

WOMEN ON THE MOVE:
GENDER AND CROSS-BORDER
MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

WOMEN ON THE MOVE:
GENDER AND CROSS-BORDER
MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

BELINDA DODSON

EDITORIAL NOTE

This publication is the second Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) Migration Policy Paper based on the 1997 Three Nation Public Opinion Survey conducted in Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The survey has also recently been implemented in Namibia and Botswana. Further publications, including a book of essays, are expected as SAMP researchers continue to mine this rich data source which will shortly be made available on the internet as a public resource. Dr Belinda Dodson, the author of this publication, is a former Lecturer in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences at the University of Cape Town. She is currently based at Queen's University where she is a SAMP research associate.

Published by Idasa, 6 Spin Street, Church Square, Cape Town, 8001, and Queen's University, Canada.

Copyright Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) 1998

ISBN 1-874864-82-9

First published 1998

Edited by Roger Field

Layout by Bronwen Dachs Müller

Typeset in Goudy

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior permission from the publishers.

Bound and printed by Logo Print

Print consultants Mega Print, Cape Town

WOMEN ON THE MOVE:
GENDER AND CROSS-BORDER
MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

BELINDA DODSON

SERIES EDITORS:
JONATHAN CRUSH & DAVID McDONALD

CONTENTS	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	5
GENDER AND MIGRATION IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT	6
GENDER AND MIGRATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA	8
THE ROLE OF GENDER IN MIGRATION PATTERNS AND PROCESSES	8
WHO GOES TO SOUTH AFRICA?	9
WHAT FACTORS ENCOURAGE OR DISCOURAGE WOMEN'S MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA?	13
WHAT ARE THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF WOMEN'S MIGRATION	15
LOGISTICS OF FEMALE MIGRATION	19
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S MIGRATION	21
THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION	25
POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	27
UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S MIGRATION EXPERIENCE	27
POLICY IMPLICATIONS	29
THE GREEN PAPER: GENDER-NEUTRAL OR GENDER-BLIND?	32
CONCLUSION	35
ENDNOTES	36

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY GENDER	10
TABLE 2	MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY MARITAL STATUS	11
TABLE 3	MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY HOUSEHOLD STATUS	11
TABLE 4	MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY EDUCATIONAL STATUS	12
TABLE 5	FACTORS ENCOURAGING AND DISCOURAGING MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA	14
TABLE 6	DESIRE AND LIKELIHOOD OF MIGRATING TO SOUTH AFRICA	16
TABLE 7	FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND LENGTHS OF STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA	17
TABLE 8	DECISION-MAKING AND MIGRATION	19
TABLE 9	LOGISTICS OF MIGRATION	20
TABLE 10	REASONS FOR VISITING SOUTH AFRICA AND RETURNING HOME	22
TABLE 11	JOB PREFERENCES AND REMITTANCES	23
TABLE 12	EXPERIENCES WITH MIGRATION AND IMPRESSIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA	24
TABLE 13	PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF MIGRATION	26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The traditional pattern of cross-border migration in the Southern African region has been one of impermanent (if long-term) labour migration of black males to South Africa from other Southern African countries. It is likely that parallel female migration to South Africa has been underestimated, being of tenuous legality and therefore deliberately covert. In addition, female migration from outside the country appears to have undergone a significant increase since 1994. This study examines women's experiences of cross-border migration and compares these experiences to those of men. Among the questions it seeks to answer are:

- Who migrates?
- Why do women migrate to South Africa?
- What are the spatial and temporal patterns of female compared to male migration?
- Does the economic behaviour of female and male migrants differ?
- What are the social experiences of women migrants?
- How do men and women perceive the impacts of male and female migration at the individual, household, community and national scale?

The analysis is based on data from surveys conducted by SAMP in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique in mid-1997. Findings reveal that Southern African women's experience of migration differs from that of men in a number of ways:

- Migration to South Africa is still heavily male-biased, with a far lower incidence of migration experience among female respondents. Those women with migration experience tend to be married, older women rather than younger single women, whereas male migrants come from a wider range of age groups and marital status categories. Female migrants tend to be better educated than their male counterparts, with lack of education seeming to discourage female mobility while encouraging male mobility.
- Men and women migrate to South Africa for different reasons. Men go primarily in search of employment, whereas women's migration is driven by a wide range of social and reproductive factors in addition to economic incentives. Even the economic motives for migration are gender specific, with women going to South Africa largely to trade and men to work, mostly in formal employment.
- Concerning the purpose of migration, men and women go to different destinations in South Africa. Male migration is closely

tied to places of employment, notably the mines, whereas female migration is to towns and cities offering opportunities for informal sector trade and the procurement of a range of goods and services.

- The decision process and physical logistics of female migration differ from those of men. Women are less likely to migrate independently, and are more likely to be subject to the will of a (male) parent or partner in determining whether they migrate. In addition, although women's migration cannot be seen merely as an adjunct to male migration, women's migration is still commonly tied to that of men, with many women travelling to South Africa for the express purpose of visiting male family members. Women visit South Africa for shorter time periods, and are more likely than men to migrate legally.
- The social and economic behaviour of people migrating to South Africa is gender-specific, reflecting the different motivations and patterns of male and female migration. Men are more likely to have established social networks in South Africa, arising from their longer periods of stay in single locations and their ties to workplace-based social structures. Men participate more formally in the South African economy, while women's migration experience is shaped by the temporary and contingent social and economic interactions involved in trading and retail activity. Both genders, migrants and non-migrants alike, hold generally favourable impressions of life in South Africa, although they would still prefer to remain in their home country.
- The men and women affected clearly understand the positive and negative impacts of migration. However, women with personal migration experience were more likely to rate the impact of migration as negative. The economic benefits of migration are achieved at considerable social cost, with disruptions to family and community life. Both male and female respondents were well aware of the national cost of migration through the loss of skills to the local economy. Nevertheless, they continue to support and participate in migration as a rational household reproduction strategy in a situation of limited alternative options.

There are a number of parallels with the findings of those in other developing countries. As elsewhere, men in Southern Africa are more mobile, and it is women who are more often "left behind". The women left behind are disadvantaged in various ways by male out-migration, which may bring in earnings but adds to women's productive and reproductive responsibilities at home. Certainly men's migration in the

region is undertaken more independently than that by women, although both are better understood as part of a “household strategies” approach. As in the international experience, male migration here is more closely tied to employment, and women have fewer legal and irregular employment opportunities than men in the South African labour market. Related to these gender-specific motivations for migration, men move further and to a wider range of destinations.

Two fundamental points emerge from this analysis:

- The migration experience in Southern Africa is deeply and profoundly gendered. To a long-established tradition of male labour migration we can now add a growing stream of female migrants who come to South Africa for a number of different reasons, both social and economic.
- The different motives and patterns of male and female migration arise from structural determinants in the social and economic fabric of source and recipient countries. Any sound migration policy therefore has to go hand-in-hand with regional development initiatives.

In addition, a number of specific guidelines for policy on gender and migration are suggested:

- Female migrants are law-abiding, responsible, entrepreneurial and resourceful. They use cross-border movement for their own and their families’ betterment. Current migration policy, together with a host of entrenched social norms and practices, discriminates against women in all sorts of ways, limiting their life choices and restricting their physical and socioeconomic mobility. Migration policy should aim to facilitate female migration, thus aiding women’s empowerment and allowing them to become agents of development in their home countries and in South Africa.
- Policy should be formulated not in terms of atomistic, genderless “persons” but in terms of men and women with specific biological, legal and social relationships. Even cross-border migration undertaken by individuals occurs within a social framework, with implications for families, households and communities. Policy should not merely accommodate but actively encourage links between migrants and their families and communities “back home”. For example, policy could make it easy for migrants to make return visits and for family and friends to visit foreign migrants in South Africa.
- One category of female migrant that should be actively encouraged is women who come to South Africa for the purposes of trading and shopping. This activity certainly injects cash into

the South African economy. While there are complaints that foreign informal-sector traders undercut their South African counterparts, this competition must surely be part of the movement towards freer trade in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

- The perpetuation of male foreign migrant labour on mines and farms to the virtual exclusion of female migrant labour is clearly discriminatory. Equitable opportunity for legal participation in the South African labour market by citizens of other Southern African countries is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, it should be one of the objectives of migration policy, with particular attention being paid to the expansion of opportunities for women.
- In the formulation and drafting of policy and legislation, the adoption of gender-neutral language should not serve unintentionally to discriminate against women. Further, the drafting of non-sexist migration policy must be carried into its actual implementation by officials.

