

DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN RURAL UPPER EGYPT AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY: A CASE STUDY OF ASSIUT GOVERNORATE

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Abstract: The attention paid by international organizations to the link between migration and development coupled with the demographic transition proceeds in Egypt now, highlight the need to re-investigate current approaches of international migration. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the dynamics, processes and impacts of international migration in rural Assiut Governorate of Upper Egypt. Central to this study, which has not yet received enough consideration, is the investigation of occupational mobility in each sector at village level.

To accomplish study objectives, a sample of 260 return migrants was drawn and intensively interviewed. Answers of return migrants reflect to a great extent their poor conditions prior to their migration. However, Findings indicate that emigration selectivity exists clearly as a core component of migration process. Emigrants are usually younger and to some extent highly skilled.

A major question raised in this study was whether rural international migration has contributed to the socioeconomic development of the four selected villages. Analysis of data revealed that rural international migration has had to some extent a positive economic impact on villages. A base for diversification of village commercial activities has been created by rural migration. In addition, some migrants acquired new skills while working abroad, and have continued working in those areas after returning home. The positive aspects aside, there have been some negative impact on village economy, resulting from; change in consumption habits, significant increase in prices of agricultural land and products, large decrease in number of farm cultivators, and use of agricultural land for construction purposes. In general, returnees' contributions to village economic development and creating new job opportunities were very limited.

Keywords: International migration; Occupational mobility; Migrants' remittances; Upper Egypt

Introduction

Individuals have an impact upon the population size only once through birth and once

through death but, in all likelihood, many times through migration. Migration is the most repeated demographic event and

the least predictable aspect of population change (Castles and Miller, 2003). Migration is increasingly seen as a force that can contribute to development. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) both impacts and is impacted by the effective management of migration. While acknowledging the contribution of migrants in host countries, it is important to note that the flows of financial, technological, social and human capital back to countries of origin contribute to the development of migrants' home countries.

In case of Egypt, international migration is one of the major challenges the country faces at the current time and will continue at least in the forth coming decades. This issue derives its importance from the fact that a large number of working-age people are leaving their country of origin for other countries that may offer more attractive employment opportunities and higher incomes, as well as better health and education services for themselves and their families. Based upon demographic transition as it occurs, it is expected that the migration of the working-age population will increase, leading to an accelerated rate of international migration on the whole (Shakoori, 2005).

One of the predictable issues Egyptian government will have to face is related to the political and social pressures resulting from the growing demand by people to migrate. Receiving countries, however, no longer encourage migration and are currently seeking to curtail its movement through the tighter control of rigid immigration policies. However, international labor migration has resulted in significant socio-economic changes in Egypt (Nada 1991). Nevertheless, estimates on the number of Egyptians working abroad have not been accurate. A noticeable confusion and wide discrepancies are common aspects of these various estimates (Amin and Awany, 1989)

This paper seeks, to some extent, to investigate in-depth the process of contemporary international migration among rural Upper Egyptians. Central to this investigation is the study of emigrants' characteristics. Another major component of this paper is to study intensively reasons behind international migration, push factors. Moreover, the paper analyzes the patterns of rural migration in Assiut Governorate of Upper Egypt region. Lastly, this research sheds light on the impact of rural international migration on some socioeconomic and demographic aspects in the study area.

Methodology

To achieve study objectives, a sample of four districts of Assiut governorate, which represent its different geographical areas, would stand as a fair sample for the field research. Assiut is one of the most populated governorates in Upper Egypt located 375 Km south to Cairo. These districts are Abnoub, El-Ghanaim, Kosia and Abu Teeg. From each of these districts, a village was selected for drawing the study sample after thorough investigation of the study area in terms of rural international emigration. The villages are Sawalem Abnoub, Al-Azaiza, Mair and Al-Zarabi from districts of Abnoub, El-Ghanaim, Kosia and Abu Teeg, respectively. These villages proved to be characterized by heavy rural emigration. Lists of return migrants in the four research sites were made. A sample of 65 return migrants during last two decades was chosen from the enumeration records of each village for interviewing. Meanwhile, a structured questionnaire was prepared and administered to the return migrants sample in each village. Ratios, cross-tabulations and histograms were the main analytical tools approached in SPSS environment to reach the results of this research. However, the following variables were considered for return migrants in research sites:

- Age, educational status and occupations before migration
- Reasons behind migration
- Channels for migration
- Sources of travel expenses
- Number of the times migrants traveled abroad and number of years they spent abroad
- Occupations of migrants abroad
- Landholding among migrants
- Use of remittances
- The impact of migration on land and labor
- Occupational mobility among migrants

Results and Discussion

1. Characteristics of Migrants

1.1. Age, educational status and occupations before migration

Results show that the majority of rural migrants (67%) were in young ages (20-35 years old) (figure 1). This result was in the predicted direction that selectivity is a major component of the migration process. In other word, demand for young ages is high in all recipient countries especially oil-producing ones.

