

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***International migration and development: survival or building up strategy* by Sarathchandra Gamlath, ISBN 978-624-95361-0-4 (Kandy: Kumara Publishers, 2019, 266 pages)**

Reviewed by Samitha Udayanga\*

*Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka.*

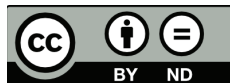
“International migration and development: survival or building up strategy” by Sarathchandra Gamlath explores the community-level and family-level consequences of international migration in Sri Lanka while arguing that international migration cannot be positive in terms of the country’s overall development. Migration can bring about different results at micro level compared to its positive impact on the well-off social segments of the Sri Lankan community, but it does not adequately benefit the low income segments. Gamlath claims that it is noteworthy to understand whether the migrants who come from badly-off segments are benefited from their migration because of their belief that migration would help them alleviate poverty. He has observed that many people below the poverty line suffer from several socio-economic problems because of the inappropriate pattern of development influenced by different biases or prejudices, such as favouring urban areas over rural areas. Consequently, the remittances sent by labour migrants who are predominantly from the badly-off segments of the community do not help their dependents at home when the national level resource distribution is discriminatory while the well-off segments continue to receive thereby more and more funds for their opulence.

The community-level and family-level impacts of international migration have been significantly analysed in the book. The primary emphasis is placed on labour migration and the impoverishment of migrant families in Sri Lanka, who are hampered in their efforts to promote sustainable development due to inadequate resources and a disturbed socio-economic environment. The author

asserts that for a majority of labour migrants, migration has become a “survival strategy”, even though they had expected to consider overseas employment as a “building up strategy” to overcome socio-economic adversities while ensuring a prosperous future. Although migration is generally considered a positive contributor to the development of a country, Gamlath demonstrates, on the basis of Sri Lanka’s experience with it, that international labour migration cannot contribute to the progress of the families concerned unless it enhances their existing resources. The lower the existing resources of the relevant families remain, the less progress the families achieve from labour migration. One of the key findings of this research is that the contribution migration should make in procuring resources for development, particularly at the community level, is closely linked with the level of existing services and facilities the relevant families should enjoy at home. The author, therefore, implies that the community level of development has to be prepared systematically to captivate migration resources so that it can contribute to the process of national development.

Divided into nine sections, the book carefully draws the reader’s attention to international migration. It then introduces different themes, of which labour migration in the Sri Lankan context has received significant attention. The author also elaborates on why the contribution of migration to the development of a less-developed country is being widely debated. To understand the situation of labour migration in the Sri Lankan context and its relationship with development, the author asserts that development should not be understood merely

\*Corresponding author (senithrisami@gmail.com  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9826-691X>)



This article is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-ND License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>). This license permits use, distribution and reproduction, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed anyway.

as inducement of economic growth but as a broad phenomenon that cannot be defined solely on the basis of macro-economic performance because it might limit a holistic understanding of migration-development links. Here, Gamlath employs two main conceptual frameworks: “migration-development link” and “nature of development processes in less developed countries”. Moving on to the Sri Lankan situation, significant development challenges contributing to migration pressure is described, drawing on various sources of information that further include a conceptual explanation of different themes such as “migrant families” and “community”. Although some significant issues related to labour migration in contemporary Sri Lanka have been explained in this chapter, the subjective dimension of migration has been less highlighted. How lifestyle changes and the changes in migrants’ worldviews were not adequately described by the author despite their significant influence on the migration process.

Secondly, the chapter entitled “Contemporary International Migration” provides a conceptual understanding of different themes related to international migration and the complexity of migration types that consist of temporary migrants, permanent migrants, forced migrants, and illegal migrants. Although the author explains different migration types and their complexities, some emerging migration patterns are not given significant attention. For example, student migration is one of the emerging types by which students from the developing world largely migrate to developed countries to obtain higher education, but what is noteworthy is that they are highly likely to remain in those countries instead of returning to the country of origin. This has made a significant change in the socio-economic landscape in the developing world.

In addition, how the destination of migrants has changed after the first-half of the twentieth century is described alongside delineating diversity in the areas of their origin. Arabic countries were the most popular destinations earlier, although now East Asian countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and Japan have become the predominant migrant-receiving countries. The shift from the west to the east has been described in the book. However, the influence of gender and subjective experiences in this process was not adequately explained. Furthermore, the author focuses on south-north migration while giving significant attention to migration pressure in less developed countries.

Next, the chapter on “Theoretical Perspectives of Migration” presents different theoretical frameworks that can be used in understanding international migration;

therein, both macro and micro theoretical perspectives are presented. Recently, the international organisation for migration asserted the importance of the cognitive orientation of the migrants because that influences how migrants configure their behaviour, so a large body of research on migration now focuses on the behavioural changes and the subjective dimension of migration that could have been included in this discussion. All classical theories of migration somehow focus on the structural dimensions of migration, although the discussion of how the cognitive orientation of migrants influences their overt behaviour is much more restricted.