Each of the above recommendations has development implications. While it is a common view that migration undermines development, with a loss of skills from source countries and an over-supply of labour in the recipient country, the pattern of “to-and-fro” migration practised by Southern African women can serve to facilitate positive socio-economic change. Allowing women freer access to South Africa would encourage the exchange of goods, services and ideas that constitutes the very engine of development, and there is little to suggest that a more open migration policy would result in an unmanageable influx of women (or men) into the country. Indeed, female migration to South Africa could be a mechanism for reducing both spatial and gender-based inequalities in the region, empowering women as agents of development in their home countries and in South Africa itself.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration policy is one of the last bastions of sovereign state power in an increasingly globalised world. Capital and information flow more or less freely across state borders. It is only when actual human bodies become involved that national drawbridges are raised. Relations of power and access to resources determine who moves where, when, how and why.¹ Men and women have different access to power and resources across a range of scales, from the local to the global, and thus face different opportunities and constraints in determining their patterns of mobility. Nowhere, perhaps, is this truer than in migration to South Africa from other Southern African countries. Yet the links between gender and international migration in the region remain poorly understood.²

In an attempt to redress the balance, this paper examines the contemporary experiences of women in relation to such cross-border migration and compares these experiences to those of men. Among the questions it seeks to answer are:

- Who migrates? How do the characteristics of female migrants differ from those of male migrants? Are they from similar backgrounds in terms of age, position in the household and educational status?
- Why do women migrate to South Africa? Do men and women cite the same factors influencing their decision to migrate? What are the relative importance of economic and social motives?
- What are the spatial and temporal patterns of female compared to male migration? Do men and women go to the same places in South Africa? Do women cross borders more or less often? Is their migration more likely to be short-term rather than long-term or permanent?
- How do women move? Do they take their migration decisions independently or are they subject to decisions by (male) others? Do they move as individuals, or do they tend to migrate with male partners or in family or other groups? Do women use the same modes of transport as men in making their border crossings? Are women more or less likely to migrate illegally?
- How does the economic behaviour of female migrants differ from that of men? How do they support themselves in South Africa? Are women more or less likely than men to remit earnings to family members in their home country?
- What are the social experiences of women migrants? Are they more or less likely to describe their experiences in South Africa in positive terms?

- How do men and women perceive the impacts of male and female migration at the individual, household, community and national scale?

Although the questions seem straightforward, their answers reveal a complex set of gender relations and gender-specific behaviours. While there are many interesting similarities, the differences between male and female respondents are at least as significant.

The gender-neutral language used by officials, researchers and the media to describe migration and migrants — although intended to be non-sexist — effectively acts to discriminate against women. Real migrants, and the people they leave behind, are not sexless “persons”, “migrants” or even, in official parlance, “aliens”. Rather, they are men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, homosexuals and heterosexuals, friends and lovers. Their very decisions to migrate are often motivated precisely by their gender identities, roles and relations. So too are the decisions of the South African state whether to admit people as legal (im)migrants. Gender must therefore be thoroughly and explicitly addressed in formulating new migration policy.

GENDER AND MIGRATION IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

If it is to be meaningfully interpreted, migrancy in Southern Africa needs to be placed in an international context. One of the legacies of apartheid-era isolation has been a tendency to stress the uniqueness of the South African experience. However, international comparisons and the application of theories developed elsewhere can help to shed light on regional patterns and processes. Particularly helpful is the large and growing literature on gender, migration and development.³

Sylvia Chant has identified eight characteristics of the gendering of migration which are found in most developing countries:

- Men are more mobile than women, and it is women who are more often “left behind”.
- Women left behind are often disadvantaged by male out-migration.
- Men’s migration is undertaken more independently than that by women.
- Men migrate “in ways that are linked much more directly with access to employment”.
- Men move further and to a wider range of destinations.
- Migrant women “have fewer employment opportunities than migrant men in destination labour markets”.

- Men migrate across a wide range of ages, whereas female migrants tend to be young.
- In terms of both social and economic links, women “maintain more enduring ties between areas of origin and destination”.⁴

In the Southern African region, the traditional pattern of cross-border migration has been impermanent (if long-term) labour migration of black males to South Africa from other Southern African countries.⁵ These men generally return to their countries of origin on completion of their contracts on mines or farms, and this system remains essentially intact. Yet it is likely that parallel female migration to South Africa has been underestimated, being of tenuous legality and therefore deliberately covert.⁶

Robin Cohen has recently noted six global trends in migration patterns that relate to post-apartheid South Africa:

- Refugee migration
- Immigration shopping
- Undocumented workers
- Independent female migration
- Skilled transients
- Unskilled contract workers.⁷

Each, of course, has gender implications specific to particular historical and geographical contexts. Noting that the last category — almost entirely male — is at present the most common form of migrancy in Southern Africa, Cohen predicts an increase in the other five categories. With regard to women he writes:

“Many studies of migration have dealt with women as a residual category, as those “left behind”. Where they crossed a border, women have generally been treated as dependent or family members. They were effectively the baggage of male workers. However, even historically, we are beginning to turn up evidence that women were more independent actors than had previously been thought.”⁸

Although he does not hazard a guess at the South African numbers, nor how these might have changed over time, he comments that “independent female migration from inside the country and from outside is now highly visible”, including “traders, maids, prostitutes and waitresses entering from neighbouring countries”.⁹ Far from being exceptional, this type of female migration is common between a number of countries around the world.¹⁰ Indeed, the “feminisation” of international migration seems to be an international trend, and there is little reason to believe that Southern Africa should be an exception.¹¹

Female migration from outside South Africa appears to have under-

gone a significant increase since 1994. The lack of data makes it impossible to quantify this increase, and much of it may represent an increase in visibility rather than volume, but it certainly warrants attention by both researchers and policymakers.

Despite its importance, female migration has been “hidden from history” and from policy. There is a fundamental reason for recentring gender in the analysis of migration. As Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe point out, “gender-differentiated population movement may be significant in a whole range of ways to societies undergoing developmental change.”¹² Understanding the gender dimensions of Southern African migration provides insights into the wider transformation of the region’s society and economy in the post-apartheid era. In turn, this suggests a range of possibilities for positive development interventions that could improve the lives of women and men alike.

This paper therefore seeks to retrieve women from a dual marginalisation:

- Their insecure legal status as migrants to South Africa, where many of them are technically “illegal” or “undocumented.”¹³
- Their marginalisation in research and policy-making, where they are either relegated to footnotes or erased altogether through the use of gender-neutral language to describe what are in reality markedly gendered patterns and processes.

GENDER AND MIGRATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

SAMP was established, in part, to research the “demographic, spatial and *gender* characteristics of migrant populations in the region” (emphasis added).¹⁴ This publication uses survey data recently collected by SAMP in mid-1997 as part of a public opinion survey on migration and immigration in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.¹⁵ Following an empirical analysis of the survey results, the paper moves on to suggest a number of measures that might be adopted in the construction of more gender-aware and non-sexist migration policies.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN MIGRATION PATTERNS AND PROCESSES

There are three dominant prevailing stereotypes of Southern African migration to South Africa. The first is an image of a highly formalised system of male migrant labour to the mines. The second stereotype is one of an uncontrolled post-apartheid invasion of “illegal immigrants” seeking a better life in the new South Africa. A third stereotype, largely arising from the first two, is that all migrants are male.

The first stereotype is an accurate representation of reality, although there are a number of myths and misconceptions about how the system operates, as well as about the migrants themselves.¹⁶ A previous SAMP publication, *Challenging Xenophobia*, debunks the second stereotype. It concludes that most Southern Africans are content to remain in their own countries and that those who do migrate are “hardly the stuff of desperate, uneducated criminals threatening South African society.”¹⁷ With regard to the third stereotype, the SAMP survey shows that the cross-border migrant is frequently, and perhaps increasingly, likely to be a woman.

Before analysing the survey results, there are two important caveats. First, although the SAMP survey was conducted according to rigorous methodological standards, it was not designed primarily to elicit information about gender.¹⁸ This makes it difficult to determine fully the gendered nature of migration in the region. Further survey work focused explicitly on gender and migration is therefore highly recommended.

