
POVERTY, MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

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Abstract. In some small island developing states (SIDS) income distribution is becoming more unequal and poverty concentrated in small pockets in urban areas and remote rural areas. Income inequality is often exacerbated by and enhanced through urban bias and inadequate access to education and health services. Social problems have followed. Constraints to trade, other than in some services, have resulted in small states emphasising the need for migration. International migration has increased in volume and range, and, as a result, scarce skills have been lost. However, also as a result, remittances have grown substantially (especially in the Pacific) and these tended to reduce inequality. The chapter will discuss the possible economic benefits of remittances, arguing that at the national level the economic future of several small states partly hinges on the continued flow of remittances, and hence on continuity of migration. In turn this can have a positive effect on economic resilience.

1. Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the changing economic context of small island developing states (SIDS), with a particular focus on the Pacific region, and on the interrelationships between poverty, migration and economic resilience. Many SIDS are isolated and fragmented, with numerous populated islands and, in Melanesia, with many distinct languages and cultural groups. Prospects for economic growth are limited, especially in Polynesia and Micronesia, where no island state has a population of more than 250,000. Five island states in the Pacific and five elsewhere (two in the Atlantic, two in the Indian Ocean and one in the Caribbean) are officially classified as Least Developed Countries. Several have been described as failed states; others as highly corrupt. Although SIDS in the Pacific region do not suffer from the absolute depths of poverty experienced in some parts of the developing world, including such island states as Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor) and the Comoros, they have their own social and economic problems (Abbott and Pollard, 2004). Generally growing populations have

intensified pressure on land. Economic growth has been disappointing since independence, granted to many SIDS about thirty years ago, though mining and tourism offer prospects in a few cases. This has resulted in a series of imposed attempts at restructuring, urged by such institutions as the World Bank, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank.

Problems have intensified with the shift from an older reliance on commodities towards a more diversified but less protected economy, involving the liberalisation of trade and the multinationalisation of production. This has been especially challenging for SIDS producing sugar and bananas, where effective substitutes have yet to be found, and has led to rising unemployment, and even localised trade wars such as the “kava-biscuit war” between Vanuatu and Fiji (Connell and Soutar, 2007; Connell, 2007a).

The life courses of island people, present or absent, are increasingly embedded in international ties, and many SIDS have sought out new migration opportunities. Island states, individuals and various international agencies have attached new and increased significance to migration, remittance flows, return migration and the role of the diaspora, in contexts where “conventional” development strategies have achieved limited success.

Almost all SIDS are characterised by increased emigration, with some declining quite rapidly and others (such as Palau) experiencing a positive migration flow. Smaller and more vulnerable islands have become more evidently peripheral and dependent parts of a wider world, with the global shift towards neo-liberalism and free trade. Contemporary patterns of migration have diversified, demography has changed, and the restructuring of global and island economic landscapes present different development contexts.

This chapter is organised as follows. The next section, discusses the link between poverty and income distribution and delves into the reasons for poverty. Section 3 deals with domestic and international migration, and the related effects of urbanisation, brain and skill drains, and remittances. The fourth section discusses the need for a migration policy in SIDS followed by a section on the connection between migration and resilience building. Section 6 concludes the chapter.

2. Poverty and Income Distribution

Most SIDS have limited data on income distribution, either in terms of the contemporary situation or as time series data. Where such data exists,

these are subject to dispute, partly because of the task of measuring incomes in semi-subsistence economies. Formal sector jobs are being created more slowly than school-leavers are emerging from the education system. The consequence is one of rising unemployment, a growing informal sector and visible signs of poverty, especially within urban areas. Although poverty is not a welcome word, there is growing evidence that it is widespread, sometimes disguised by words such as “hardship” (Abbott and Pollard, 2004). Much poverty is also hidden in outer islands and remote mountainsides, where there is both a poverty of opportunity and minimal access to crucial educational and health resources, alongside employment opportunities. One consequence of this is sustained rural-urban migration, hence a major task for most states is to create employment, and provide services, for outer islands and remote places, that would stimulate development and reduce migration and thus unmanageable urban growth.

Reasons for Poverty

At least in the Pacific, until quite recently, there was a widespread belief that poverty did not exist, because of the existence of both urban and rural “safety nets” where extended families could and would support those who for whatever reason experienced temporary problems. There is now evidence that both such safety nets are breaking down and it is no longer possible, if it ever were, for urban people simply to return and be supported by rural kin (Connell, 2003a: 68-70). In SIDS outside the Pacific, poverty has been earlier and sometimes more widely recognised. The IMF has produced Poverty Reduction Strategies for many small and island states including Cape Verde, Comoros, Dominica, Timor-Leste (formerly East Timor), Grenada, Haiti and São Tomé and Príncipe. Timor-Leste has long had high levels of poverty with 42 percent being below the poverty line in 1996, and in 1998 Haiti was the poorest country in the world with 80 percent of the population living in poverty (World Bank, 1998). In Comoros, in 2004, some 37 percent of households were classified as being poor, and in Cape Verde some 30 percent of the population were poor (and some 14 percent ultra-poor) in 1989 but that proportion had risen to 36 percent in 2002. Grenada, regarded as having the highest proportion of people in extreme poverty in the Eastern Caribbean, had 32 percent in poverty and 5 percent in extreme poverty in 2002 (Brown, 2002).