Regarding to education, the majority (60.4%) of emigrants were illiterate. In addition, 17.8 percent of respondents were only being able to read and write. A small proportion of emigrants

have attained formal education (21.8%), among whom only 2.3% have university degree (figure 2). Such a result may be attributed to types of work abroad. Many types of work there do not require better educated persons. In other words the marked demand for unskilled workers in oil-producing country does not attract much educated people to emigrate. It is worth noting that such a demand differs by country, vs. for emigration for Europe or North America, the selectivity will be in the side of high educated persons while the opposite is found in emigration for oil-producing countries.

With respect to occupations, as shown in figure 3, it was evident from the data that a sizeable proportion (51.6%) was engaged in agricultural work and related activities. Another proportion (12.6%) were worked in governmental sector receiving very small salaries, meanwhile, others (8.1%) were jobless. The classification of migrants by occupation will be reflected in reasons behind emigration.

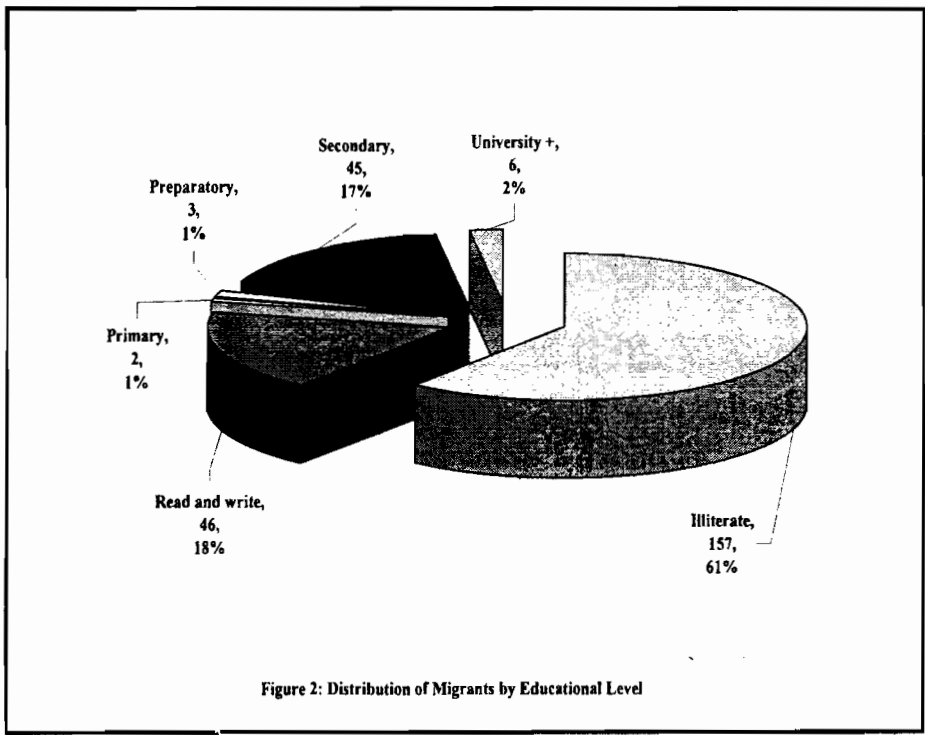
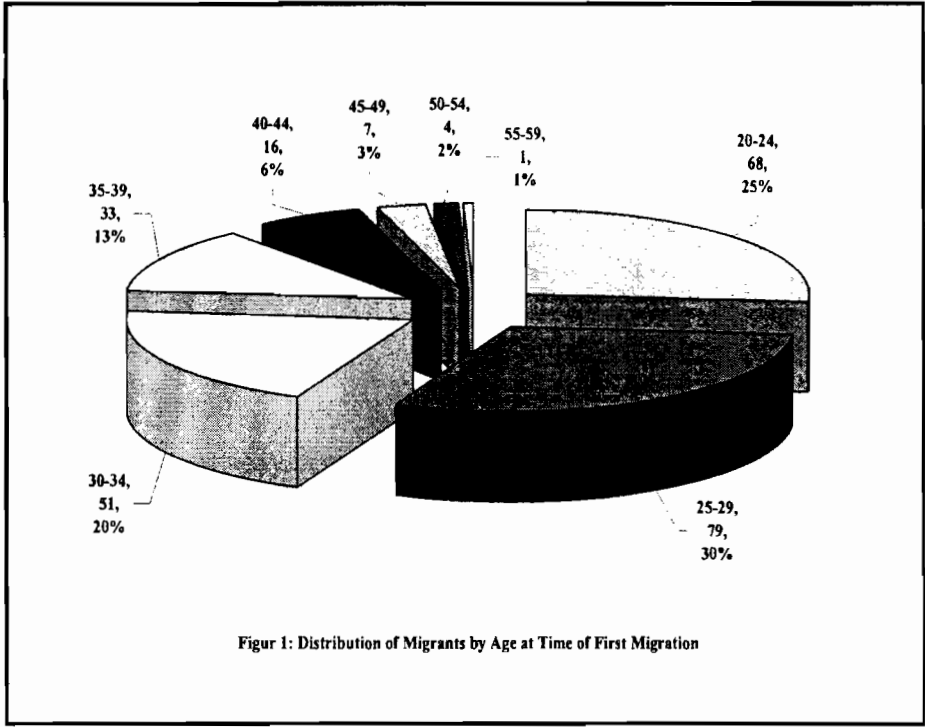
1.2. Reasons behind migration

