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Abstract

This article, part of a major research project dealing with return migrants, delves into the feeling of loss experienced by female return migrants who migrated in their youth and returned home as older women. Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data confirms that most of the respondents regretted their decision to migrate mostly because they thought it had harmed their marriage prospects. Many of them also felt that their long absence from home had weakened their roots in the family and community. A substantial number of respondents rued that the professional skills they possessed before migration had become redundant in the country of their origin as they were not able to use these while they were away.

Keywords

Return female migrants, international migration, reintegration, youth

Introduction

"...departed with tight skin and black hair, and returned with wrinkled skin and white hair..."—A migrant returning to Nepal from Hong Kong.

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Young migrants comprise a growing percentage of migrants, making up about a quarter of all migrants globally. As the total number of international migrants increases, so do the number of children and youth affected by this global phenomenon (UN, 2011). Within this group fall domestic helpers who go to foreign countries for a better income. Of around 1 million domestic helpers in Hong Kong and the Middle East, an overwhelming majority (92 percent) migrated in their reproductive age,¹ with most being in the age group of 18–25 years at the time of migration (Ullah, 2010). They generally started with a two-year contract; but some managed to renew their contracts multiple times, thus extending their stay. One study (Ullah, 2010) shows that around 35 percent of them have been in Hong Kong for about 12 years after renewal of contracts or change of jobs.

In order to recoup the money they had spent to finance their migration, and to meet the current expenses of the family they left behind, they continue to extend their contracts. However, at some point during their life overseas they experience a “wake-up call” and begin to feel that the most important part of their life is over. They start pondering on their lives. The fact that this migrant community of domestic helpers consists of females implies that this segregated job market is gendered. Hence, their experience after return may turn out differently from that of males. Women are believed to be attracted to migration due to the high demand and preference for their services in gender stereotyped low-skilled work, such as, domestic work, care-giving, and the entertainment industry (CARAM Asia, 2002). It is only in the last decade that there has been an increase in the flow of more skilled female migrants (UN, 2009). The “feminization of migration” emanates from mostly three countries in Asia, namely, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

These populations leave young and return old. In between, a long period of time is spent living an illusion of sorts. However, at some point disillusionment often sets in, and many migrants experience what can be described as a “wake-up” call. It is important to study and analyze the feelings of these migrants, given the heated debate on whether the economic gains made by the migrants can compensate for the invisible losses they suffer. There is no mechanism to measure the psychological baggage they carry, the erosion of roots, and the loss of marriage prospects. Hence, this has crucial policy implications for both the sending and the receiving countries.

Childhood and youth are in themselves valuable stages of life, more than just necessary steps on the way to adulthood. The transition from a time of dependence (childhood) to independence (adulthood) has four distinct stages,² which are interconnected. Leaving home and setting up one's own personal economy requires an independent source of income, and to reach this stage a young person generally has to acquire qualifications, besides demonstrating his or her skills in the labor market (Caldwell, 2002). Young people, when faced with uncertain employment prospects and financial insecurity, are likely to avoid establishing stable personal relationships, will postpone marriage, and will put off having or accepting the responsibility of children.

When we talk about gendered migration, especially female migration, resilience is an important issue. As mentioned earlier, they generally move unaccompanied and stay in an entirely new environment where they have to anticipate unwanted interventions in life. Little wonder then that resilience is considered a necessary shield for them. Resilience entails the ability to adjust successfully to major life changes, which appears highly relevant in the context of migration, considering the changes and hardships that female domestic workers face. Although the literature on resilience focuses mostly on individual characteristics, such as, personality, the significance of an individual's connectedness to others and the role of social support have been acknowledged as well (Benard, 2002).

Almost all of these young female migrants move unaccompanied, meaning that—with rare exceptions—their life abroad is spent without a partner. At one point, some may decide to return, some fail to renew contracts, and some get tired of staying away from homeland. Regardless of the reasons for their return, subconsciously they calculate the costs and benefits of their migration. This cost–benefit analysis is not only in relation to monetary factors, but is also an analysis of the social cost they have paid and its benefits. Youth is the prime time of any individual.³ This is the time to contribute to the nation, build one's future, and strive for personal satisfaction. It is crucial to understand the implications of the “wake-up call” after a decade or more of living abroad.