Absolute poverty is not generally apparent in the Pacific; however some households are poor in the sense that they do not have enough food, clean water or the resources to enable access to adequate housing, health care or basic education (Bryant, 1993). Where data exist, it appears that poverty is increasing. In Fiji, for example, one of the few countries to

have longitudinal data in the Pacific region, the extent of poverty grew significantly between 1975 and 1991 when the Fiji economy was growing relatively rapidly. In other words no effective trickledown effect was occurring, which meant that inequalities were simultaneously increasing. Fiji has achieved greater levels of economic growth than most SIDS, hence the extent of poverty and inequality could be greater in other places.

In addition, the extent of poverty in Fiji is now clearly growing, as the sugar and manufacturing sectors slump; to the extent that, in terms of the government's own data, about one third (34 percent) of all households were regarded as being under the poverty line in 2006. Moreover the extent of poverty has significantly increased from 9 percent in 1977 and 25 percent in 1990.

As the Director of the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA) has said:

“When we look at income distribution and the evidence of growing inequality in Fiji in terms of housing, wages, education, health care and access to opportunities we must admit that we are in danger of creating and accepting in Fiji – the Fiji of the rich, which belongs to a small number of elite and the Fiji for the poor, which belongs to a vast majority who are struggling to keep their heads above water.” (*Fiji Times*, 17 September 2006).

Poverty and income inequality exist for various reasons. Most island economies are weak and have tended to be further weakened through recent processes of globalisation. Low levels of investment, political instability, corruption and failures of governance worsen existing situations, as do natural hazards. In some states this has resulted in a downward spiral – an urban “poverty trap” from which there appears little hope of improvement.

A parallel downward spiral may also be occurring in rural areas where young people choose not to enter the agricultural sector but, despite high urban unemployment, move in search of urban jobs (which their limited education often denies them), resulting in a large proportion of uncultivated land, low productivity and loss of traditional knowledge and techniques. Single parent households and those with disabilities are commonly relatively poor (though many single parent households in the Pacific actually depend relatively successfully on the remittances of distant males) as are those where there is functional or real illiteracy, and bear the primary burdens of poverty. Furthermore in many SIDS there is growing evidence of “chronic intergenerational poverty” (Brown, 2002) as the downward spiral remains in place.

A number of outcomes of poverty and income inequality are manifested by inadequate housing, limited access to clean water, low education levels, especially post-primary education, and inadequate health services, thus tending to perpetuate the structural context of poverty. Urban areas are growing faster than the rate of overall population growth, and informal settlements are growing particularly quickly, as the supply of land and formal housing is inadequate to meet the needs of new migrants (or even established residents). In larger cities like Suva, settlements house more than half the urban population: a result of rural-urban migration precipitated by the demand for services (especially education), the expiry of land leases and the breakdown of extended families.

Urban Poverty

Many urban poor live in settlements, and socio-economic inequalities are most evident in urban areas. Those who are poorest are those with little support from the rural economy and no opportunity to move away from town when poverty, rising unemployment, old age or social disorders make life difficult. In settlements such as Blacksands, Vila (Vanuatu) insecurity over land tenure and employment meant that migrants often contemplated return migration but usually chose to remain for their children's sake. Most households in Blacksands had incomes below the national average and at least a quarter had problems meeting school fees, paying rents and providing food. Most supplemented their cash incomes from subsistence food gardens (Mecartney, 2001), an option not always open to settlement residents. Low incomes and a lack of support during illness or unemployment give a sense of biding time, waiting for unforeseen and uncertain opportunities and sometimes securing multiple jobs, maintaining strict budgets and abandoning some "traditional" obligations, simply to get by. Many urban residents survive rather than prosper in the city (Connell and Lea, 2002).

One consequence of urban growth being in excess of urban job creation is the steady emergence of the informal sector, with particularly rapid growth being in prostitution and the rise of crime. In Suva, Honiara, Port Vila and elsewhere, the rise of urban poverty and the informal sector has been marked by new repressions of the poor and marginalised, in diverse anti-urban policies, as they are forced out of urban areas, most dramatically by the bulldozing of settlements, and by attempts to devolve solutions to the churches from the state, rather than by concerted attempts to devise welfare, employment or rural development policies that might reduce such problems (Koczberski et al., 2001). Pervasive opposition to urbanisation has delayed and discouraged the development of coordinated plans for urban management, and hence the reduction of urban

development problems. Ironically there is no evidence that it has slowed rural–urban migration. Even urban markets and market vendors have been opposed by urban and national governments, despite their ability to provide substantial employment for both youths and women. Social disorganisation and crime are a function of substantial inequalities in access to land, housing and other services.

Archipelagic populations have become increasingly concentrated on the more central urbanised islands, accentuating problems of service delivery in remote areas, in turn accounting for further movement away from isolated areas and the slow depopulation of smaller, remote islands. Unemployment is most visible amongst urban youth (Abbott and Pollard, 2004), and there is growing recognition of the existence of significant numbers of unemployed and marginalised youth in most towns, such as Port Vila (Mitchell, 2004), the small Tongan towns of Neiafu and also Nuku’alofa (Gailey, 1992b). Poverty is also hidden in outer islands, where there is both a poverty of opportunity and minimal access to crucial educational and health resources, alongside employment opportunities (Connell, 2003a; 2006a). This, in turn, has stimulated emigration. Towns are seedbeds of discontent and provide incentives to further migration, but amongst those least able to achieve, or gain, from it.