Answers of interviewees revealed four major factors behind rural international migration. More than one half of research sample (53%) indicates that absence of agricultural land for cultivation was main reason behind their emigration to seek gainful employment in the

surrounding Arab countries. Meanwhile, about one fourth (27%) of respondents refer that insufficient wages and poor salaries, coupled with the dramatic increase in life expenses were effective forces for them to migrate. Emigration of 13 percent of respondents was attributed to lack of job opportunities in labor market whether in public or private sectors especially for university graduates of rural areas. It is worth noting that setting up new productive or commercial project pushed the minority (only 7%) of research sample to emigrate. This result shows that the expected contribution of rural international migration may not be significant for developing rural community rather for achieving personal benefits.

1.3. Channels for migration

Emigrants differed in the channel they approached to work abroad. In this sense, primary groups such as relatives and friends were the most approached channel to work abroad (45%). In addition, a sizeable proportion of emigrants (37%) depends upon labor brokers as a channel for working abroad and making all the needed arrangements i.e., passport, visa and contract procedures. For eighteen percent of emigrants, labor and travel agents act as mediators between labor market in villages and companies abroad. These labor



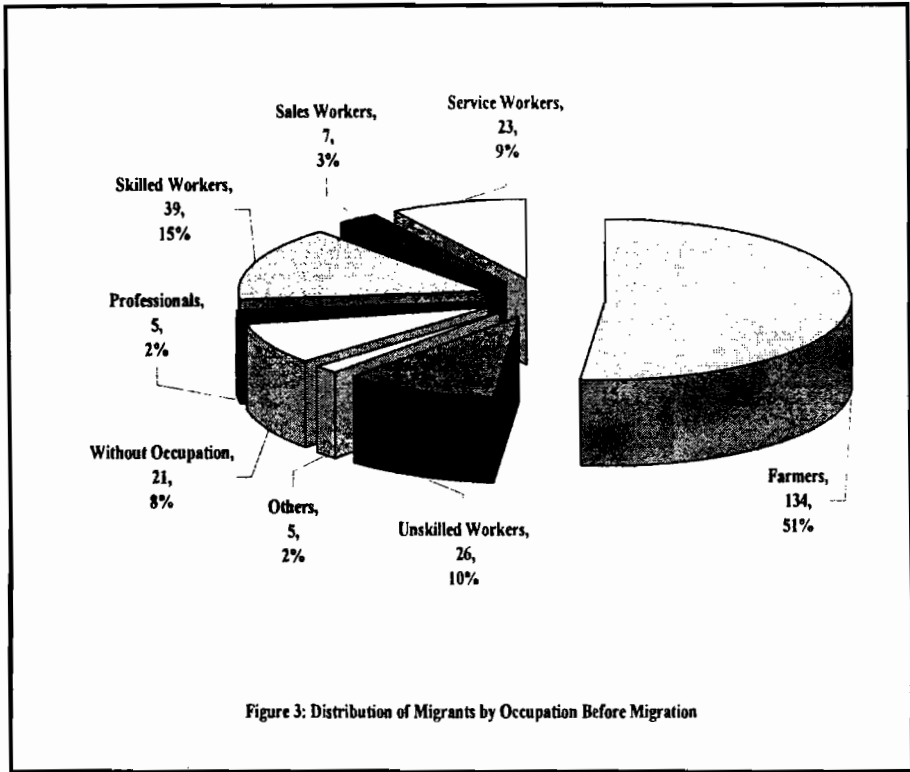


Figure 3: Distribution of Migrants by Occupation Before Migration

and travel agents usually located at the capital of the governorate or in Cairo. However, the analysis of channels through which rural people emigrate did not include any governmental channel. How comes?! It is incredible result especially if we declare that most of developing countries i.e., South-East Asia, MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) except Egypt have a clear governmental channels for emigration. In spite of having a ministry of migration in Egypt, we still do not have clear encouraging policy for international migration.