The organization of this article is as follows. The section that follows on methods and objectives elaborates on the way the writer selected the sample for data collection and lists the objectives of the research. The section after that outlines the theoretical issues based on which the article

demonstrates the migration trajectory of the participants. And the last section offers the empirics, analysis, and the concluding remarks.

Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this article is to better understand what the returnees think about the prime time of their life that they spent abroad unaccompanied, and how it has impacted the course of their lives. This article deals with two major issues: the perceptions of the returnees about their time spent abroad, and what they think is the best way to compensate for their perceived loss. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To examine how they would have planned their life had they not migrated as unaccompanied workers;
2. To find out if they considered their migration to have been a beneficial decision; and
3. What would they now recommend to young people moving abroad unaccompanied.

The study is based on a mixed method approach (quantitative and qualitative). In the quantitative part of the study, only descriptive statistics were applied. Qualitative methods of analysis were applied at two levels. First, the research used focused narrative interviews of the participants to reveal their experiences of reintegration into the country of their origin after their return. Second, the existing literature was selected based on the relevance to the current study for conducting a content analysis. Qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and field notes were analyzed and triangulated with quantitative data and the results of the literature reviewed.

This research selected the study sample (n) using the snowball technique. Respondents were selected who had lived abroad for at least 10 years, and had migrated unaccompanied when they were between 18 and 30 years of age. Those who were accompanied were excluded, being outside the scope of this research. Most of the respondents were single (at the time of their departure), and all were female. A well-designed checklist was used for data collection. Countries were selected purposively

based on logistical convenience. The distribution of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Distribution

Countries of Origin	Respondents	%
Philippines	19	31
Bangladesh	23	33
Nepal	11	17
India	12	19
Total	63	100

Source: Developed by the authors.

Theoretical Underpinning

Contemporary scholarship on migration tends to overlook the fact that millions of young migrants who leave their country of origin unaccompanied suffer considerable psychological upheaval, in addition to other material losses. This is particularly important for migration research, as most migrant groups are made up of young people.

Migration behavior of the youth is different from that of other age groups. They show different migration directions (rural to urban to international migration). Their migration behaviors are also likely to be influenced by different reasons (Sandefur, 1985). However, it is suggested that youth, in their early years, are largely driven by economic incentives which lead them toward metropolitan areas (Johnson & Fuguitt, 2000).

The migration experience of young people in the past decades suggests that their motivation to migrate is best understood in terms of economics (Domina, 2006). Young people also have more productive labor market time than older ones to recoup the costs associated with migration, and they can contribute more to the economy. Hence, their migration behaviors tend to be more responsive to economic opportunities than those of older people. This is also asserted by the primary tenets of human capital theory (Borjas, Bronars, & Trejo, 1990). Even though there are occupational and other economic considerations across an individual's lifespan, preference for a particular residence might become a more important influence as a person goes through different life stages,

such as, raising a family, rearing children, seeing them grow up and leave home, and retiring (Detang-Dessendre & Molho, 1999; Domina, 2006; Johnson & Fuguitt, 2000; Sandefur, 1985).

The following theoretical model, developed by the author, demonstrates the underlying factors that connect the entire migration trajectories of respondents in the study. Since all the respondents are females, this model can be applied in a similar kind of research in gendered migration (Figure 1).