Second, certain in-built spatial (eg urban/rural) and temporal (eg agricultural season) factors served to bias the survey sample towards men. The sampling method was designed to select a nationally representative sample of the adult population in each country.¹⁹ If women make up at least 50% of the population, and if men are more likely to have migrated to South Africa and thus be physically absent from the locations in which the survey was conducted, the sample should have been more than 50% female. But the highest proportion of women was only 49% (in Lesotho).²⁰ In Mozambique and Zimbabwe the figures were 39% and 44% respectively. One possible explanation is that women’s responsibility for much of the household’s agricultural and domestic labour may have made them less likely to have been available when the interviewer called. The sampling bias may thus itself reflect the implication of gender in household relations and the division of labour, which gives rise to gendered personal geographies and time allocation.

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the survey constitutes a sufficiently valid sample to provide a reliable source of information on women’s experience of migration. However, the data cannot be taken as numerically accurate, nor used to predict or extrapolate the incidence of female migration in any quantitative sense.

WHO GOES TO SOUTH AFRICA?

The gender bias in migration is immediately apparent in the basic demographic breakdown of the SAMP survey’s sample population. Males are under-represented relative to females in the age categories 15-24 and 25-44 respectively. These are the economically active age groups from which migrants are typically drawn. The male bias in migration also

shows up in respondents' answers to the question of whether they had ever been to South Africa (Table 1).

The smallest gender difference was found in Lesotho, where 86% of the male respondents and 76% of the female respondents had visited South Africa at least once in their lives.

Lesotho also had the highest overall incidence of visits to South Africa (81%). Mozambique had the largest gender difference, with 41% of the men and only 9% of the women reporting previous visits to South Africa. In Zimbabwe, with the lowest overall incidence of cross-border visits (23%), 25% of the men and 20% of the women reported experience of such travel. These gender differences throw into relief the broader differences between the three countries in the nature, pattern and motives of migration to South Africa. They also suggest that men and women go to South Africa for different reasons, and this is borne out by analysis of several other variables.

Age breakdown of survey sample by gender	Male			Female		
15-24	26%			30%		
25-44	46%			51%		
45-64	22%			15%		
65 +	5%			4%		
Ever been to South Africa						
No	53%			64%		
Yes	48%			36%		
Ever been to South Africa (by country)	Les	Moz	Zim	Les	Moz	Zim
No	14	59	75	24	92	80
Yes	86	41	25	76	9	20
<i>Note: tables may not add up to 100% due to rounding.</i>						

Other socioeconomic indicators show up interesting differences between men and women. These reflect women's generally disadvantaged position in the Southern African context. Compared to the men, women had lower levels of literacy and education, were less likely to be in formal, remunerated employment, and were less likely to own property (except indirectly through marriage). Although a similar percentage of men and women (63% and 61% respectively) gave their marital status as "married or living together" (Table 2), women were more likely to report being separated, divorced, abandoned or widowed. Although the question was not raised directly, it is likely that many such incidences of marital breakdown are related to male out-migration.

When sociodemographic variables are broken down by whether respondents have ever been to South Africa (for whatever reason or

duration of visit), a number of possible causal relationships emerge that might explain women's migration behaviour (Tables 2, 3 and 4). In terms of marital status (Table 2), married women and widows were more likely than unmarried or divorced/abandoned women to have visited South Africa. This is similar to the situation for men (although currently absent migrants could by definition not be included in the survey, so the male figures especially are biased towards returnee or non-migrants).

In the unmarried category, the gender difference is most marked. Some 23% of those who have been to South Africa are unmarried men, compared with 13% being unmarried women. Migration is thus related to marital status with older, married women being more likely to have made cross-border visits, including visits to husbands living and working in South Africa. Although they make up only a small proportion of the sample (10% of women surveyed), widows comprise 13% of the women reporting personal experience of migration to South Africa. It is likely that this is related to husbands having lived and perhaps died there.

In terms of their status in the household (Table 3), women who classified themselves as "child" or "other family" were far more likely not to have visited South Africa than those describing their status as "spouse"

TABLE 2: MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY MARITAL STATUS

Marital status of survey sample	Male		Female	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Unmarried	40%	23%	29%	13%
Widowed	1%	3%	8%	13%
Separated/divorced/abandoned	4%	3%	7%	6%
Married	55%	71%	57%	69%

TABLE 3: MIGRATION EXPERIENCE BY HOUSEHOLD STATUS

Household positions of survey sample	Male		Female	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Household head	46%	69%	14%	25%
Spouse	4%	3%	43%	56%
Child	32%	21%	24%	14%
Other family	9%	4%	9%	2%
Other	9%	4%	10%	4%

or “head of household”. The latter category had the highest level of migration experience. This lends weight to the argument that female migration cannot be viewed simply as an adjunct to male migration but is often undertaken independently of a male spouse. It may even represent a means of female empowerment (although of course some women may have reported their status as *de facto* “head of household” precisely because of absent migrant husbands). In either case, this finding supports the idea of the female migrant as “responsible citizen”, engaging in short-term migration to South Africa for reasons related to household reproduction.

The breakdown of “level of education” by gender is also revealing of the types of men and women who migrate. For the men in the sample, experience of migration to South Africa decreased as level of education increased (Table 4). Men who were functionally illiterate or educated only to primary school level were over-represented in the category of males who reported having made at least one visit to South Africa, while men with secondary or tertiary education were under-represented (although again this category would have been missing men who were currently absent).

While the same picture emerged for women with tertiary education, there were significant gender differences in the other categories. Whereas 15% of men who had visited South Africa at least once in their lives had no schooling, the same was true of only 3% of women. Women who had visited South Africa tended to be those with at least primary or some secondary education, with education seeming to encourage cross-border travel.

In Zimbabwe and Mozambique, there was also a gender difference in the geographical origin of migrants. Women who reported visiting

Educational status of survey sample	Male		Female	
No schooling	11%		9%	
Some primary	26%		27%	
Primary completed	16%		19%	
Some high school	32%		36%	
High school completed	9%		8%	
Postgrad and further	6%		2%	
Ever been to South Africa	No	Yes	No	Yes
No schooling	9%	15%	13%	3%
Some primary	19%	32%	26%	29%
Primary completed	17%	15%	18%	20%
Some high school	39%	24%	35%	36%
High school completed	9%	9%	6%	10%
Postgrad and further	7%	5%	2%	1%

South Africa came mostly from urban areas, while males with migration experience tended to come from rural areas. In Lesotho, by contrast, there was a rural bias in both male and female respondents.

The above analysis suggests that in general female migrants are more sophisticated than their male counterparts. These differences reflect different motives for male and female migration, together with the different opportunities and constraints facing men and women, both in South Africa and in the countries surveyed. The SAMP report, *Challenging Xenophobia*, draws attention to various positive attributes of potential migrants to South Africa.²¹ A gendered analysis suggests that these attributes relate especially to women with migration experience whose marital status, household position and level of education are far removed from the common negative stereotypes.

WHAT FACTORS ENCOURAGE OR DISCOURAGE WOMEN'S MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA?

A key element of the SAMP survey was the part that investigated the potential to migrate through a series of questions on “push” and “pull” factors in the respondents' home countries and in South Africa. Here again, although there are broad similarities between men and women, there are also a number of revealing differences (Table 5).

Men and women cited the same reasons for staying in their home country rather than migrating to South Africa: access to land, water and housing; better levels of safety, peace, freedom and democracy; and the ties of family and friends. Even when pressed to identify the single most important attraction of home, there was remarkable concurrence between male and female respondents.

A slight gender difference emerged when respondents were asked to rate, on a four-point scale, their level of concern about a range of factors that might discourage them from migrating to South Africa. Although they agreed on the broad categories of concern, men tended to express lower levels of concern than women in response to almost every suggested deterrent. These included leaving behind assets and family members, not having family or friends in South Africa and not being assured of accommodation or employment. It would therefore seem that the migration potential of women is currently lower than that for men.