Therefore, this result calls for having appropriate emigration policy that study the labor markets abroad and coordinate with labor offices that spread over the country.

1.4. Sources of travel expenses

Analysis of data has shown that sources of travel expenses are basically private or family-based resources. This result may be attributed to the nature of rural society, which characterized by values of cooperation and participation. Friends also played an important role in providing rural emigrants with loans or

financial assistance to meet their traveling expenses. Figure 4 shows different sources that emigrants used to secure travel expenses.

1.5. Number of times migrants traveled abroad and number of years they spent abroad

On one hand, findings of study show that the majority (76%) of migrants traveled abroad only once. This may be attributed to the global energy crises happened through eighties of last century. On the other hand, it is noticed that 75 percent of migrants had spent less than three years abroad. This period of time spent abroad looks to be insufficient to produce big remittances to be directed for achieving rural development needed in Egypt. In other words, the small period of time spent abroad may interpret why sizeable proportion of remittances was contributed for personal benefits rather rural development of villages.

1.6. Occupations of migrants abroad

Rural international emigrants were mainly distributed, by type of occupation in receiving countries, in domestic and unskilled work. Data show that (55 percent) of emigrants engaged abroad in manual unskilled works like construction, agricultural related work or domestic services in

hotels and restaurants. Meanwhile, about one-third of emigrants abroad work in skilled occupations (figure 5). This result may be attributed to the lack of skills coupled with high illiteracy rates predominant among rural emigrants. In this sense, we should adopt the new trend dominant in migration internationally that is brain gain. In other words we should pay more attention to educate and train our people in rural areas so that they become qualified to have skilled work in the host countries.

1.7. Landholding among migrants

Classification of migrants by landholding indicates that about two-thirds of migrants were categorized as landless, while only 34 percent of research sample qualified as landholders. It is worth noting that the majority of landholders (75 %) own or rent small land plots (less than one feddan). As mentioned in reasons behind migration, the absence of agricultural land push many people in rural areas to emigrate.

2. Impact of Migration

2.1. Use of remittances

The role of migrant remittances in economic development continues to be an important issue for researchers and policymakers. Both groups are attracted to migrants'