In the past few years, increasing global unemployment has hit young people hard, and this impact has been gender disproportionate. The number of unemployed youth increased steadily between 1993 and 2003, and is now hovering at around 88 million (ILO, 2004). This places the youth share of the total unemployed at 47 percent, a “particularly troublesome figure given that they make up only 25 percent of the working-age population” (ILO, 2004, p. 5). Current estimates are that in 2015, 660 million young people will be either working or looking for work, which is an increase of 7.5 percent over the number of youth in the labor

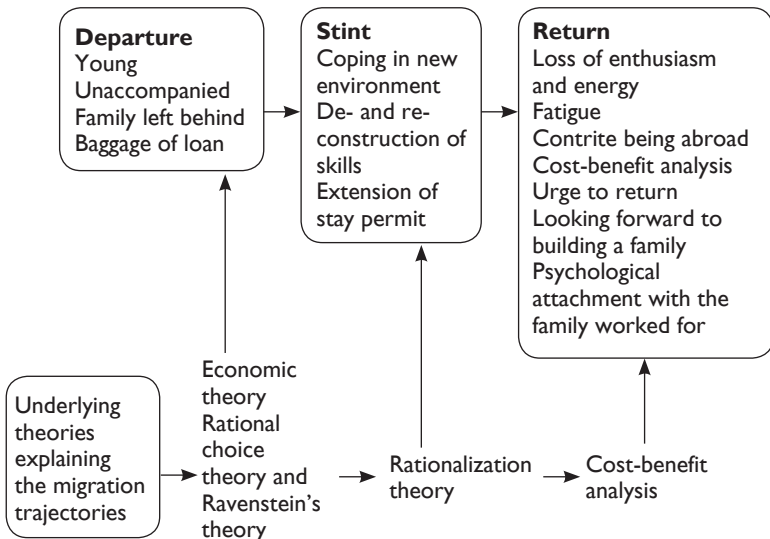


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework Explaining the Migration Trajectory

Source: Developed by the author.

force in 2003 (ILO, 2004). Young people are more inclined to move than any other groups. This tendency is a direct resonance of the gravity model of Ravenstein (see Ravenstein, 1876, 1885, 1889). The pressure of unemployment at home, the inherent propensity to move, and ambition for upward economic and social mobility operate as strong motivating factors for the youth to explore opportunities overseas (Asian Demographic Ltd., 2004). "For most young people, finding decent work is a coming-of-age symbol that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood" (ILO, 2004, p. 1).

The transition from youth to adulthood for migrants represents a challenge to the youth/adult dichotomy of migration, and presents a new set of challenges on account of migration. Early migration often speeds up the transition to adulthood, as females tend to marry younger and take on the responsibilities of adulthood sooner. A research study conducted in garment factories in Bangladesh, focusing specifically on adolescence as a time frame to judge the effects of migration,⁴ found that young female garment workers, who enjoyed a degree of autonomy during their adolescence as a result of their work, had greater decision-making ability once they transitioned into the role of a traditional wife later in life. In this context, migration benefits young people by redefining their traditional roles and increasing their economic value in the family. Employment in labor-intensive, low-skilled factory work offers women a chance to work outside the home and experience a modicum of independence.⁵ Women who migrate for employment are likely to marry later in life (Amin, Diamond, Naved, & Newby, 1998). However, when their stay becomes more prolonged than they expected, marriage often gets postponed forever, and existing relationships are likely to end.

Although a significant number of studies have been conducted on many aspects of migration and labor issues, there is a scarcity of research on the financial or psychological consequences of a youth spent abroad alone. The end results of such a long absence from the homeland are largely unknown.

Although the idea of young people with agency is quite common in studies on young people in developing countries, and has been widely used to counter the idea of young people as simply passive (Whitehead, Hashim, & Iverson, 2007), it is difficult to find research that deals with the loss of one's youth while serving others abroad (du Toit, 2003; Whitehead et al., 2007).

Results and Discussions

Our research found that the mean stint of the migrants abroad was 11.14 years. The average age when they moved was 21, the prime of life (Table 2). Thirty-five percent (22) of the respondents were married and the rest were single. Nine of the married ones and three of those who were single had children before they departed. Many returned when they reached 50 years of age. As many as 67 percent stayed legally following the extension of their contracts, while 5 percent stayed illegally after their first contract expired; the rest declined to answer. Of the returnees, 71 percent lived in Hong Kong, 25 percent in the Middle East, and the rest in different countries in East Asia.

Table 2. Age at Departure

Age when Departed	F	%
18–22	31	59
22–26	19	30
26–30	13	21
Mean year of stay	11.14	
Mean age	20.6	
Total	63	100.00

Source: Developed by the author.