In contrast to the situation for what might be termed migration retardants, the “pull” factors encouraging migration displayed considerable gender variation. Although jobs, trading opportunities, shopping, education and health care were consistently seen by both men and women as being better in South Africa than in their home country,

when asked what would actually motivate them to go to South Africa the overwhelming majority of men cited employment, while women were almost as likely to cite shopping (25%) as jobs (28%). A range of goods available in South Africa, including many foodstuffs, is either

TABLE 5: FACTORS ENCOURAGING AND DISCOURAGING MIGRATION TO SOUTH AFRICA		
Most important reason given for staying in home country	Male	Female
Land	22%	25%
Water	2%	1%
Food	1%	2%
Houses	4%	4%
Jobs	2%	2%
Living conditions	5%	6%
Safety of self and family	10%	8%
Crime	5%	5%
Peace	17%	18%
Education/schools	2%	1%
Health care	-	1%
Place to raise a family	4%	3%
Freedom	7%	6%
Democracy	1%	1%
Most important reason given for wanting to go to South Africa		
Jobs	53%	28%
Trade	3%	7%
Living conditions	7%	7%
Education/schools	5%	6%
Health care	6%	12%
Shopping	13%	25%
Concerns about "someone close" going to South Africa		
Have an affair in RSA	3%	3%
Get injured	28%	30%
Be victim of a crime	21%	18%
Be involved in crime	6%	5%
Get a disease	8%	10%
Have second family	3%	6%
Never come back	18%	17%
Perceptions of South Africans' views of foreign migrants		
Very negative	15%	18%
Negative	27%	25%
Neither positive or negative	13%	12%
Positive	35%	35%
Very positive	11%	11%

Note: answers with a response rate of <1% are not included.

unavailable or more expensive in the countries surveyed, so there is sound economic justification for crossing the border to make purchases.

Other migration motives cited more frequently by women than by men included trade, health care and education. It would thus seem that while there are strong motives for both men and women to travel to South Africa, gender-specific social and economic roles are reflected in existing and potential migration behaviour. In economic terms, and supported by restrictions on the employment of foreign women, most men would go to South Africa to work; most women go to buy and/or sell goods. Women were also more likely to express multiple motives for migration. This, of course, relates to their responsibility for a wide range of household productive and reproductive functions, rendered even more complex by the “stretching” of households across international borders by male migrant absenteeism.

Somewhat surprisingly, given their differences in migration behaviour, there was remarkable agreement between men and women when it came to specific concerns about “someone close to you” going to South Africa. The main concerns expressed by people of both sexes were that the migrant might get injured, be a victim of crime, never come back, catch a disease, have an affair or start a second family. This indicates a broadly realistic view of the migration experience, with both men and women alert to the potential risks and costs as well as the benefits.

There was also remarkable concurrence between men and women in their rating of South Africans’ perceptions of people who go there from other Southern African countries, with an interesting bimodal distribution of positive and negative responses. Again, this suggests a realism about migration that would seem to negate the stereotype of millions of would-be migrants threatening to swamp South Africa’s society and economy.

WHAT ARE THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF WOMEN’S MIGRATION?

The term “migration” covers a wide range of spatial and temporal patterns of movement, from short-distance shopping trips lasting a few days to long-distance, long-term contract labour over several years. As the survey demonstrates, the dominant forms of migration to South Africa differ markedly between men and women. Already evident from the discussion above, these differences are borne out by respondents’ answers to questions about their actual and anticipated migration behaviour (Table 6).

Respondents were asked whether they had any desire to live in South Africa, with separate questions for permanent (immigration) or short-term (migration) residence. The majority of men and women

replied strongly in the negative for permanent residence, with women being more negative than men. There was also a gender difference for short-term residence, with some 60% of men, but only 46% of women, saying that they would like to go and live in South Africa for a period of up to two years. A similar pattern emerged in response to a question about their likelihood of ever living in South Africa, again asked separately for permanent and short-term residence. Here too, men and women responded largely in the negative for permanent residence, but slightly more men than women regarded it as likely that they might end up spending some time living in South Africa. Once again, this demonstrated that migration potential is lower among women than men.

Neither men nor women expressed a great desire to attain South African citizenship or permanent residence status, with a roughly 80/20 split of “no” to “yes” answers for both genders in both categories. Even more tellingly, neither male nor female respondents had much wish to retire to South Africa, still less to be buried there. Clearly, ties to

TABLE 6: DESIRE AND LIKELIHOOD OF MIGRATING TO SOUTH AFRICA

Desire to live in South Africa permanently	Male	Female
Not at all	59%	67%
Not much	13%	11%
Some extent	15%	10%
To a great extent	14%	12%
Desire to go to South Africa for a short period		
Not at all	26%	39%
Not much	15%	14%
Some extent	38%	31%
To a great extent	21%	15%
Likelihood of living in South Africa permanently		
Very unlikely	52%	59%
Unlikely	21%	20%
Neither likely nor unlikely	8%	7%
Likely	12%	10%
Very likely	7%	5%
Likelihood of leaving home country for a short period		
Very unlikely	24%	31%
Unlikely	14%	14%
Neither likely nor unlikely	9%	9%
Likely	35%	31%
Very likely	14%	10%
Don't know	5%	5%
Desire to retire or be buried in South Africa		
Do you want to retire in South Africa (% who said yes)	11%	14%
Do you want to be buried in South Africa (% who said yes)	7%	8%

“home” are strong. This was further evident in respondents’ expressed desire for return visits should they ever reside in South Africa, with most men and women saying that they would return “frequently”. Even (perhaps especially) those with strong migration experience or potential thus seek to retain a transnational lifestyle and identity rather than become fully or permanently South African.

The different pattern and purpose of male and female migration shows up clearly in the timing of both anticipated and actual visits to South Africa (Table 7). For hypothetical future migration, the question on duration of visit was phrased as follows: “Imagine that you decided to go and stay in South Africa. How long would you want to stay?”. In categories ranging from “a few days” up to “a few months”, the frequency for women exceeded that for men. There was an almost equal response rate between men and women in the categories “six months” and “six months to a year”, but a heavy male bias for the longer time periods.

This gender difference was also evident in frequency and duration of actual visits to South Africa in the previous five years. Women had made more frequent visits but of shorter duration, with most visits lasting one month or less. Most men had stayed a month or more. Those

TABLE 7: FREQUENCY OF VISITS AND LENGTHS OF STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Length of stay for hypothetical future visits to South Africa	Male	Female
A few days	3%	6%
A few months	4%	9%
One month	1%	4%
A few months	8%	11%
Six months	7%	7%
Six months to a year	17%	17%
A few years	40%	29%
Indefinitely	21%	17%
Frequency of actual visits in the past 5 years		
More than once a month	13%	17%
Once a month	10%	15%
Once every few months	18%	17%
Once or twice a year	21%	21%
Less than once or twice a year	20%	15%
I have been just once	19%	16%
Duration of actual visits in the past 5 years		
1 week or less	23%	35%
2-4 weeks	26%	42%
1-6 months	15%	15%
6 months to a year	17%	4%
Longer than a year	19%	4%

men who had stayed longer than a month commonly reported periods of residence in South Africa lasting 48 to 52 weeks — the typical year-long migrant labour contract. Thus gender difference in migration timing arises from the different motives for male and female migration: men for employment purposes, requiring stays of months or years; women for buying and selling goods, visiting family members and accessing services such as health care, requiring only short visits of a few days or weeks.

There is a corresponding geography to these temporal differences. When asked, for the same hypothetical migration, where they would like to go, men and women gave strikingly similar responses: Gauteng came up most frequently, followed by Cape Town, Durban, Welkom and Bloemfontein, and then by a number of smaller towns in the Free State, Mpumalanga, Kwazulu-Natal, Northern and North-West Provinces (the five South African provinces most proximate to the three countries surveyed).

But when asked where they actually went on their last visit to South Africa, gender differences in migration geography did show up (also, interestingly, displaying marked difference from the desired destinations). Respondents reported visits to a wide range of places, some as specific as a particular mine and others a general reference to a city or province, so the detail of the geography is difficult to extract. Nevertheless certain patterns emerge.

Rather than the major cities, which is where people say they would like to go, most migration seems to be to mining and other small towns. Men tended to migrate to places of employment, notably the mines of the Witwatersrand and the Free State. Women, by contrast, travelled to places offering opportunities to buy and sell: either the major cities (mostly in Gauteng) or towns near the border with Lesotho, Zimbabwe or Mozambique. This gendered geography was explicit in respondents' stated reasons for selecting a destination. Men overwhelmingly cited job availability. Women, in addition to employment, gave the presence of friends and family and the availability of cheap goods and better shopping as their reasons for choosing a particular place.