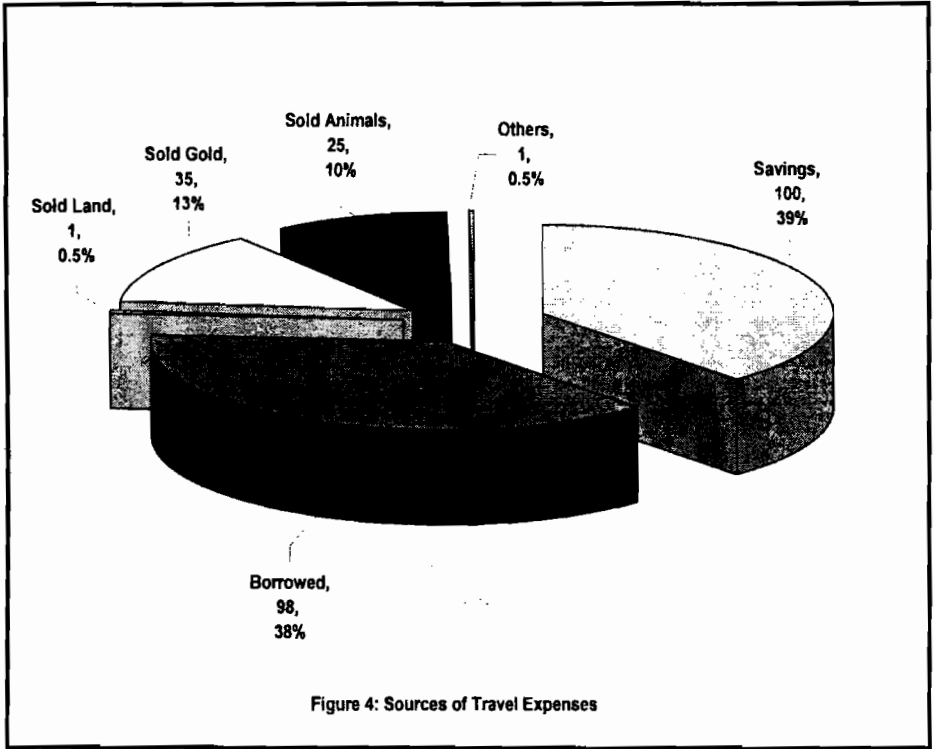


Figure 4: Sources of Travel Expenses

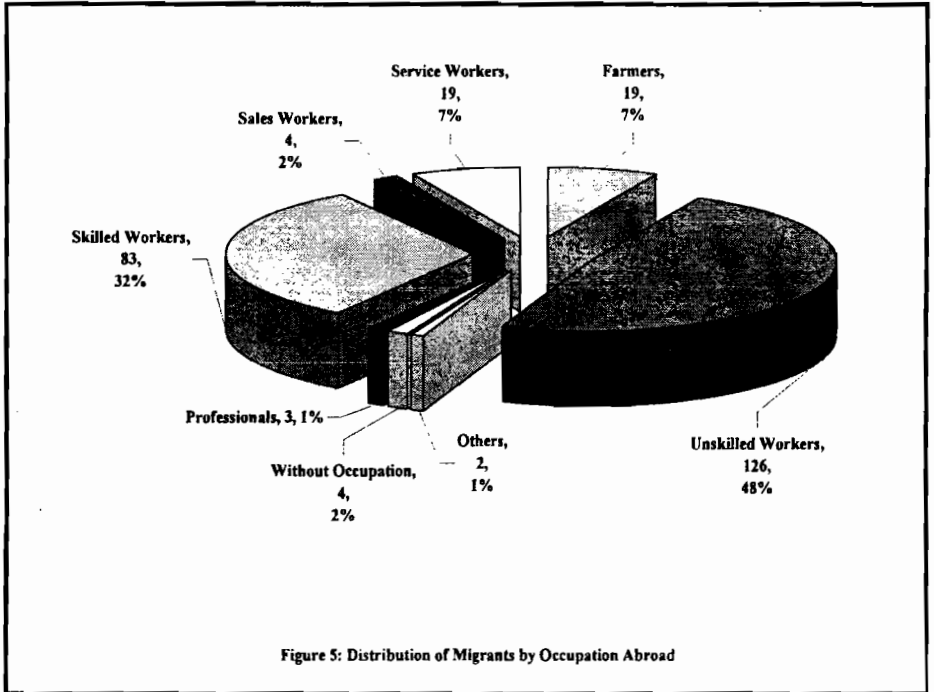
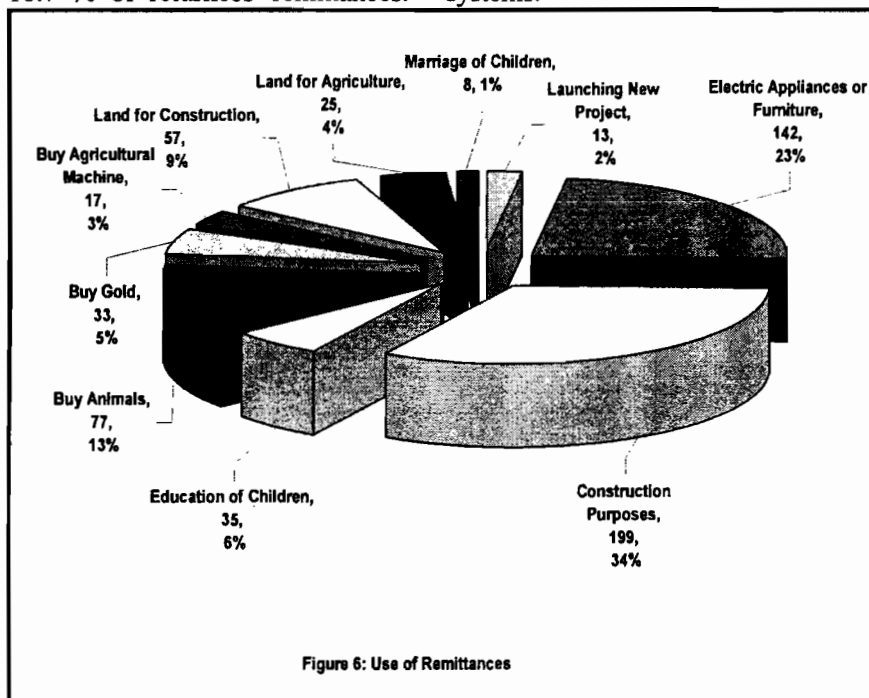