Of the respondents from the Philippines, 35 percent were trained nurses who used to work in private clinics; 25 percent used to teach in schools; 15 percent had worked in sales; 13 percent said they had been unemployed; and 9 percent owned small businesses.

Of the Bangladeshi respondents, 76 percent were unemployed (that is, helping parents in household chores); 12 percent worked in garment factories; 5 percent used to go to school; and 6 percent used to work as household helpers. Of the Nepali respondents, 67 percent claimed to have been unemployed, 21 percent said they used to work as low-skilled factory workers; 8 percent claimed to have small businesses, and 4 percent said they were attending school. Thirty-eight percent of the Indian respondents used to work in garment factories; 25 percent were

unemployed; 18 percent used to attend school; and 7 percent used to work as household help.

Life Plan on Return

...time flies fast, I never thought I would spend so many years of my life out of my country. When I returned, I found everything had changed. Though in between I visited my country twice, but it seems I failed to comprehend the real change that took place during my absence. (a Bangladeshi return migrant)

This statement sums up the disillusionment faced by most returnees. They are shocked at the changes that have taken place in their absence, and wonder if they would ever be able to fit into the new scheme of things. Some families are excited when migrants return home, while others are disappointed as the return of a migrant means an end to remittances. To many, they appear as a superfluous "element" in the family for whom space has to be carved out.

Most respondents only appeared to have experienced emotions of regret in an evaluation that did not essentially weigh financial gains. Arranged in order of significance, they regretted the loss of marriage prospects; the loss of a chance to be a mother; the erosion of family ties; lost skill and job opportunities; psychological scarring; and difficulty in reintegrating into the society they had left in their youth. Male return migrants would not necessarily hold the same views as in most South Asian countries marriage of girls is seen as an essential rite, any delay in which is considered shameful for the family. Similarly, motherhood is said to "complete" a woman in most South Asian societies.

Regardless of their origin, an overwhelming majority of the respondents rued that they had lost their marriage prospects. It was one loss that weighed the heaviest for most of the respondents. One reason could be that, with the exception of respondents from the Philippines, no marriage means no motherhood for most of them (Table 3). They pointed out that in order to be a real woman, one had to be a mother, and they had lost that prospect as well. In charting the transition from youth to adulthood, a spatial and relational disruption is evident in the family structure of migrants,

Table 3. Perception about Marriage Prospects

Countries	Lost Marriage Prospects (%)	Lost the Chance to be a Mother (%)
Philippines	95	53
Bangladesh	98	99
Nepal	91	95
India	90	94

which is relevant to the patterns and effects of migration (Arulampalam, Booth, & Taylor, 2001). This dislocation can be both a cause and effect of migration. Local norms about parent–child relationships have context-specific effects on how the dislocation is managed, while governmental discourse on the subject of youth migration has been adverse, often-times labeling it as “trafficking” even though it is far from it.

Throughout the history of Asia, men have dominated households with the exception of matriarchal societies. Evidence suggests that husbands in general do not allow wives to obtain a gainful job from fear of losing their dominant position in the household. Kabeer (1996) rightly points out that “gender relations are not confined to the domestic arena—although households constitute an important institutional site on which gender relations are played out—but are made, remade and contested in a range of institutional arenas” (p. 7).

Table 4 provides a clear picture of gender relations within the family and beyond in the selected countries. It is often easy to get carried away by the presence of women in a few top positions in these countries—Bangladesh Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are both women; women have assumed the post of president and other high offices in the Philippines, and India boasts a woman president in the recent past—but this picture does not represent the ground reality. In terms of marriage and family relations, marriage is seen as more of legal than a social bond in the Philippines where divorce is illegal (although legal separation is possible), unlike other countries under study where marriage and family ties are seen more as a religious and social bond. The threat of divorce is a deterrent to women asserting themselves. In north India, for instance, a deeply entrenched belief is that a woman leaves her father’s home in a wedding palanquin, and only returns in a coffin.