All of this suggests that the status quo, with heavily male-biased labour migration, is deeply entrenched. People in neighbouring countries are realistic rather than optimistic about life "on the other side of the fence" and most, especially women, would prefer to remain in their home countries.

Male migration, even when it is long-term, is not permanent, nor do most male migrants wish it to become so. Female migration is a response to difficult circumstances in their home countries, but is perceived and practised as a temporary and expedient tactic to alleviate

some of those difficulties rather than as long-term relocation. Improved job opportunities in their home countries, along with general social and economic upliftment and the improved availability of goods and services, would remove much of the motivation for male and female migration, serving to reunite divided households and allow people from Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique to remain at home where they wish to be.

LOGISTICS OF FEMALE MIGRATION

Not only do men and women display different patterns of migration, but the actual logistics of male and female migration differ too. Some of the key differences are summarised in Tables 8 and 9.

TABLE 8: DECISION MAKING AND MIGRATION		
Who would make the final decision if you were to go to South Africa permanently?	Male	Female
Myself	62%	35%
Another person	38%	65%
Would you be able to go to South Africa if you wanted to?		
No	22%	37%
Yes	78%	63%
Would your family encourage or discourage you from going?		
Strongly discourage	19%	26%
Discourage	19%	23%
Neither discourage nor encourage	12%	10%
Encourage	27%	24%
Strongly encourage	24%	18%
Sources of information about South Africa		
I don't know anything about South Africa	4%	7%
From my own experiences in South Africa	28%	18%
From meeting South Africans in respondent's home country	2%	2%
Hear from others who have been to South Africa	35%	39%
Hear from others about South Africa	5%	7%
Television	3%	5%
Newspapers	5%	2%
Magazines	2%	1%
Radio	15%	19%

For a start, the decision to migrate is much less likely to be taken independently by women. Some 65% of women said that if they were to migrate, the decision would be taken for them by someone other than themselves.

The equivalent figure for men was only 38%. Perhaps reflecting their relative lack of independence, or alternatively an indication of stronger family commitment, women were slightly more likely than men to say

they would migrate with other family members, or send for family members once they got to South Africa.

A higher number of men (78%) than women (63%) were of the opinion that they would be able to go to South Africa if they wanted to. This was a further indication of the greater social constraints on women's mobility. Family members were said to be likely to discourage women from migrating while encouraging men to do so, meaning that even those women with the inclination to go to South Africa face added obstacles relative to their male peers.

A further constraint on women's migration is their relative lack of knowledge and information about South Africa and how to get there. Women were less likely to know how to obtain travel documents, how to get to South Africa safely and cheaply, how to get a job or how to find a place to go on arrival. For the most part, women's information was at best second-hand, gleaned from people who had been to South Africa. Twenty-eight percent of the men surveyed could report personal experience as their main source of information about the country, compared with only 18% of women. Combined with family discouragement, fear of the unknown must serve as a powerful deterrent to female migration.

Even more revealing than answers to the questions about hypothetical migration were the gender differences in reported migration behaviour for the person's most recent cross-border visit (Table 9).

Interestingly, and significantly for policy purposes, women appear to have a higher incidence of legal migration than male migrants. Ninety-five percent of women who had been to South Africa, compared with 86% of men who had been to South Africa, had a valid passport before leaving their home country.

Both of these figures are quite high, and certainly challenge the stereotype that most Africans from the region enter South Africa "illegally", but the figures also demonstrate once more the degree to which women's migration in particular contradicts the stereotype. The real

TABLE 9: LOGISTICS OF MIGRATION

Ability to obtain passport before departure from home country	Male	Female
Yes	86%	95%
No	14%	5%
Mode of transport on most recent visit to South Africa		
Foot	11%	5%
Bus	23%	19%
Plane	2%	1%
Car	11%	4%
Train	16%	11%
Combi or taxi	33%	55%

incidence of undocumented migration may have been under-reported in the survey due to the respondents' concerns with confidentiality, but there is little reason to believe that the relative gender picture would be any different. If anything, the truth might have revealed an even higher incidence of undocumented migration among men.

Also interesting, although without straightforward explanation, are the different modes of transport used by men and women. More than half the women on their most recent trip to South Africa had travelled by minibus taxi, whereas men's mode of transport was more evenly divided between minibus taxi, bus and train. What this difference could indicate is the greater spontaneity and shorter duration of women's visits, with the more formalised, longer-term labour migration of men being more compatible with less flexible modes of transport. Men were also more likely than women to have travelled by car, by plane or on foot although in all cases the percentages were relatively small. Again, the survey findings seems to contradict the perception of migrants fording rivers and sneaking through fences to gain "illegal" access to the country.

What this section shows is that women come to South Africa not as undocumented, would-be immigrants but as legal migrants. While this is true of men, it would appear to be more the case with women. They make short visits to South Africa by legal means and for legitimate purposes. Given that women wishing to migrate face added deterrents and obstacles at home, there would appear to be little justification for any further discrimination against them in South African migration policy.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S MIGRATION

A number of factors have already indicated gender-specific motives for migration, with men migrating for more narrowly economic reasons, while women tend to combine economic and social motivations for visiting South Africa. What do men and women actually do when they get to South Africa? Here the gender differences are striking and unambiguous (Table 10).

Sixty-three percent of men have worked in South Africa, compared with only 16% of women. The most common reason cited by men for going to South Africa recently was to work or look for work (50%), with mining being the most common occupation stated. For women the order was first visiting family or friends, second shopping, third buying and selling goods, fourth for medical care and only then to work or look for work (10%). Reasons given for returning home from South Africa are related to these gendered migration motives. Men were more likely than women to state that they had lost their job, their contract had ended or they had become ill or injured, while women were more likely to say simply that their holiday or visit had ended.

TABLE 10: REASONS FOR VISITING SOUTH AFRICA AND RETURNING HOME		
Purpose of most recent visit to South Africa	Male	Female
Look for work	17%	3%
Work	33%	7%
Buy and sell goods	4%	10%
Shopping	13%	23%
Business	3%	3%
Visit family or friends	17%	38%
Holiday or tourism	3%	3%
Medical care	2%	8%
Other	8%	5%
Incidence of working in South Africa at some point in the past	63%	16%
Reason for returning home		
Returned after holiday or visit ended	21%	43%
Wanted to come back home	17%	20%
Family reasons	8%	8%
Sick/injured	5%	1%
Contract ended	10%	1%
Retired from job	3%	1%
Lost job or retrenched	14%	-
Travel documents expired	3%	6%
Expelled or deported from South Africa	5%	-
Goods sold out	2%	3%
Other	12%	17%

A less clear picture emerged when respondents were asked about hypothetical future migration as opposed to actual recent migration (Table 11). When asked what job they might want to do in South Africa, men's first choice of occupation was mining, followed by industry and trading. This closely matches their actual patterns of employment in existing migration. Women, when asked the same question, mostly expressed a preference for vending and hawking, followed by industry, trading, starting their own business and being a domestic worker.

Although the question was a leading one, women can evidently at least imagine the possibility of working in South Africa, even those who have not done so in the past. This suggests that there may be considerable latent migration potential amongst women, but in the absence of legislative reform and the expansion of legal employment opportunities in South Africa for female SADC citizens, this latent potential will remain just that. Furthermore, while some of the occupations stated might "take jobs away from South Africans", women's commonly-expressed wish to trade or start their own business suggests a strong entrepreneurial urge that might well create jobs and generate income for South African citizens.²²

TABLE 11: JOB PREFERENCES AND REMITTANCES		
Type of job preferred (first mention)	Male	Female
Vendor/hawker	5%	18%
Trader	8%	10%
Miner	23%	1%
Mechanic	7%	1%
Industrial worker	9%	12%
Farm worker	2%	3%
Start own business	4%	6%
Teacher	3%	4%
Doctor	1%	1%
Nurse	1%	3%
Domestic worker	-	5%
REMITTANCES		
If you were working in South Africa would you send money home?		
Yes	91%	89%
No	9%	11%
To whom would you send money?		
Parents	43%	49%
Grandparents	2%	2%
Spouse	36%	12%
Children	11%	27%
Sister/brother	4%	5%
Other — family members	2%	2%
Other — non-family	2%	3%

When asked about remittances, and contrary to what might have been expected, women seem no more or less likely than men to send money back to their home country. International experience suggests women are more frequent remitters although amounts are lower because of lower earning potential. Rather tellingly, 90% of respondents stated hypothetically that they would send money home should they migrate to South Africa in future, whereas only a third of respondents who had actually worked in South Africa claim to have remitted any of their earnings while working.