Figure 5: Distribution of Migrants by Occupation Abroad

remittances because they represent a substantial flow of financial resources, predominantly from developed economies to developing economies (Chami et al, 2005). However, as shown in figure 6*, analysis of data revealed that the sizable proportion (76.5 %) of migrants' remittances was spent in building new houses or renewal old ones, while (54.6 %) of remittances were allocated for buying household appliances. The next use of remittances was directed to purchase agricultural land, agricultural machines, or animals (45.9 percent). Meeting family needs like education and marriage of children have received 16.7 % of returnees' remittances.

However, it is worth noting that small proportion of remittances (4.9%) was invested in launching new productive projects in migrants' villages. Consequently, rural international migration did not make significant capital contribution for economic development in villages of rural Assiut Governorate. Therefore, government should adopt a clear vision to help return emigrants set up new productive projects rather put obstacles in front of their investments upon return. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the role of international rural migration as major factor of social change in basic rural social systems.



* In this figure, total number of research sample and percentage add up to 260 and 100 percent since remittances may be allocated for multiple uses.

2.2. Impact of migration on agricultural production

As mentioned in figure 3, more than one half of migrants (51%) occupied as farm cultivators and farm laborers before migration. This affected adversely the structure of the labor force required for performing farm operations. Consequently, emigration resulted in significant changes in land and labor as essential elements of agricultural production. In essence, large area of fertile agricultural land was converted into construction purposes. Accordingly, the prices of agricultural land have increased tremendously. With respect to labor, in-depth investigation of the study area revealed that it became difficult to locate an agricultural laborer, and if so, his wage was highly increased. This may be attributed to the fact that many laborers previously engaged in agriculture have abandoned this type of work in favor of employment in other types of work.

2.3. Occupational mobility

Of crucial importance for migration process is the mobility in occupational structure. It expresses migrants' upward and downward mobility resulted by migration. However, scholars tend to study this issue in its national context rather in its local one. The present study tries to understand occupational mobility

in each sector at village level. As shown in figure 7, sharp decrease happened in the number and percentage of agricultural workers abroad (downward from 51.5% before migration into 7.3% abroad). This confirms the assumption that demand for agricultural workers abroad is very low. Accordingly, one can assume that the rest of the migrants who was originally come from agricultural occupations (41.2%) switched their occupations abroad to other occupations mainly unskilled ones, i.e., construction and domestic services. However, it is worth noting that the majority of return migrants who originally worked in agriculture before migration have returned to the same occupation upon their return. It means that rural international migration has no significant impact on such a category of agricultural occupation. For instance, they did not acquired new skills abroad so that they returned to the same old occupation.

In terms of unskilled works, this category has a marked inverse U shape. In other words, it jumps from 10 percent before migration into 48.5% abroad, then decreased to 8.1% after migrants returned home. This also may be attributed to the high demand abroad for such a category. In addition, the characteristics of rural emigrants i.e., illiteracy, unemployment,

poverty may explain why they accept such type of work.

With respect to skilled work, findings show a sizeable increasing abroad in the size of migrants who originally engaged in skilled work category. This result may be attributed to either the high demand for this type of work in the recipient countries or to the scarcity of opportunities available for skilled workers at rural Assiut Governorate. However, a slight increase in this type of occupation happened after migrants return home. It means that migrants acquired these new skills abroad. In other

words, a positive impact of rural international migration appeared in acquiring new skills, but it needs to have more efforts to maximize this feature.

Another positive impact of rural international migration is the decrease of the number of unemployed among return migrants upon their return home. As shown in figure 7, unemployment percent of return migrants was decreased by half from 8.1% to 3.8%. More efforts should be done to overcome this problem completely among return migrants.