Urban poverty bears some relationship to internal migration since the urban poor are often those who have migrated from the most impoverished and remote rural areas. People are thus moving away from rural poverty, in the sense of inadequate access to employment and income-earning activities, and towards services, yet migration tends to transfer poverty to urban areas. Migration is embedded in this very broad context, which takes minimal note of either substantial or subtle regional variations.

A Population Context?

All small island states within the Pacific region are going through, or have experienced, the demographic transition hence the “doomsday syndrome” – with explosive population growth rates – that was forecast a decade ago in the Pacific, did not materialise. Nonetheless population growth rates in the Pacific region remain relatively high in a few states, even with high levels of outmigration.

Life expectancies have risen over the past quarter of a century, but remain relatively low in the Melanesian. A critical development issue is that of maintaining, let alone improving, present standards of living in the face of continued population increase, the absence of effective population policies and minimal economic growth.

Developing and implementing population policies has proved difficult in most SIDS. The factors that are most conducive to successful population policies—integration of population and development policies, improved rural development and communications to spread new values and reduce the use of children in production, and formal sector employment opportunities for women of increasing age of marriage—are largely absent.

The outcome of high population growth rates has been that in most states there is a preponderance of young adults in the population, a situation that has placed strains on land resources, but also on employment markets, education and social organisation. The phenomenon of a “youth bulge”, where a high proportion of the population is both youthful and unemployed, is becoming increasingly visible and problematic in many SIDS, where formal job opportunities are few.

In certain localised contexts, population pressure on resources has created tensions, where land is not freely available, but zealously guarded by its traditional owners. In the Solomon Islands quite recent conflicts around Honiara were partly a consequence of Malaitans leaving their own densely populated island and settling on the land of the local Guadalcanal population who resented the loss of their resources—and the greater competition for scarce urban jobs (Connell, 2006b). More broadly it has been argued that there is a possible correlation between recent political tensions in the Melanesian region (Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands) since migration from these countries is limited or non-existent in contrast to Polynesian and Micronesian states, where migration has been considerable and political stability much greater (Ware, 2005). However other crucial realities suggest that the relationship between migration, population pressure on resources and political tensions is much more complex.

3. Urbanisation and International Migration

Migration is a response to real and perceived inequalities in socioeconomic opportunities, within and between states. Social influences are important, especially in terms of access to education and health services, and are in turn often a function of economic issues. Environmental hazards and degradation may be catalysts. Expectations have risen over what constitutes a satisfactory standard of living, a desirable occupation and a suitable mix of accessible services and amenities. Employment crises, growing populations, inflation, static (or even falling) commodity prices and the declining availability of land in some areas, slowly increase the gap between expectation and reality, at

the same time as it becomes more visible. Agricultural work has lost prestige and the relatively limited and declining participation of young men in the agricultural economy is ubiquitous. Changes in values, following increased educational opportunities and the expansion of bureaucratic (largely urban) employment usually from the 1970s, the period when many island states became independent, have further oriented migration streams outwards, as local employment opportunities have not kept pace with population growth.

Urban Migration

Urban migration has led to national populations becoming increasingly concentrated on the more central urbanised islands, and this has become a vicious circle accentuating and accounting for further movement away from isolated areas. Migration is always selective. The more educated have tended to migrate first and migrants have left many rural areas to take advantage of superior urban educational and employment opportunities, as in Blacksands settlement, Port Vila, Vanuatu (Mecartney, 2001). Earning power is increasingly concentrated amongst urban bureaucracies while the absence of developed state mechanisms (such as progressive taxation, unemployment benefits and pension schemes) for affecting transfers of income minimises redistribution towards rural areas other than through remittances. Growing inequalities, coupled with rising expectations, are the concomitants of increased migration.

Economic issues are critical but not the only influences on migration, especially where small islands have limited social, educational and medical facilities. Many migrate for their children's educational and employment future (Connell, 2006b). Political factors have also been significant influences in various contexts, notably in the migration from Fiji that followed the 1987 and 2000 coups, and in the skilled migration from Bougainville, Fiji and the Solomon Islands during the recent crises. In Fiji, migration was not only of ethnic Indians, arguably the most affected by the coups, but also of ethnic Fijians, emphasising how migration could be seen as "a barometer of fear" of further conflict (Narayan and Smyth, 2003). Environmental factors have similarly influenced migration with significant recent movement from Montserrat, where half the population left in the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Soufriere in the mid-1990s (Philpott, 1999), from the Carteret Islands in Papua New Guinea, where localised sea level rise and erosion has posed particular problems (Connell, 1990), and from Manam (Papua New Guinea) and the northern islands of the Marianas, following volcanic eruptions. Cyclone Heta, that devastated Niue in January 2004 destroying almost a quarter of the houses on the island, even prompted some

thoughts about the permanent abandonment of the island, as had Cyclone Ofa two decades earlier (Barker, 2000). Earlier eruptions temporarily depopulated Tristan da Cunha. Global warming poses a future threat to the islands, and especially to over a hundred populated coral atolls, should sea level rise occur. In Tuvalu, fears are such that emigration has already occurred in anticipation of new difficulties to follow (Connell, 2003b). Island states are in no position financially, geographically or politically, to defend themselves against such potential threats, but if – perhaps when – the worst does occur, then islanders may become a new stream of environmental refugees to metropolitan states.