Drawing from different sources, the author reviews the relationship between development and migration in the third chapter. The focus of this chapter is to understand what ‘development’ is meant to be. The United Nations, as one of the leading international organisations that initiates a discourse on ‘development’ has declared four development decades in order that the member countries work towards overall progress. Gamlath asserts that those endeavours have often been inappropriate since their overemphasis on individual and corporate functions has brought about unexpected repercussions on people’s lives. Thus, the concept of ‘distorted development’ has become a widely documented concept, because, in the name of ‘development’, populations seem to have experienced unexpected catastrophes. The author has thus recognised some of those distorted trends in development. There he focuses on neglecting rural localities, ignoring urban marginal groups, avoiding equal participation, changing values, and boosting undue competition. This discussion then emphasises the state of migration pressure in the context of distorted development, distinct strategies for development, the development outcomes of different policies, the social base for building migration pressure, and the dominant types of migration movements.

The chapter on “Labour Migration: Characteristics, Reasons, and Preparation” presents and discusses data obtained from fieldwork during seven months with regard to the characteristics of labour migrants in the Sri Lankan context, reasons for migration, and preparation for the move. Because the characteristics of the migrants are closely related to the family-level socioeconomic success they achieved through migration, the author analyses how different attributes of migrants influence their socio-economic attainments. Age, gender, the general pattern of marital status, education and skill levels of migrants, reasons for migration, and resource levels for migration are some of the important themes presented in this chapter. Moreover, the author demonstrates the differences between the characteristics of migrants, reasons, and preparation for migration

between the rural and urban sectors, which pave the way for understanding the state of international labour migration in two different social settings in the country. As Gamlath carefully observes, the rural and urban differences in terms of relative development differences can influence the migrants differently; migrants from relatively less developed rural areas are less benefitted than those from urban areas.

Furthermore, three types of migrants were identified based on their socio-economic situation, such as low-level, middle-level, and high-level. This analysis implies that migrants coming from those categories adopt migration as a strategy to overcome respective problems, in that sense, migration serves as a 'survival strategy' for the low-level socio-economic groups. It is a 'building up strategy' for the middle-level socioeconomic groups, whereas it is considered a 'broad building up strategy' for the high-level socioeconomic groups. Because many migrants originate from the rural sector, it is implied that labour migration has largely become a 'survival strategy'.

As far as the chapter on "Labour Migration: Income, unemployment, and skill acquisition" is concerned, the author provides an analysis of community and family-level income from labour migration, the potential impact of labour migration on unemployment levels, and the effects of labour migration. There he shows that the income consequences of labour migration at the national level are beneficial to the country. Moreover, a significant finding is that unemployment is characterised by a relatively high-level educated labour force. In contrast, the educational characteristics of the labour migration show that it was made up of a large number of relatively less educated people from rural areas. The next chapter is an extension of the previous two chapters dedicated to presenting the impact of labour migration on education, housing, and community living. Based on the findings, the author indicates here that the effects of migration on education, health care, and housing are positive, not only because of labour migration but also due to other factors such as the pre-migration family-level socioeconomic

situation and the degree of post-migration community-level services and facilities available.

The conclusion precedes the analysis of policy implications. Based on the knowledge obtained, the author provides some important policy implications to be considered. In order to avoid the negative consequences of a *purely-growth-oriented-economic policy*, it is suggested to consider a people-centred approach that includes human resource development, gender-sensitive policies, and a targeted development approach that gives sufficient attention to the rural and urban informal sectors. Because distorted development would exclude a large number of the lower socio-economic sections, they have less capability for involving in international labour migration as unskilled migrant workers. This study thus recognises the relevance of having a minimum human resource base at the family level in order to capture the advantages in post-migration. On the other hand, should the migration-development link be benevolent and ubiquitous without discrimination? Gender-sensitive policies must be attributed to macroeconomic development policies, as the author argumentatively suggests. Moreover, to bring people in need back to the macro process of economic development, Gamlath emphasises targeting sections that are lagging and providing them with some facilities and services instead of a classical blanket approach or urban-targeted policies as a policy initiative. In addition, how community-based migration-related programmes are planned and implemented is given significant attention in the policy implication chapter, with the ultimate purpose of linking the micro-level migration-purposeful activities to local development programmes.

"International migration and development: survival or building up strategy" is thus an insightful work because it provides empirical evidence embedded in a sound theoretical argument about international labour migration in contemporary Sri Lanka. The strength of the book depends on the theoretical framework used and the empirical approach employed, which will bring about a comprehensive understanding of the situation of "international migration and development" in Sri Lankan society.