Table 4. Different Countries, Different Norms

	Social Norms/ Women's Employment	Marriage and Family Relationship	Perception about Female Migration	Roles in the Family*
Philippines	Greater equality between genders than many countries in Asia. Women's employment is seen positively.	Legally bound and strong family ties.	Well accepted by society, family. Government encourages migration.	Shared role.
Nepal	Inequality is pervasive. However, working women are seen in a positive light.	Socially and religiously bound strong family ties. A mix of progressive and the older medieval family relations where customs and tradition come first.	Mostly well accepted by families and societies.	Most household chores are performed by women, though in many cases they are now being shared.
Bangladesh	Inequality is pervasive. Women's jobs (in most cases) are not accepted. The perception is that only poor families send their women to look for employment (with a few exceptions).	Socially and religiously bound strong family ties.	Neither families nor the government policies encourage female migration.	Mainly household chores.

(Table 4 continued)

(Table 4 continued)

	Social Norms/ Women's Employment	Marriage and Family Relationship	Perception about Female Migration	Roles in the Family*
India	Country of contrasts: inequality and equality exist side by side.	Socially and religiously bound strong family ties.	Some obstruction from society (and traditional families). Government encourages migration.	Mostly household chores but in many cases these are shared.

Source: Developed by the author.

Note: *There is a difference between rural and urban society.

Today, however, women have begun to engage in income generation in the wake of growing economic pressure, although their jobs in no way diminish their domestic roles. In some traditional societies in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, women still require the permission of a father, brother, or husband to step out of their homes.

Social and cultural norms are shaped by a society's history, popular culture, literature, media, customs, laws, and everyday practices. Hence, all the four countries in this study are revealed to have differences in social mores. In Bangladeshi society, for instance, good wives keep themselves within the confines of their homes. Wife battering in Bangladesh is considered the prerogative of men, who use religious arguments to legitimize it (Schuler, Hashemi, & Badal, 1998).

Regardless of the country, feminization of poverty has pushed women into employment, and many of them have ended up in the informal sector, such as, that of readymade garment factories (Benería, 1995). This was the first step out of their homes for women, and eventually emboldened them to set out for foreign jobs. However, female migration is still not accepted well by society and religion in Bangladesh, so much so that governments so far have imposed a ban on it.

Inevitably, gender plays a big role in the expectations of young people and their ability or desire to migrate. Girls, in African and Asian contexts,

are not seen as permanent members of the household, since they eventually leave home after marriage. Researchers have found that families are more likely to let a woman work elsewhere, since her economic value is lower, and her future ties to the family in question are uncertain (CPRC, 2004). Women also have a slimmer chance of pursuing education, and thus they are more likely to move in search of economic opportunities. This is problematic and troubling, since young migrant girls are at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation by employers (Socorro & Xenos, 2004). Nearly 28 percent of the population of the Philippines can be bracketed as "youth," and of these 21 million young people, nearly 12 percent are migrants. Women and girls dominate the urban migration flow, particularly in the 15–19 year age group.

Although the age of young migrants varies from place to place, it is well recognized that children are dependent, passive, and obedient (Whitehead et al., 2007). But at times, large families may take advantage of local approval toward child migration when socioeconomic factors prevent them from adequately caring for all the children. This is quite evident in rural Africa, where researchers have found the trend of youth migration closely linked to poverty and urbanization (CPRC, 2004). The family is one of the most important socioeconomic institutions in society, but the nature of the links between family members varies dramatically across nationalities. In some cultures, family ties are weak and members feel obligated to continue their relationship with other members of the family only to a point. In other cultures, family ties are strong and enduring (Alesina & Giuliano, 2007; Elder & Schmidt, 2004). The highest percentage of respondents who thought that their absence weakened the family ties were the Nepalis (67 percent), followed by Indians, Filipinas, and Bangladeshis. The variation across the countries may be explained by the traditional family bond or the belief in joint families. Most of those who felt their place of origin seemed "new" on their return were Indians (72 percent), followed by Nepalis, Bangladeshis, and Filipinas (Table 5).