Yet, ultimately, an economic rationale, real or latent, may underly most migration moves. Simply stated, in Port Vila, one of the most important reasons was “bilong winim smol vatu bikos i no gat rod long winim vatu long aelan (to earn a little money since there is no way to earn money on the home island)” (Mitchell, 2000: 172). For many that is reason enough. Growing inequalities, coupled with rising expectations, are the concomitants of increased migration. Within the larger Melanesian states remittances from urban to rural areas continue to play an important role, especially where migration is from small islands. Even for remote parts of such large islands as Tanna, Vanuatu, remittances from urban migrants are the single largest source of income in several villages (Winthorpe, 2004). Experiences and perceptions of the wider world, its values, and its material rewards further underlie the migratory experience.

International Migration

In most SIDS, outmigration first became significant in the 1960s with the “long boom”, rising demand for labour in metropolitan states, jet air travel and cheaper fares. Within a decade of that boom smaller island states, such as Niue, were already losing population and moving towards a “culture of migration” where migration was normative and central to island life (Connell, 2007a). Migration gradually became an expected and accepted phenomenon, an integral strand in both household and national concepts of development and a semi-permanent safety valve, not for population growth but for weak local and national economies (Connell and King, 1999).

In the present century, migration has taken new forms in the wake of global economic shifts. International migration has become more skill-selective and the “brain-drain” increasingly exemplifies patterns of migration from islands, whether of nurses, airline pilots or footballers, and women are now a key component of migration. Whereas early migration tended to follow colonial, post-colonial and linguistic ties, it

has become gradually more global. Remittances have played a more important role as the economic gains from migration have taken precedence, and commodification of labour has become more apparent, especially in new pressures from many island states to negotiate migration ties with metropolitan states, as part of a new “outward urge”.

Underpinned by economic forces, an increasing gap between well-being in SIDS and metropolitan states has stimulated migration. Experiences and perceptions of the wider world, its values, and its material rewards further underlie the migratory experience, and in an electronic era, knowledge of distant places is less fragmentary. In many places (Connell, 2007a; Carling, 2002), migration is perceived as an appropriate and legitimate means to economic and social well-being, rather than a rupture or discontinuity with island experiences.

Since the 1960s, there has been accelerated migration from island states, as islanders began to seek employment and access to services in the metropolitan states. For the smallest places, including the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Anguilla, Montserrat and Pitcairn, migration has been particularly pronounced as a majority of the indigenous population now live overseas. St Kitts, Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands have experienced declining populations over the past quarter of a century, while it has long been forecast that the smallest populated entity, Pitcairn, may simply disappear as its population falls below a sustainable level (Connell, 1988). Niue has sought immigration from Tuvalu, as its population has recently declined sharply in the wake of Cyclone Heta and due to a long term “culture of migration” (Connell, 2007a). Even relatively larger states, such as Samoa and Tonga, have experienced very limited population growth as emigration has become something of a “safety valve” for high population growth rates (Ware, 2005).

A few islands have experienced depopulation in recent times, such as Merir (Palau) where one observer recorded its final phases: “The island is dying, at least as far as the present generations are concerned... The women are too old to cultivate taro in any quantity, and the men cannot keep the taro groves cleared” (Osborne, 1966: 49). But this is unusual. Other tiny island populations, such as that of Pitcairn, have survived long after their demise was predicted (Connell, 1988). Niue has a resident population of 1500, but there are 5328 Niue-born in New Zealand and more than 500 elsewhere, alongside their dependents (Connell, 2008). Such extremes of depopulation are however exceptional. By contrast, a few dependent territories, notably the United States Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos in the Caribbean, Guam, the Northern Marianas and American Samoa in the Pacific, and Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, have become stepping stones for onward migration

to affluent metropolitan states, usually the United States. In each of these islands, population growth has usually been very rapid. Extensive subsidies have turned these and other dependent islands, such as Niue, Norfolk Island, Christmas Island, Britain's south Atlantic territories, and St Pierre and Miquelon in the north Atlantic (Royle, 2001: 89-90) into "government islands" where public service employment enables a prosperity and population stability that would be more difficult elsewhere. Here and in many other islands, migration is the principal regulator of demographic change.

In the past decade, new patterns of skilled migration have taken nurses from Fiji to a diversity of destinations, from the Marshall Islands and Palau to New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates (Rokoduru, 2008; Connell, 2004), and took rugby players beyond the "traditional" destinations of New Zealand and Australia to Japan and the United Kingdom. In the Caribbean, Aruban nurses go to Curacao, Cuban nurses and doctors to several states and Jamaican nurses to Bermuda; many go on to Canada, the United States and the Netherlands (Connell, 2007a). Active recruitment has emphasised this process (Connell and Stilwell, 2006). Even newer movements have become particularly important in the last couple of years, with migration from Fiji and Tonga to the Middle East (Iraq, Kuwait and also Sudan), emphasising the manner in which new and highly paid overseas employment opportunities are being firmly grasped, even in an unappealing and violent security and social context, and have quickly turned Fiji into a major recipient of remittances alongside Tonga (Connell, 2006a). Simultaneously, islands where migration was of relatively slight importance barely a decade ago, have become highly dependent upon it. The former US territories of Micronesia – the now independent states of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and particularly the Marshall Islands – are becoming increasingly similar to other Pacific islands: a steady outflow, growth of relatively permanent urban communities overseas (beyond student groups), the return flow of remittances and growing interest in migration). Nowhere does the demand for migration appear to be decelerating.