Some gender distinction is apparent in the different people to whom money would be sent, with men most frequently listing their parents and spouse while women gave parents and children as the likely recipients. Clearly men are expected to be the primary breadwinners, and it would be unusual for a woman to remit money to a male partner. Here again, migration behaviour is shown to be grounded in socially-constructed gender roles and relations.

Men's and women's social experiences with regard to migration must differ widely, but this was not explored in the survey beyond trying to

ascertain people's general impressions of South Africa. Here there was broad consensus between men and women, although women were slightly more likely than men to describe their impressions of South Africa as unfavourable or very unfavourable. There was closer gender concurrence in the perceptions held by those men and women who had direct personal experience of South Africa. Seventy-nine percent of men and 80% of women who had visited the country rated their experience as either positive or very positive. Women who had not been to South Africa had more negative impressions, again indicating a fear of the unknown that is surely a deterrent to female migration.

One revealing gender difference was in the reported incidence of friends resident in South Africa, with 59% of all the women surveyed but only 36% of the men replying that they had no friends living there. Given that the existence of social networks in the destination country lends powerful encouragement to migration, this is an additional deterrent facing potential female migrants. It is also indicative of the longer-established tradition of male migration, with men living more transnational lives.

It is important, in identifying such gender similarities and differences, not to lose sight of the fact that men's and women's migration streams are linked. The men who migrate to work in South Africa are the husbands, brothers, fathers and sons of the women surveyed. Their remitted earnings make an important contribution to household economies in their home countries. Much of the women's cross-border movement is for the purpose of "visiting family and friends", including male partners and other relatives living in South Africa. The information on which women make their migration decisions and choices comes largely from friends and family members who have themselves been to South Africa, most of whom are likely to be men.

Migration should thus be seen in terms of household production and

TABLE 12: EXPERIENCES WITH MIGRATION AND IMPRESSIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA		
Rating of personal experience in South Africa	Male	Female
Very negative	8%	6%
Negative	10%	9%
Neither positive or negative	4%	5%
Positive	47%	50%
Very positive	32%	30%
General impressions of South Africa		
Very unfavourable	4%	8%
Unfavourable	11%	12%
Neither	12%	12%
Favourable	45%	45%
Very favourable	29%	23%

reproduction strategies; as a collective endeavour rather than as a set of isolated individual choices and practices. If men's migration is largely economically based while that of women relates to a wider range of social and economic factors, this is because the societies in the countries surveyed attach particular social and economic roles and responsibilities on the basis of gender. That said, migration can be a means of challenging and undermining social norms, and this may be particularly true for women, who can employ migration as a means of social and economic empowerment. Democratic migration policy should therefore be based on relations between men and women, on families, households and communities and not simply on genderless, atomistic "persons".

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION

The impact of migration is difficult to assess in any absolute or objective sense, especially by those actually involved. Not only does it touch on virtually every aspect of life, but it represents a combination of costs and benefits that are not easy to disentangle, still less to weigh up. How, for example, does one calculate the benefit of economic gains obtained at the social cost of disrupted family lives? Respondents were asked to try to evaluate the impact of people from their country going to South Africa in four categories: impact on the respondent personally; on their family; on their community; and on their country. In each category respondents were asked to rate the impact on a five-point scale from "very negative" to "very positive."

Given that migration behaviour itself is so strongly gendered, one would expect a difference between men's and women's perceptions of the impact of migration. Yet overall, the ratings of the impact of migration, at every scale from the personal to the national, were strikingly similar across the genders — and surprisingly positive (Table 13). More than 50% of both men and women rated the impact of migration as "positive" or "very positive." Women were slightly more likely to rate the impact as negative, and men slightly more likely to rate it as very positive, but the differences were small.

In terms of personal and family impact, some 30% of both genders felt it had "no impact", and fewer than 20% rated it "negative" or "very negative." Going up the geographical scale to community and national level, negative ratings increased for both men and women, but this was matched by a decrease in the "no impact" rather than the "positive" categories. Indeed, it was at the community level that the incidence of "positive" and "very positive" ratings was highest, at just over 60% of both men and women. The highest incidence of "negative" and "very negative" responses occurred at the national scale, so clearly people are conscious of the effect of countries "losing" labour and skills to South Africa.

Breaking down the answers according to whether respondents had themselves been to South Africa reveals a much more complicated picture. The most highly positive ratings of migration seem to come from men who have been to South Africa and women who have not. This seeming paradox is simply resolved: many of the women without migration experience are married to men with migration experience, so it is likely that their opinions are coming via their husband.

The impact of female migration is much more ambiguous, and the personal experience is clearly difficult for many women. At every scale, from the personal to the national, the highest incidence of “negative” and “very negative” responses came from women who had been to South Africa. Yet even for this group of women, there were more positive than negative responses, especially at family and community level. This suggests that overall the impact of migration is still considered to be beneficial, and that women are prepared to endure personal difficulties in order to secure benefits for their families and wider communities.

Certainly people seem to be generally aware of the tensions between the costs and benefits of migration: how costs to individuals can bring

TABLE 13: PERCEIVED IMPACTS OF MIGRATION		
Impact of migration on you personally	Male	Female
Very negative	2%	4%
Negative	11%	14%
No impact	29%	28%
Positive	41%	41%
Very positive	16%	14%
Impact of migration on your family		
Very negative	2%	3%
Negative	12%	16%
No impact	30%	27%
Positive	42%	42%
Very positive	14%	13%
Impact of migration on your community		
Very negative	4%	4%
Negative	16%	16%
No impact	19%	19%
Positive	51%	50%
Very positive	11%	11%
Impact of migration on your country		
Very negative	6%	8%
Negative	22%	24%
No impact	11%	10%
Positive	48%	48%
Very positive	14%	11%

benefits to families; and how benefits to families and communities might translate into costs to broader national development. Of course, households are unlikely to forfeit personal gain for national development, and this is precisely the “Catch 22” situation that South African migration policy should be trying to address. The objective of policy should be to facilitate migration that can be beneficial to both source and recipient countries, harnessing human mobility as an agent for the exchange of goods, services, ideas and skills that drive the development process.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN’S MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

The analysis in this paper suggests a number of ways in which Southern African women’s experience of migration differs from that of men. These are summarised here, first by answering the questions set out in the introduction, and second by comparing the survey findings with the international observations made by Chant.²³

- Migration to South Africa is still heavily male-biased, with a far lower incidence of migration experience among female respondents. Those women who do have migration experience tend to be married, older women rather than younger single women, whereas male migrants come from a wider range of age groups and marital status categories. Female migrants tend to be better-educated than their male counterparts, with lack of education seeming to discourage female mobility while encouraging male mobility.
- Men and women migrate to South Africa for different reasons. Men go primarily in search of employment, whereas women’s migration is driven by a wide range of social and reproductive factors in addition to economic incentives. Even the economic motives for migration are gender-specific, with women going to South Africa largely to trade and men to work, most in formal employment. Thus migration is closely tied to socioeconomic roles and responsibilities allocated on the basis of gender.
- Related to the differences in the purpose of migration, men and women tend to go to different destinations in South Africa. Male migration is closely tied to places of employment, notably the mines, whereas female migration is to towns and cities offering opportunities for informal-sector trade and the procurement of a range of goods and services.

- The decision processes and logistics of female and male migration differ. Women are less likely to migrate independently, and are more likely to be subject to the will of a (male) parent or partner in determining whether they migrate. In addition, although women's migration cannot be seen merely as an adjunct to male migration, women's migration is still commonly tied to that of men, with many women travelling to South Africa for the express purpose of visiting male family members. Women visit South Africa for shorter time periods, and are more likely than men to migrate legally.
- The social and economic behaviour of people migrating to South Africa is gender-specific, reflecting the different motivations and patterns of male and female migration. Men are more likely to have established social networks in South Africa, reflecting their longer periods of stay in single locations and their ties to workplace-based social structures.
- Men participate more formally in the South African economy, while women's migration experience is shaped by the temporary and contingent social and economic interactions involved in trading and retail activity.
- Both genders, migrants and non-migrants alike, hold generally favourable impressions of life in South Africa, although they would still generally prefer to remain in their home country.