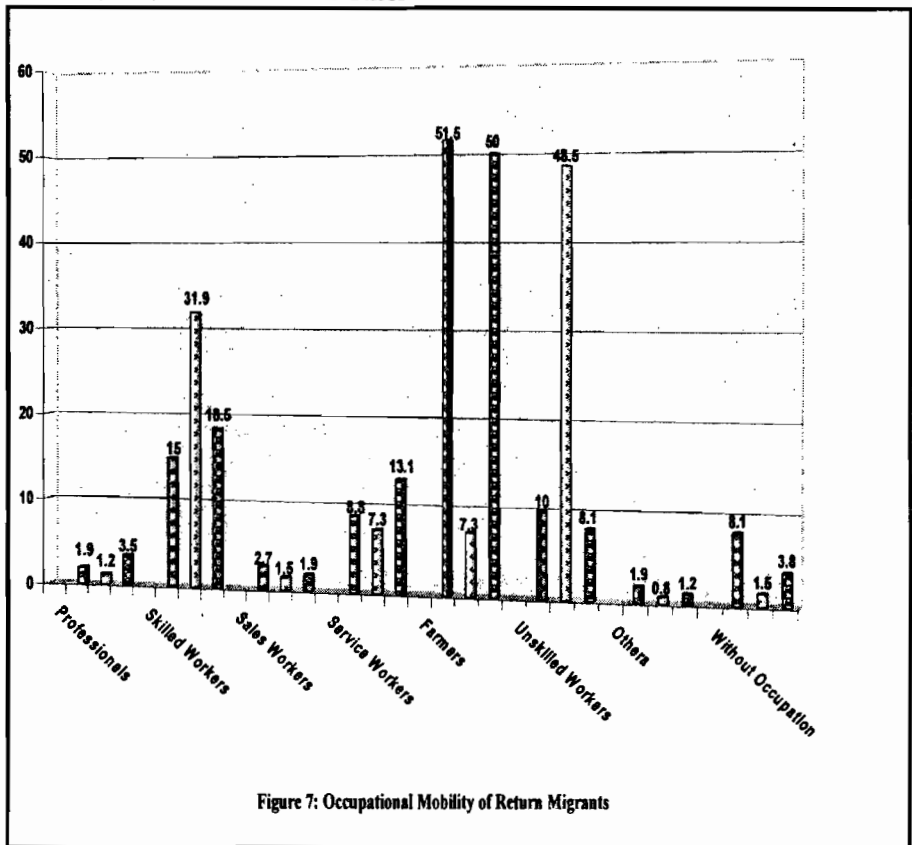


Figure 7: Occupational Mobility of Return Migrants

Conclusion

The argument in this paper is that international migration in rural Upper Egypt, i.e., Assiut Governorate at the turn of the century needs to be considered. As fertility transition proceeds at present time, a window of opportunity will begin to take shape, in which the dependency ratio will decline, making savings and investments more feasible. Accordingly, re-investigating and redirecting international migration will be a crucial must as a regime for benefiting from demographic bonus started in Egypt. However, a major task of this research was to analyze patterns and processes involved in rural international migration. In addition, socio-economic changes generated by rural international migration and the return of migrants were of great importance.

Statistical analysis of data collected by questionnaire reveals that the majority of rural migrants were younger, illiterate and farm cultivators. A marked proportion of rural migrants worked in unskilled occupations abroad. Absence of agricultural land, lack of job opportunities, and the continuous increase in life expenses by large sector of rural population were probably the main reasons behind rural migration to the oil-producing countries.

However, study brings out that international labor migration has resulted in significant socio-economic changes in rural Upper Egypt. In spite of the marked role of migrants' remittances as a major source of foreign exchange, these remittances have not contributed significantly to rural development. Some of migrants' remittances were invested in launching new productive projects. Classification of migrants' occupational mobility introduced in this study may be considered a plus point since it goes into micro level of analysis, which is village level. In this sense, sizeable migrants who were originally come from agricultural occupations switched their occupations abroad to other occupations mainly unskilled ones. A positive impact of rural international migration appeared in acquiring new skills, but more efforts should be considered to maximize this feature. The positive aspects aside, rural international migration has caused some negative economic impact on village resulting from increase in labor wages and agricultural land as elements of agricultural production.

The study recommends that an appropriate encouraging policy of international emigration should be considered within an integrated approach in Egypt especially at the current time to absorb the availability of labor resulted from fertility transition

we pass. In addition, government should give chances for return emigrants to invest their remittances in productive project to improve the quality of rural life.

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ديناميات الهجرة الدولية في المناطق الريفية في صعيد مصر في مطلع القرن الجديد: دراسة حالة لمحافظة أسيوط

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تحتاج هذه الورقة البحثية بأن الهجرة الدولية في المناطق الريفية في صعيد مصر في بداية القرن الجديد إنما تحتاج إلى إعادة نظر. فقد بدأت فرصة تبلور في الأفق نتيجة التحول الحالي في معدلات الخصوبة، مما سيجري عليه انخفاض في نسبة الإعالة، الأمر الذي يجعل من المدخرات والاستثمارات أكثر جدوى. وبناء على ذلك، فإن إعادة التحقيق في وتوجيه الهجرة الدولية تمثل ضرورة ملحة كأحد الأساليب التي يجب أن تنتهج للاستفادة من الميزة الديموجرافية التي بدأت في مصر. وعليه فإن إحدى المهام الرئيسية لهذا البحث تتمثل في تحليل الأنماط والعمليات التي تنطوي عليها الهجرة الدولية في المناطق الريفية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، ثمة أهمية كبرى توليها هذه الدراسة للأثار الاجتماعية والاقتصادية المترتبة على الهجرة الدولية وعودة المهاجرين إلى الريف.