Professional compromise is quite commonplace among these migrants. The researcher's first encounter with a former college teacher in Indonesia, who accepted the job of a domestic helper in Hong Kong, answered his long-held questions about professional compromise. Later, he encountered countless cases of trained and experienced nurses from the Philippines working as domestic helpers in Hong Kong and Singapore.

Table 5. Perception about Family Ties

Countries	Family Ties Weakened (%)	Loss of Roots (%)
Philippines	65	54
Bangladesh	45	55
Nepal	67	70
India	66	72

Source: Survey by the author.

Young migrants have an advantage where adult migration is common, as they can benefit from the latter's knowledge about the mechanics of migration, and the condition of work and life at the destination (Whitehead et al., 2007).

But professional compromise does not end with one job; it has implications over the years. As their existing skills get eroded over time, migrants often lack the confidence to reclaim the skills they had gained before they moved abroad (Table 6).

A common motivation for young people to migrate is the early loss of one or both parents, which heavily spurs them to move abroad. Impoverishment at home has been a leading cause of migration in Africa, and it continues to be so elsewhere as well. Filipinos, for instance, are also motivated to migrate because of the prospects of better income abroad (Whitehead et al., 2007). Any study of the migration of youth will undoubtedly throw up many other reasons, which together offer a complete explanation of the process. However, there are perceptible variations in the preference of work attributes by gender and age group. Young women value the match between work and skills more, while men attach importance to management of work (Ryan, 1999).

Table 6. Lost Skills and Job Opportunities

Countries	Lost Skills and Job Opportunities (%)
Philippines	78
Bangladesh	70
Nepal	84
India	75

Source: Developed by the author.

In most cases, long absence of migrants often turns them into strangers at home. In some cases, they are not easily accepted again in the family. Therefore, reintegration within the family and society appear as a challenge for them, let alone arranging a new job in such a "new" environment. Most complain about losing contact with their friends and possible employers. They complained that they were now forced to start afresh as if in a "foreign country."

This article did not assess the level of difficulties faced by migrants returning home. They were only asked whether they faced any difficulties on return, and the nature of such difficulties, to ascertain the dynamics of these roadblocks in their reintegration process. The highest percentage of returnees who faced difficulties was from Bangladesh followed by the Philippines, India, and Nepal. Major difficulties mentioned included uncooperative family members and neighbors, inability to find jobs, friendlessness (previous friends had either left the place or had got married) and the inhospitable attitudes of relatives and other people (Table 7).

However, many respondents reported an eventual feeling of empowerment that accompanied their migration and employment. Although in the international realm, migration of young girls is often frowned upon and seen as purely exploitative, evidence shows that it helps these women adjust to adulthood by bringing them in contact with ideas they may not have experienced otherwise (Amin et al., 1998). But this feeling of emancipation is tempered by biases at home. In a conservative society like Bangladesh, girls who work are feared to have been corrupted, and face bleak marriage prospects. No wonder women workers often save and pay for their own dowries. In the transition to adulthood for women,

Table 7. Difficulty in Reintegrating into Society

Countries	Respondents	%
Philippines	19	31
Bangladesh	23	33
Nepal	11	17
India	12	19
Total	63	100

Source: Developed by the author.

societal pressures always militate against migration and employment opportunities. But broadly speaking, the opportunities that accompany migration could benefit women in conservative societies as well.

Elsewhere in the region, researchers have recently been looking at the ways in which minority (migrant) youths integrate into dominant cultures. In a slightly different category than young people who migrate independently for employment, children of migrant workers experience a more difficult time adapting to their new lives and transitioning into adulthood because of it. "Some scholars have suggested that minority youths may deliberately resist adaptation of majority behavior, and therefore also reject the goal of upward social mobility," as they contain themselves within like communities by language or culture (Aslund & Skans, 2009, p. 6). There is a correlation between social integration and economic opportunities, confirming the suspicion that young people who migrate and then remain segregated in like communities may be at a disadvantage later in life (Jekielek & Brown, 2005).

