When are Migrants "Good" or "Bad" for the Environment?

Panel Contribution to the PERN Cyberseminar on Rural Household Micro-Demographics,
Livelihoods, and the Environment, April 2006

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One can never definitively state whether a migrant is good or bad for the environment; numerous other factors muddy the links between the characteristics of a person, their actions, and their impact on the environment. Nonetheless, a theoretical discussion on when and how migration, or migrants, may exert negative impacts on the environment can lead to well-planned empirical studies and ultimately how to mitigate negative impacts.

Migration and its impact on the environment in the *destination* area is not a topic discussed in the background paper. In order to narrow the scope to a few important issues, the paper was limited to migration, livelihoods and the environment in the *sending* communities. But migration's impact on the destination's environment is a very important and timely topic as well.

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When are migrants "good" or "bad" for the environment in their destination areas? I argue that the answer depends greatly on the degree of migrant incorporation into the local community. A greater degree of migrant incorporation mediates the impact of a migrant's detrimental effects on the environment (Cassels *et al*. 2005).

Modes of incorporation describe the reception of migrants in places of destination, from government policy towards migrants to public perceptions of migrants to the size and coherence of migrant ethnic enclaves already present in a destination. But linking migrant incorporation and environmental degradation is not straightforward. How do we define migrant incorporation in different contexts? If a migrant incorporates into a well-established migrant enclave, does this mediate negative environmental impacts? Additionally, how can we measure degrees of incorporation?

First, let's review some theory of migration and the environment, and hypothesize how migrant incorporation mediates the relationship.

1) Short-term outlook

   Theory: Migrants often have expansionist attitudes that fail to consider long-term effects of resource extraction and land-use (Pichon 1997).

   Mediation: If a migrant is incorporated into the community, then the individual may not be as isolated, and can rely on community members to satisfy the immediate, short-term needs of

survival. Then the individual's actions may not be as detrimental on the environment if they have support to invest in longer-term outcomes.

2) Poverty

Theory: Related to the short-term outlook of migrants, migrants are more likely to be impoverished than non-migrants. The poor and hungry often over-harvest and degrade their surrounding environment in order to survive. An impoverished migrant may not be able to practice sustainable resource extraction in order to ensure future environmental productivity when immediate consumption needs are so strong (Broad 1994).

Mediation: A migrant that is incorporated into the community may be less likely to be in poverty; and if they are in poverty, they can rely on community members for short-term help instead of making unsustainable decisions that endanger the natural environment.

3) Misapplication of technology

Theory: A migrant may use inappropriate technology to extract natural resources, which may be unsustainable. Technological changes imposed by migrants without knowledge of social and ecological context are more likely to fail and decrease ecological resilience (Begossi 1998, Perz 2003).

Mediation: The more deeply a migrant is incorporated into a community, the more access the migrant has to appropriate technology and local knowledge of the community's resources.

4) Social norms and common property regimes

Theory: Migrants are out of touch with social norms and expectations. A good example of this comes from literature on migration and health, specifically sexually transmitted disease. A migrant may feel freed from familial norms and social pressures, and may feel anonymous when they are in a new community. This may lead the migrant to make poor, risky decisions regarding sexual behavior. The same theory can be used for migrants' decisions regarding sustainable resource extraction and land-use.

Mediation: If a migrant is incorporated into a community, they may be under social pressure to comply with local rules and regulations such as common property regimes. If they feel a sense of belonging and responsibility to the community, they may make fewer risky decisions. For example, dynamite fishing may satisfy immediate needs and supply many fish, but the individual may risk being scorned by the community for the lack of regard for long-term sustainability of the reef and thus avoid such actions.

How can we define and measure migrant incorporation? One way to measure migrant incorporation is via marriage between migrants and non-migrants in a community (Cassels *et al.* 2005). Marriage can facilitate migrant integration and be a source of both social (through increasing access to social networks) and cultural capital (through enhancement, understanding and awareness of the norms of behavior within a community).

- What are some other ways migrants incorporate into communities?
- What is the best way to measure, or capture, the "degree" of incorporation?
- Is the negative association between migrant incorporation and environmental degradation found in other settings?
- What about ethnic enclaves? If a migrant incorporates into an enclave, are they less likely to be associated with environmental degradations as well?
  - Although the majority of the residents may be migrants themselves, the long-term migrants or elders in the community most likely established a responsibility to environmental sustainability.

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