In recent years, migration opportunities in metropolitan states have however tended to decline, and are increasingly targeted at skilled migrants, rather than family reunions. Thus migration flows from the Caribbean and Pacific are increasingly likely to be of skilled migrants from various sectors including health (Connell, 2004; 2007a; 2008) and education (Voigt-Graf, 2003). Structural changes within metropolitan states have meant that certain sectors, notably health, are short of skilled workers. Island nurses, usually entering the bottom levels of the "global health care chain", have migrated much greater distances, as demand intensifies.

In the past, male migration usually preceded female or family migration from most islands, especially where plantation labour was required, but preferences have firmly shifted towards women. In many cases, families migrate as units, often as skilled migrants on the basis of one spouse's qualifications. Some specific occupational categories are either male or female dominated. For instance, Fijian women have migrated as nurses, domestic helpers and care-givers while Fijian men have moved overseas as soldiers, tourism workers, police, pilots and employees of private security companies (Voigt-Graf and Connell, 2006). There are however real disadvantages associated with this, both in terms of the loss of skills to Fiji and circumstances where more than a dozen workers have been killed in the Middle East. More generally, the demand for service sector workers, in areas from domestic service to tourism, information technology and health, has shifted the balance in favour of women, particularly in the Caribbean, though women migrants are most likely to be exploited (Ferguson, 2003: 16).

Interest in migration has long been such that in Samoa, when prospects for emigration were particularly poor at the start of the 1980s, the "broken dreams" of potential migrants contributed to a significant rise in youth suicide (Macpherson and Macpherson, 1987). At a national level, the economic future of several states partly hinges on the continued flow of remittances, and hence on some continuity of migration (Ahlburg, 1991; Connell and Brown, 1995; World Bank, 2006).

The possibility of blocked migration in the future, a situation ever present in public debate (Macpherson, 1992; Shankman, 1993), emphasises the potential problem of a high rate of natural increase in the event that emigration is substantially reduced, especially as a "culture of migration" becomes established. Thus in recent years, migration has become more complex, globalisation has extended the number of destinations and brought longer migration chains, migration has become more selective, but also in greater demand, and part of that selectivity has favoured the migration of women.

Brain and Skill Drains

The proportion of skilled islanders among all migrants is increasing, as a result of shortages in the receiving countries, some of which – as with the health services of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States – have led to private sector recruitment (Connell and Stilwell, 2006). Low remuneration, poor promotion opportunities, limited training and further educational opportunities, poor working and living conditions, particularly in remote regions, are push factors for skilled migrants (Connell, 2007c; 2008). The growing shortage of skilled workers

has also contributed to increased inter-island migration, with workers migrating to countries offering better work conditions and salaries, such as Fijian teachers migrating to the Marshall Islands, and Fijian tourism workers moving to the Cook Islands. This international and regional brain-drain has become excessive in some small states, though ironically many migrants become part of a “brain loss” or “brain-waste” because their qualifications, despite gaining them entry, are unrecognised in the destination. At the same time, illegal migration of less skilled migrants has occurred. There are many illegal Fijian and various Polynesian overstayers in the United States (Scott, 2003), Australia and New Zealand, Cape Verdeans in the United States and France (Carling, 2002), and Caribbean islanders in more developed Caribbean states, Canada and the United States.

The loss of skilled labour has been a serious issue for several island states, but perhaps especially for some of the smallest, who only need, but have, few skilled workers. Emigration rates of skilled persons have steadily increased in the PICs, particularly as overseas recruitment occurs, and especially for health workers. New Zealand, the UAE and other countries, for instance, have actively recruited nurses from Fiji. Consequently there is a shortage of skilled health practitioners in almost all Pacific and Caribbean island states (Connell, 2007c; 2008). Even in larger states like Fiji, the loss is significant and problematic. Doctors are twice as likely to migrate as nurses because wage differentials are greater, and because most nurses are women and men are often the primary decision makers regarding migration (Brown and Connell, 2004). However female Fijian nurses frequently took the decision to migrate autonomously, often leaving their husbands and children behind, mainly for higher wages, but alongside escaping marriage problems and customary obligations (Rokoduru, 2008). Because of smaller numbers and greater training costs, the loss of doctors (and other specialists) is most critical. There is an acute shortage of doctors and nurses in Fiji, exacerbated in the wake of the 2000 coups and by the active recruitment of some receiving countries, and the Ministry of Health has had to recruit doctors from the Philippines and the Indian subcontinent to fill the gaps (Chandra, 2003).

In some smaller states the brain drain has been equally worrying; the Cook Islands, for example, lost more than half its vocationally qualified population in the single decade 1966-76 and much the same happened again in the mid-1990s when the national economy collapsed (Connell, 2005). Many islands and island states now also experience a shortage of airline pilots, accountants, engineers, IT workers and other skilled groups. Even tiny Niue has had to import refrigeration and other engineers from the Philippines because of its losses of human capital to migration (Connell, 2007a). Skilled migration is unlikely to decrease,

given worsening skilled worker shortages in the “standard” destinations, and increased shortages in newer, more distant markets.