Migration undoubtedly has important effects on the transition from childhood to adulthood. In some cases, these effects are positive, while in others they underline the need for greater regulation of youth migration. The transition to adulthood is a complex process in which young people who have been dependent on parents throughout start taking definitive steps to achieve a measure of financial, residential, and emotional independence. Without education, they are unlikely to integrate and will suffer from disconnection later in life. Many of them openly admitted that they were living an isolated life. Many relatives visited them after their return with the hope of getting or borrowing money from them. When refused, they stopped making contact. Of the married return migrants, 24 percent got divorced, while 9 percent separated.

Globally, the number of female migrants has been on the rise, both in terms of the sheer number of women who migrate, and their share in the world's migrant population. Migrants decide whether to stay in a host country or return while simultaneously making other choices. Decisions are made by comparing discounted flow of utility between staying for an additional year and returning permanently to their home countries. The majority of these returnees often turn into unproductive members of their societies. This may largely depend on how well governments and civil societies invest in social, economic, and political institutions that meet their current needs. The even more obvious gain in making the most of

the productive potential of youth and ensuring the availability of decent employment opportunities for them is the personal gain to the young people themselves.

One important issue highlighted throughout the article that begs further focus is the importance of a reintegration policy. Integration and assimilation are generally seen as issues of the destinations, but reintegration in the countries of origin is equally important. Although a few countries have adopted reintegration policies, this issue remains largely ignored. It is important because migrants who have remained away from the country for more than 10 years may lose their roots, skills that they had before they left (due to professional compromise), their friends, and obviously their previous jobs. Therefore, policy-assisted reintegration is necessary for them.

Existing research generally looks into successful cases of return migrants and their enterprising initiatives. However, little attention is paid to the perception of those returnees who regret spending a major part of their life abroad. More research is needed in this area to delve more deeply into the dynamics of their perceived "losses."

Conclusion

A statement from the World Youth Report (2007) notes that negative perceptions of youth, the failure to help them develop to their full potential, the inability to recognize that investing in youth benefits national development, and the consequent unwillingness and incapacity of society to fully involve young people in a meaningful way have effectively deprived the world of a resource of inestimable value. There is no doubt that without remittances from migrants, the economy of many countries would suffer. These countries could make further strides with the active and full participation of return migrant workers. Without a reintegration policy, it is not possible to expect all returnees to participate in development activities. Hence, reintegration into the home community remains one of the most critical issues of migration.

This research obviously does not claim to cover all the dynamics of reintegration issues of return migrants. However, it suggests that more in-depth research is required to find out how some migrants have succeeded

in reintegrating themselves into the economy and community upon their return, while others have failed to do so. The process of reabsorption or reintegration of returning migrants into the economy and society is more significant for women migrants than their male counterparts. This is because many societies in Asia do not grant social sanction to female migration, and women migrants often run the risk of social isolation when they return. Emotionally too, they are more vulnerable when they return to a society whose expectations they are unable to meet, having spent their youth working for strangers abroad to fend for their families back home.

Notes

1. The term “reproductive age group” refers to the active reproductive years of women, starting with menarche around 12–14 years and ending with menopause around 45–49 years. For demographic purposes, the reproductive age group is usually defined as 15–49 years or 12–49 years.
2. Leaving the parental home and establishing new living arrangements; completing full-time education; forming close, stable personal relationships outside of the family, often resulting in marriage and children; and testing the labor market, finding work and possibly settling into a career, and achieving a more or less sustainable livelihood.
3. Prime time of life seems subjective and arbitrary. Plenty of people would say their retirement was their prime time of life. However, here the youth is considered prime time of life.
4. Adolescence is usually defined as a time between the ages of 10 and 19 years when young people are making the transition from childhood to adulthood. The three main aspects of this stage of life are demographic and biological, psychological and emotional, and economic (Amin et al., 1998).
5. In a setting such as Bangladesh, where girls are considered eligible for marriage soon after puberty and work provides an alternative to early marriage, child labor legislation has important consequences for reproductive health. Importantly, the transition from childhood to adulthood brings young migrants to terms with their own sexuality, which in Bangladesh is managed through early marriage and *purdah*.

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