evil city.

Upper Egyptian migrants in Cairo live in relative isolation, as has been pointed out many times. They do not have channels to communicate with the local population, except formal work relations. Migrants tend to live in groups from the same village or group of adjacent villages, which of course contributes to their intentional isolation.

This isolation is a natural reaction that reflects their failure to comply with the general styles of urban life from their side. On the other side, it is a means to keep their own identity, norms, and traditions.

We can say that the labor migration of husbands has many effects on the family in rural areas suggests that women's status within the family increases when their husbands migrate to look for work; the women become more active in farming, wage labor, dealing with government agencies, and generally taking over the husbands' roles as family decision-maker and disciplinarian.

Egypt has an established tradition of inequitarian sex roles, and the superiority of the husband and father is reinforced in various ways. For instance, in Egyptian family law, which is based on Islamic law, the husband’s legal and economic dominance over his wife is clearly recognized. On a practical level, too, the Egyptian family system sharply defines gender roles, and women are reluctant to take over all the functions of the absent migrant husband. Village women whose husbands were away were uncomfortable about dealing with banks and with construction laborers who were working on their houses, and also felt inadequate when disciplining their children. Further problems could arise, one imagines, about renegotiation of respective roles when the husband returns [13, 14].

Conclusion

Despite distinct differences between the countries of the Arab Region, there are also many common challenges faced by the countries: expanding populations, a growing youth bulge and high youth unemployment, rapid urbanization and crowding in cities, large flows of immigrants, and shortages of arable land, food and water.

Demographic pressures will continue to constitute a core development problem and will continue to have substantial environmental, economic and political consequences for the Region.

The challenge of job creation will need to take into account the millions of new entrants to the labor market as both the working age population and the labor force participation rates, especially for women, will continue to expand. High levels of unemployment will persist even though international migration has provided some relief in certain countries. Consequently, if more opportunities to work abroad are available, the potential for continued emigration will be high.

However, in the longer term, emigration might decrease following the decline in the numbers of young people attaining working age in several countries after 2025, although this obviously depends on future economic growth. This can be viewed as an opportunity if education and training programs are combined with economic policies that promote employment generation, while taking into account the integration in the global economy.

In case of Egypt we mentioned that the main pushing reasons to migrate include bad living conditions in the village, need for money/contribution to the family income, seasonality of work in the village, the temporary nature of the work at the village, landlessness, to lessen the burden of a big landless family, work in the village does not afford enough food, escape from family pressures and troubles, and some other reasons such as being with no occupation, facing tough conditions at home, and disability to
work in farming.

Although it is not difficult to appreciate that most of the reasons are basically saying the same thing: that living conditions in the village, at least for the migrants, are desperately poor, with extremely low incomes and limited access to work. Hence, and especially if migrants come from families which are landless and have many family members, there is scarcely enough to eat. What we seem to be dealing with here, therefore, is a migration for survival or, at its most extreme, starvation migration.

As a result, policies in developing countries are increasingly more concerned with influencing the direction of rural to urban migration flows – e.g. to particular areas – with the implicit understanding that migration will occur anyway and thus should be accommodated at as low a cost as possible.

References