Changing aspirations and the migration of the more educated young contribute to the brain and skill drain from SIDS, perhaps ultimately worsening the welfare and bargaining position of those places. In small island states, it is unusually difficult to replace skilled migrants, both because of the duration of training that is required and the very small demand for some particular skills. The outcome in the health sector at least is that basic needs are less well satisfied, especially in more remote areas, and there is a loss of morale amongst those who have remained, as working conditions deteriorate. Wards are closed, waiting lists and times lengthen, examinations are more cursory, or complicated by new cultural differences, and large proportions of budgets are directed to referrals to distant places (Connell, 2004). The shift to skilled migration, despite remittances, has been at some cost to service provision in many islands and island states, but it is unlikely to decrease, given the significance of skilled worker shortages in each of the “standard” destinations, and increased shortages in newer, more distant markets.

Return migration has not solved labour shortage problems and small states including Fiji and the Cook Islands have turned towards Asian labour markets for replacements (Connell, 2005). In the case of migration of Tongans and Samoans to the United States alone, “Emigration results in the permanent loss of young educated skilled labour from the Pacific island nations. Skilled labour is in short supply and emigration probably hinders development” (Ahlburg and Levin, 1990: 84). This is certainly true more generally in the health sector, where more costly (and sometimes less skilled) replacements have sometimes been required, and in sports. However nurses at least send very high levels of remittances, sustained over long periods of time, to the extent that their remittances are almost certainly substantially above the training costs (Brown and Connell, 2004). At the same time more nurses are joining the profession because it provides migration opportunities, hence some Pacific and Caribbean states are moving towards the situation in the Philippines where nurses are effectively trained to be migrants. This suggests that the economic costs of skilled migration are not as great as has been feared, even if training is in the public sector and remittances are private, but it is impossible to accurately cost the health disadvantages of high levels of emigration.

Remittances

Migration decisions are usually shaped within a family context, as migrants leave to meet certain family expectations. Migration has rarely been an individual decision, nor has it been dictated by national interests

(except perhaps in the case of Kiribati and Tuvalu), but is directed at improving the living standards of those who remain at home and the lifestyle and income of the migrants. Consequently, as in Tonga, “families deliberate carefully about which members would be most likely to do well overseas and be reliable in sending remittances” (Gailey, 1992b: 465), and extended households have transformed themselves into “transnational corporations of kin” which strategically allocate family labour to local and overseas destinations to maximise income opportunities, minimise risk, and benefit from resultant remittance flows (Marcus, 1981). While this form of household consensus certainly occurs, and demonstrates the significance of access to the migration-remittances nexus, families are not always in agreement about their economic aims and functions, and there are often conflicts and tensions within them (Morton Lee, 2004: 136; Connell, 2006a). Nonetheless, for households in Samoa, “having young wage earners abroad diversified families” earnings streams and reduced their dependence on high-risk activities. Having family members in several locations abroad diversified earning sources and reduced risk levels still further”; moreover “If this analysis depicts Samoans as calculative and instrumental, it is because in relation to risk and return they are necessarily so... [as] risks and returns available in various places were formally canvassed and modeled by families” (Macpherson, 2004: 168). While this form of household consensus certainly occurs, and demonstrates the significance of access to the migration-remittances nexus, there are household uncertainties about outcomes in various places.

Over a decade ago, James (1993: 361) argued that in many Tongan villages remittances were becoming individualised and that the idea of a transnational community of kin was becoming increasingly invalid (see also Morton Lee, 2003: 31). The extent of greater individualisation is however impossible to determine, but increased conflicts over the allocation and use of remittances emphasise, rather than downplay, their growing role.

In many countries, remittances form a significant part of disposable income, hence by the 1980s smaller Pacific island states (initially Kiribati, Tokelau, Cook Islands and Tuvalu) had become conceptualised as MIRAB states, where MIgration, Remittances, Aid and the resultant largely urban Bureaucracy are central to the socio-economic system (Bertram and Watters, 1985). The notion of MIRAB is also applicable in larger states such as Cape Verde, Samoa and Tonga, where remittances constitute some of the highest proportions of GNP in the world and in many similar contexts within the Caribbean and Pacific, now including Fiji, where remittances are the single most important source of national income (Connell and Conway, 2000).

Recent events in Fiji emphasise the expanding “outward urge”, the crucial role of remittances and the growing significance of MIRAB. While the acronym is disliked in the Pacific, for cultural reasons and because of its implication of a “handout mentality”, it nonetheless suggests the centrality of migration and remittances in islands and island states, and has been largely unchallenged for two decades (Bertram, 1986; 1999; 2006; Connell and Brown, 2005; Brown and Connell, 2006). There is no question that it has similar validity in other SIDS.

Remittances are particularly important in smaller states and more remote islands where conventional economic development is difficult. Thus for the tiny coral atoll of Manihiki (Cook Islands), migration and the resultant remittances are so crucial that they constitute nothing less than a socio-economic strategy for collective survival (Underhill, 1989). In Nanumea in Tuvalu remittances grew from being about half of the island income in the 1970s and 1980s to some 75 percent in the 1990s, largely because of the collapse of copra marketing as world prices slumped (Chambers and Chambers, 2001: 156). Similar situations occur in other small islands and island states, and the northern Micronesian states are now following this pattern (Connell and Brown, 2005: 6).