The impacts of migration, both positive and negative, are well understood by the men and women affected. Rather than the women "left behind", however, it was women with personal migration experience who were more likely to rate the impact of migration as negative. The economic benefits of migration are achieved at considerable social cost, with disruptions to family and community life. Both male and female respondents were also well aware of the national cost of migration through the loss of skills to the local economy, but nevertheless continue to support and participate in migration as a rational household reproduction strategy in a situation of limited alternative options.

The SAMP survey findings show that the Southern African experience closely parallels that of other developing countries. As elsewhere, men in Southern Africa are more mobile than women, and it is women who are more often left behind. The women left behind are disadvantaged in various ways by male out-migration, which may bring in earnings but adds to women's productive and reproductive responsibilities at home.

Certainly men's migration in the region is undertaken more independently than women's, although both are better understood as part of a "household strategy" approach.²⁴ As in the international experience more generally, male migration to South Africa is closely tied to

employment, and women have fewer legal employment opportunities than men in the South African labour market.

Related to these gender-specific motivations for migration, men move further and to a wider range of destinations, with women's migration often being no more than a quick cross-border shopping trip. The different age profiles of male and female migrants are rather difficult to determine from the SAMP survey data, although it is certainly clear that men migrate across a wider range of ages than women. Also difficult to determine from this particular survey is whether the Southern African experience conforms to the international norm that women "maintain more enduring ties between areas of origin and destination."²⁵ Both genders clearly retain strong ties to home, including ties between husbands and wives separated by the "stretching" of households across international borders. If the legal and social restrictions on women's mobility are relaxed, and women come to engage more directly and fully in cross-border migration, the "feminisation" of migration may well lead to changes in the social linkages between places of origin and destination, although whether this is a weakening or a strengthening remains to be seen.

Two fundamental points emerge from the SAMP survey:

- The migration experience in Southern Africa is deeply and profoundly gendered. To a long-established tradition of male labour migration is being added a growing stream of female migrants, coming to South Africa for a number of different reasons, both social and economic. Gender inequalities and discrimination have hitherto constrained women's migration, which can be an important mechanism of female empowerment.
- The different motives and patterns of male and female migration arise from structural determinants in the social and economic fabric of source and recipient countries. Any sound migration policy therefore has to go hand-in-hand with regional development initiatives. Just as development can alter migration patterns, so migration can itself be an agent of development. It is in this broader context that democratic, non-sexist migration policy must be formulated.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policy implications of the SAMP survey findings for gender and migration are numerous, and are outlined here only in the most general terms. In this section, a number of broad guidelines for policy on gender and migration are presented. This is followed by a section in which the South African government's Draft Green Paper on International Migration is subjected to a gender-aware, critical reading, with further

suggestions being put forward as to how the policy proposals in the Green Paper might be made more gender-sensitive.

- The most important lesson is that if there are indeed “good” and “bad” migrants in terms of their impact on South African society and economy, then female migrants are generally “good”. They are law-abiding, responsible, entrepreneurial and resourceful women, who employ cross-border movement as a mechanism for their own and their families’ betterment.
- Current migration policy, together with a host of entrenched social norms and practices, discriminates against women in all sorts of ways, limiting their life choices and restricting their physical and socioeconomic mobility. Migration policy should instead aim to facilitate female migration, thus aiding women’s empowerment and allowing them to become agents of development both in their home countries and in South Africa. This is not to suggest that female migration should be unrestricted, but that controlled female migration, particularly that of a short-term nature, can be harnessed as a powerful force for regional development, as well as for the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities between the South African core and its neighbouring periphery. Migration policy should aim to increase rather than decrease the range of options available to women in the range of productive and reproductive responsibilities that they bear.
- Policy must not be formulated in terms of atomistic, genderless “persons” or “migrants” but in terms of men and women with specific biological, legal and social relationships. Cross-border migration, even when it is undertaken by individuals, takes place within a social framework, with implications for families, households and communities. Policy must not merely accommodate but actively encourage the links between migrants and their families and communities “back home”, for example by making it easy for migrants to make return visits and for family and friends to visit foreign migrants in South Africa. There should certainly be a special class of multiple-entry visa for women (or men) to visit spouses working in South Africa.
- Another category of female migrant that could be actively encouraged is those women who come to South Africa for the purposes of trading and shopping. The latter activity certainly injects cash into the South African economy, and while there are complaints that foreign informal-sector traders undercut their South African counterparts, this competition must surely be seen as part of the movement towards freer trade in the SADC region.²⁶ Although hard evidence is lacking, it is likely

that women from neighbouring countries who bring goods into South Africa to sell then spend a large proportion of their earnings in the South African retail sector, thus making a positive economic contribution overall.

- Repatriated profits and remittances can make a positive impact on the economies of the women's country of origin, thereby facilitating local development and ultimately reducing the incentives for more permanent out-migration. Again, while the flow of imports into the country should not proceed completely uncontrolled, restrictions on the cross-border movement of people and goods should certainly be eased, particularly for small- and medium-scale traders.²⁷
- Rather more vexed is the question of foreign women being allowed to work in South Africa. Survey results show potentially increased flows of women into the South African labour market should restrictions on their employment be lifted, with many female respondents expressing a desire to be employed as domestic workers, for example. With unemployment in South Africa at high levels, especially for black women, allowing more foreign labour into the country could have deleterious social and economic consequences for South African citizens.
- That said, the perpetuation of male foreign migrant labour on mines and farms to the virtual exclusion of female migrant labour is clearly discriminatory.²⁸ Equitable opportunity for legal participation in the South African labour market by citizens of other Southern African countries, while difficult to achieve, should nevertheless be one of the objectives of migration policy, with particular attention being paid to the expansion of opportunities for women in occupations where they could make a positive contribution to the South African economy.
- As part of wider regional development assistance, the South African government could also be fostering the education and training of women in neighbouring countries, from basic literacy to vocational and professional training. Not only would this facilitate local development in those countries, but it would also mean that women are less discriminated against by the strict application of education and skills criteria for entry into South Africa — although of course care would have to be taken to avoid exacerbating the regional “brain drain”.
- In formulating and drafting policy and legislation, the adoption of gender-neutral language to describe and control what are in reality gender-specific processes and behaviours can serve effectively to discriminate against women. Nowhere, for example,

should the term “spouse” be used where “husband” or “wife” (or even “same-sex partner”) is intended to be either included or excluded. Further, the drafting of non-sexist migration policy must be carried into the actual day-to-day implementation of that policy by the officials who ultimately decide who is or is not permitted access into the country, for it is at this level that the most insidious forms of gender discrimination often operate.

Each of the above recommendations has specific development implications, both for South Africa and for neighbouring countries. While it is a common view that migration undermines development, with a loss of skills from source countries and an over-supply of labour in the recipient country, the pattern of “to-and-fro” migration practised by Southern African women can serve to facilitate positive socioeconomic change, providing an effective mechanism for the exchange of money, goods and ideas across borders. Carefully-formulated, gender-sensitive migration policy can thus make a direct contribution not just to women’s upliftment but towards wider regional integration and development.

THE GREEN PAPER: GENDER-NEUTRAL OR GENDER-BLIND?

The 1997 Draft Green Paper on International Migration provides a blueprint for a democratic, non-discriminatory immigration policy for post-apartheid South Africa.²⁹ Yet a gender-aware reading reveals a number of implicit anti-female biases.

The broad philosophy of the proposed migration policy is that economic criteria of labour demand and democratic criteria of human rights should determine who should and who should not be allowed to enter South Africa. However, the following discussion will show that neither labour demand nor human rights are gender-neutral, particularly in the Southern African context. In this region, discrimination against women is deeply culturally ingrained and women are systematically denied rights and opportunities granted to men.