ويكشف التحليل الاحصائي للبيانات التي تم جمعها عن طريق استمارة الاستبيان أن غالبية المهاجرين الريفيين يقعون في فئات العمر الأصغر (20-34 سنة) وهو ما يدعم وجود مبدأ الهجرة الإنتقائية كأحد المكونات الرئيسية في عملية الهجرة ، كما ترتفع بينهم نسب الأمية ، ويمتنعون الزراعة أو أعمال مرتبطة بها. لذا فقد كان هناك جزء ملحوظ من المهاجرين الريفيين يعمل في المهن غير الماهرة أثناء تواجده بالخارج. كما تبين من تحليل بيانات الدراسة أن عدم وجود أرض زراعية ، وانعدام فرص العمل ، والزيادة المستمرة في تكاليف المعيشة التي يعاني منها قطاع كبير من سكان الريف ربما كانت هي الأسباب الرئيسية وراء الهجرة من الريف إلى البلدان المنتجة للنفط.

وثمة تغيرات معنوية اقتصادية واجتماعية تبرزها الدراسة كآثار لهجرة العمالة الدولية من المناطق الريفية في صعيد مصر. ولكن ينبغي الإشارة إلى أنه على الرغم من الدور الملحوظ لتحويلات المهاجرين لكونها مصدراً رئيسياً للنقد الأجنبي ، فإنها - أي التحويلات - لم يكن لها اسهاماً كبيراً في تحقيق التنمية الريفية. يرجع ذلك إلى حقيقة واقعة مودها أن معظم هذه التحويلات مخصصة لتحقيق أغراض شخصية مثل تلبية الاستهلاك اليومي للأسرة ، في حين أن جزءاً صغيراً فقط منها يستثمر في بدء مشروعات جديدة ذات طابع إنتاجي. هذا فيما يتعلق بتحويلات المهاجرين كمكون أساسي من مكونات الهجرة ، أما المكون الآخر الذي أود الإشارة إليه هنا فيتعلق بتصنيف المهاجرين وفقاً لعملية الحراك المهني والذي يمكن اعتباره نقطة إضافية في هذه الدراسة كونه - أي التصنيف - يتم على مستوى أصغر من التحليل هو مستوى القرية وهو ما يجعل هذه الدراسة ربما تختلف عن دراسات أخرى عن الهجرة الدولية في مصر كون كثيرٌ منها تعرض لتحليل الحراك المهني على المستوى القومي فقط وليس مستوى القرية كما في هذه الدراسة . وبصفة عامة ، توضح الدراسة أن نسبة كبيرة من المهاجرين الذين كانوا يشتغلون في الأصل في مهن زراعية إنما تحولوا في الخارج للعمل في مهن أخرى (معظمها من المهن غير الماهرة). كما أن أثراً إيجابياً للهجرة الريفية الدولية فيما يرتبط بالحراك المهني - يتبلور في اكتساب مهارات جديدة ، لكن مزيداً من الجهود ينبغي أن تبذل بغرض تعظيم الاستفادة من هذه السمة. وبجانب النواحي الايجابية المشار إلى بعض منها مسبقاً ، فإن الهجرة الريفية الدولية قد تسبب في بعض الآثار الاقتصادية السلبية على القرية كنتاج عن زيادة في الأجور وارتفاع أسعار الأراضي الزراعية باعتبارهما - أي العمل والأرض - هما العناصر الرئيسية للإنتاج الزراعي.

وتوصي الدراسة بأنه قد حان الوقت لانتهاج سياسات مناسبة ضمن إطار منهج متكامل لتشجيع الهجرة الدولية في مصر وخصوصاً في الوقت الحاضر بغرض استيعاب تلك الوفرة في عنصر العمل والتي نتجت عن التحول في الخصوبة الذي نمر به الآن. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، ينبغي على الحكومة أن تعطي فرص أكبر للمغتربين العائدين لاستثمار تحويلاتهم في مشروعات إنتاجية من أجل تحسين نوعية الحياة في الريف.