Conventional wisdom suggests that remittances are overwhelmingly used for consumption and inadequate amounts are directed towards investment. However there are both alternative perceptions over the use of remittances and issues of fungibility – where the specific use of remittances cannot easily be distinguished from other spending patterns and may distort them (Connell and Brown, 2005). After debt repayment, new forms of consumption – which are important – housing and some community goals (such as water tanks and churches), air fares and education (an investment in social capital), remittances are used for investment, sometimes in the agricultural sector but more frequently in the service sector, and especially into stores and transport businesses. In Samoa and elsewhere, remittance money has constituted the start-up money for many shopkeepers and other small entrepreneurs. Half of all market vendors in Apia (Samoa), all of whom received remittances, claimed that some had been used as capital for the purchase of seeds, fertiliser and tools to engage in food production for sale (Muliaina, 2001: 28), while the expansion of the Nuku'alofa flea market in Tonga since the mid-1980s followed households using remittances as an investment in their market stalls, and subsequent economic diversification (Brown and Connell, 1993).

Even in the most difficult circumstances, remittance recipients make efforts to invest where they can. In the outer islands of Kiribati, where most remittances went into providing basic needs, and the custom of

bubuti (a request that cannot be refused) makes savings let alone business almost impossible, all recipients nevertheless sought to retain some income to invest in land purchase, doughnut bakeries, stores or even in sewing material for blouses that might later be sold (Borovnik, 2004). Similarly on a small outer island, like Falahola (Tonga), remittances have been used for economic ventures, ranging from agriculture to tourism, though remoteness has limited their success (James, 1991:18-20). Throughout Tonga, the increased use of remittances for investment purposes, in fishing, agriculture, stores and transport businesses, attests to the shift from consumption to investment (Faeamani, 1995; Walker and Brown, 1995). This transition has also occurred in Caribbean SIDS (Connell and Conway, 2000) and elsewhere. Where there are opportunities, and where consumption goals have been satisfied, remittances are used for investment, stimulate entrepreneurial and trading activity, increase the extent of formal sector employment and produce multiplier effects. However, while this transition benefits economic development, it emphasises intra-village (and island) economic inequalities and may hamper social development.

The use and structure of remittances have changed over time, with significant intergenerational shifts in the structure of remittances. Initially remittances are sent to parents and, in an economic sense, constitute repayment for their past investment in the human capital of the migrant; in a social sense this is usually expressed as duty, loyalty and maintenance of family ties. Even with imperfect knowledge, households consciously make decisions in favour of the quantity and quality of education of children that boost their chances for migration and thus remittances (Brown and Connell, 2004; 2006). A second wave of remittances is more likely to be dominated by brothers and sisters and by children; this phase may also correspond with a decline in volume, but represents an investment in the human capital of the next generation (Brown and Poirine, 2005). The third and final phase represents payments to spouses – and indirectly (via investment) to the remitters themselves, as return migration and/or retirement are approached.

Because of the continued and increasing significance of remittances, the sustainability of remittance-dependent development is particularly important but necessarily uncertain. Even with continued migration, however, an anticipated imbalance is likely to occur because of the dynamics of settlement migration. Though data on Tongan and Samoan nurses in Australia indicate that even skilled migrants sustain remittance levels at high levels and over long time periods (Brown and Connell, 2004), circumstances change. With family reunification and greater integration of migrants in host communities, the ability and willingness to remit should decline over time. Links with second-generation migrants

become more tenuous as these new generations act as individuals rather than perceive themselves as members of wider transnational social groupings. This is particularly so where migration opportunities decline and the number of overseas born “islanders” becomes the majority. As overseas generations lose language and cultural skills, or “marry out”, their sense of belonging declines, and without renewed migration island futures are less certain (Connell, 2006a). At the very least remittances have complex and important social and economic dimensions.

There is no consensus on whether remittances improve or worsen income distribution. Until relatively recently the dominant view was that remittances tended to reinforce income inequality, by enhancing the capacity of recipient households to invest in additional migration, education and other income-generating assets (Connell, 1980; Shankman, 1993).

Some village studies have both demonstrated considerable income inequality (Hardaker et al., 1987) and suggested that this is partly a result of remittance flows (Gailey, 1992a; Small, 1997: 134, 195). It is certainly a widespread perception; Marcus (1993: 29-30) thus suggested that “the capacity to call on international resources has become a crucial factor in influencing a family's local economic conditions. The lowest stratum in contemporary Tonga are those totally dependent on the nation-state framework, and the limited resources it embodies, without any overseas options at all”. Indeed it is increasingly argued, as in Tonga, that “every family needs to have someone overseas. Otherwise the family is to be pitied” (quoted in Small, 1997: 152). Hence, in contrast to western societies, it is often the single-female headed households that survive most effectively (Gailey, 1992a). However more recent empirical studies based on survey data have tended to challenge this view, and some macroeconomic data suggest that remittances have not led to increased inter-household income inequality, at least within Tonga (Ahlburg, 1991).

Ahlburg (1991, 1995) and Connell and Brown (1995) found that the distribution of household income with remittances was less skewed than the distribution without remittances, while other recent studies have indicated that inequality is a function of many factors of which the migration-remittance nexus may be an unimportant or tiny part (Evans, 2001; Muliaina, 2001; Halatuituia, 2001). The most recent studies of migration and remittances in Tonga and Fiji have shown that those households with migrants were more likely to have a higher income, independent of remittances, but the direction of causality was unclear (Brown and Connell, 2006). A consensus in very diverse circumstances is improbable.

4. The Need for Migration Policy

Although no SIDS have sought to discourage international migration in recent years, several have expressed particular concerns, mainly attached to the loss of skilled labour, the breaching of bonds by scholarship holders or, as in the case of Niue, particularly extensive migration.

Fiji is one country where there have been serious concerns over some impacts of migration, even though the Fiji Government once tended to regard emigrants as “traitors” and some policies effectively punish return migrants – for example where migrant nurses have to start on a lower salary on re-employment in Fiji compared to before migration (Rokoduru, 2008). While this policy discourages the temporary migration of nurses, it also discourages return migration in a sector where there are acute shortages. More recently however Fiji has sought out overseas migration opportunities. In 2004 the government finalised contracts for migrant workers to go to Kuwait.

Several countries have trained workers for overseas employment, as is the case, for example, with the Marine Training Schools of Tuvalu and Kiribati. Kiribati itself has sought to extend the seaman programme to cover nurses, and both Tonga and Samoa would like to train more professionals than can be employed locally (Ware, 2005: 445-446), and benefit from presumably superior remittance flows. This shift to the deliberate export of skilled workers has major potential ramifications for development.

On several occasions Tuvalu has drawn attention to the particular difficulties of sustaining populations in a small, densely populated island state, with few resources, alongside the problems of absorbing return migrants (Connell, 2003b: 94-5).

Several Pacific island states have recently requested Australia for guestworker positions in agriculture (Connell, 2006c), along the lines of earlier schemes negotiated between Fiji and New Zealand (Levick and Bedford, 1988). Once concerned over the costs of migration, islanders, from individuals and households to extended families and national governments, are increasingly likely to seek out new opportunities.

It appears therefore that within SIDS, there is some ambivalence towards migration. There is therefore the need for a clear migration policy in SIDS, a policy that attempts to maximise the benefits and minimise the drawbacks of migration. In particular there is the need for a policy to channel remittances more effectively into investment for the promotion of economic development.

5. Migration and Economic Resilience

There is little doubt that migration has provided new and welcome development opportunities for small island states, at village and national level. Pragmatism has overwhelmed intellectual doubts. Opportunities are eagerly sought after. While many migrants are indeed within the disadvantaged secondary sector of metropolitan labour markets, and many have been deskilled during migration, they have accepted outcomes that, however disappointing, may well be superior to what has been left behind.

At a national level the economic future of several states partly hinges on the continued flow of remittances, and hence on continuity of migration (Ahlburg, 1991; Carling, 2002; Connell and Brown, 1995). This reality may enhance the economic resilience of the recipient small states. There is evidence from cross-country studies to suggest that remittance flows are more stable than foreign direct investment and official development assistance (IMF, 2005). These flows can have the effect of a hedge against economic shocks.

There is room for some degree of optimism that remittance flows will not decline significantly in the near future, but alongside pessimism that this will not continue indefinitely, especially for non-migrant generations. That conclusion depends in large part on the continuity of migration flows. But if opportunities decline, and if, as Muliaina (2001: 20) has argued in the context of Samoa, there is a continued tightening of immigration policies in major Samoan destinations, for whatever reason, "the standard of living of rural Samoans, as opposed to urban dwellers, may be expected to decline in the next decade". Such longer term costs remain uncertain.

6. Conclusion

In a globalised world, Pacific SIDS face uncertain times. Uneven development between SIDS and metropolitan states, and within the SIDS, is unlikely to decrease. Whilst poverty is readily evident in most states, not all governments recognise its existence. At a local level more successful development, but on a small-scale, has involved a degree of hybridity between local social structures and introduced economic structures, a persistent indication that people live in societies and not economies (Connell, 2007d).

The rhetoric and intermittent practice of self reliance, at national and household levels, has disguised a situation in which there has been a

growing dependence on external sources of funding, whether from aid, remittances or investment. This has, in part, contributed to new forms of socio-economic inequality in countries and especially in cities, and incipient class formation, though ethnic and regional divisions and traditional power structures are of pervasive importance. International migration has deferred and mitigated, but not resolved, issues of poverty and of development.

While accelerated national and international migration has been partly a response to the collapse of commodity markets and the inability to effectively diversify domestic economies, it has nonetheless long been an effective strategy for economic diversification. The creation of new diasporas has spread economic risk beyond small nations, and resulted in a considerable dependence on remittances, but has sheltered and protected small island states in contexts where migration offers less risk than any outdated dependence on commodity trade. While migration may fracture families, a brain drain has become established.

The combination of weak economies, overburdened bureaucracies, urban unemployment, fractured social networks and uneven development challenge notions of sustainable development. Small island states in the Pacific are likely to remain weak for the foreseeable future, become increasingly dependent on the wider world and require new forms of external support and intervention.

Most Pacific SIDS have yet to develop policies for channeling remittances more effectively into development, but engagement with the globalising world through international migration has become a necessary and crucial means of linking into the benefits of globalisation and building economic resilience by a specific spatial form of diversification.

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