The Green Paper begins by identifying three streams of cross-border migration: immigrants, migrants and refugees. The very title of the document is significant, deliberately referring to “international migration” rather than immigration per se so as to move away from the implication of permanence in the latter phrase. The reasons for this distinction lie in part in the history of male contract labour migration to South Africa, discussed above. It was also designed as a corrective to the pervasive stereotype that every foreign African in South Africa is an immigrant who wishes to stay. However, aside from an acknowledgment that the historical male bias persists into the present, the Green Paper is curiously gender-blind in its recommendations for the “migrant” category,

essentially arguing for the perpetuation of labour migration in a new and more humane guise.³⁰

While the temporary work schemes proposed could, in theory, be more gender-inclusive than the current system, there is no explicit recognition of this fact.

Further on, the Green Paper argues that for both temporary migration and permanent immigration there should be “rules of entry driven by labour-market need”, admitting “individuals who have desirable skills, expertise, resources and entrepreneurial will.”³¹ As Southern African women are routinely denied the opportunity to acquire such skills and resources, they are automatically disadvantaged by the application of such criteria for (im)migration eligibility. Nor is it anywhere made clear whether Southern African labour migrants would be allowed to bring their partners and families with them to South Africa, beyond an endorsement of “border passes to eligible persons to ease the flow of legally-sanctioned temporary visitation of *bona fide* family members across our borders.”³²

The proposed policy of “flexible labour quotas” for the employment of foreign migrants, extending beyond mining and agriculture to include other spheres of economic activity, might in theory open up opportunities for women.³³ But such opportunities are likely to be limited in scale and scope. Many women have skills or work in sectors where work is individualised and not amenable to large-scale recruitment.

One area in which female migration might be positively favoured is in the recommendation that cross-border trading, including small-scale and informal sector trading, be facilitated by more relaxed SADC trade policies. As the SAMP survey shows, such trading is one of the key motives for visits to South Africa by women from neighbouring countries.

The final category of SADC-origin temporary migrant considered is that of students, where again there is likely to be a heavy bias in favour of males. As in the other categories, immigration eligibility criteria do not have to be explicitly sexist to discriminate against women.

The category of general immigration to South Africa is dealt with in similarly gender-blind terms. Here too there is likely to be discrimination in favour of men in both the specification and the application of the proposed skill- and wealth-based admission criteria. Everywhere in the world, but particularly in Africa, women’s access to the resources and opportunities required to achieve their full economic potential is restricted through a variety of mechanisms. On average, relative to men, women own less property, have less access to capital, and are less educated, not through any fault of their own but through socially institutionalised gender discrimination. Immigration criteria based on wealth, property ownership and skills thus automatically have an anti-

female bias. The very word entrepreneur, which recurs throughout the document, still to most people conjures up an image of a male.

This economic discourse is in contrast to the human rights-based language contained in the section on refugees, the “third stream” of international migrants and the only category in which gender is given explicit, if still partial, treatment. In the section summarising the current situation, one reads:

The majority of people who are asylum-seekers are young men in their twenties who have fled African countries such as Angola, Somalia, Zaire, Liberia, Rwanda and Ethiopia. Significant numbers of asylum-seekers have also arrived in recent months from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.³⁴

In many countries, both in Africa and elsewhere, women are a category particularly at risk and especially vulnerable to the effects of the famines, wars and natural disasters that commonly precipitate major flows of refugees. Why, then, are most of the refugees who find their way to South Africa male rather than female? Do these men leave behind female partners, parents and children who remain victims of “serious human rights violations” in their country of origin? Of course, in emphasising women’s vulnerability, there is a danger that they might become ghettoised into the “refugee” category, regarded as temporary sojourners in South Africa awaiting ultimate repatriation, while men can more readily be admitted as mainstream immigrants.

If refugee policy is couched in the language of risk and vulnerability, with women being identified as a group especially in need of protection, an unintended consequence may be the further marginalisation of women rather than protection of their human rights. The male bias of current refugee flows nevertheless demands that the gender implications of refugee policy be carefully considered.

These gender-based reservations notwithstanding, the Green Paper represents a considerable advance on the present situation regarding migration policy. Nevertheless, great care will have to be taken in the drafting of legislation and the formulation and execution of policy if gender discrimination is to be avoided, not just in language but in practice. In fact, the use of gender-neutral language can serve to conceal or even perpetuate existing discrimination, thus being quite counter-productive if the aim is to achieve gender equity. Gender differences are entrenched in past and present patterns of migration to South Africa, and any policy that is blind to this reality is fundamentally flawed.

CONCLUSION

This monograph has attempted to elucidate the perceptions and experiences of Southern African women with regard to cross-border migration to South Africa. Contrary to the common stereotypes, women coming to South Africa from neighbouring countries do so for the most part legally and for legitimate purposes. They visit their husbands, friends and relations; buy and sell goods; access services that are either less readily available or of lower standard in their countries of origin. Far from being a threat, many of their activities benefit the South African economy.

Women's migration also benefits their families and communities at home, as well as mitigating the social costs of male labour migration. Present migration policy discriminates against women, and even the Draft Green Paper contains a number of recommendations that implicitly favour men. There can be no justification for further discrimination against women: indeed policy should instead be seeking to facilitate female migration as an agent of positive social and economic change in the region.

Allowing women freer access to South Africa would encourage the exchange of goods, services and ideas that constitutes the very engine of development, and there is little to suggest that a more open migration policy would result in an unmanageable influx of women (or men) into the country. Properly managed, female migration to South Africa could be a mechanism for reducing both spatial and gender-based inequalities in the region, empowering women as agents of development both in their home countries and in South Africa itself.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jennifer Hyndman, "Border Crossings" *Antipode* 29(2), 1996, pp. 151-2.
- 2 Women's migration within countries has been better documented, as has the impact of male labour migration on women left behind. See, for example, Belinda Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa: 1900-1983* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1993); Colin Murray, *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 3 Of which the best-known example is probably Sylvia Chant, (ed.), *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries* (Chichester: Wiley, 1992).
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 192-98.
- 5 Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves and David Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire: A History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Cape Town and Boulder: David Philip and Westview Press, 1992); Alan Jeeves and Jonathan Crush, (eds.), *White Farms, Black Labor: The State and Agrarian Change in Southern Africa, 1910-1950* (London, New York and Pietermaritzburg: James Currey, Heinemann and University of Natal Press, 1997).
- 6 See, for example, Miranda Miles, "Missing Women: A Study of Female Swazi Migration to the Witwatersrand, 1920-1970" (M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1991); Camilla Cockerton, "Running Away from the Land of the Desert: Women's Migration from Colonial Botswana to South Africa, c.1895-1966" (Ph.D. Thesis, Queen's University, 1995).
- 7 Robin Cohen, "International Migration: Southern Africa in Global Perspective". In Jonathan Crush and Faranaaz Veriava, (eds.), *Transforming South African Immigration Policy* (Cape Town and Kingston: SAMP, 1997); by "immigration shopping" Cohen means the active targeting of potential immigrants with specified skills, as practised by the Australian and Canadian governments.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Sylvia Chant and Sarah Radcliffe, "Migration and Development: the Importance of Gender". In *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries*.
- 11 Giovanna Campani, "Women Migrants: From Marginal Subjects to Social Actors". In Robin Cohen, (ed.), *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 12 Chant and Radcliffe, "The Importance of Gender", pp. 2-3.
- 13 Maxine Reitzes, "Undocumented Migration to South Africa: Dimensions and Dilemmas". In *Transforming South African Immigration Policy*.
- 14 *The Southern African Migration Project: Project Prospectus and Programme Priorities* (Cape Town: Idasa, 1996), p. 3.
- 15 The survey has since been extended to Botswana and Namibia. However, the survey results for those countries were not available at the time of writing.

- 16 See Sechaba Consultants, "Riding the Tiger: Lesotho Miners and Permanent Residence in South Africa" (SAMP Migration Policy Series, No. 2, Cape Town, 1997); Fion de Vletter, "Sons of Mozambique: Mozambican Miners and Post-Apartheid South Africa" (SAMP Migration Policy Series, No. 8. Cape Town, 1998). Accompanying the formal movement of male contract workers is a growing informal movement of female migrants to the mining areas; Dunbar Moodie (with Vivienne Ndatshe), "Town Women and Country Wives: Housing Preferences at Vaal Reefs Mine". In Jonathan Crush and Wilmot James, (eds.), *Crossing Boundaries: Mine Migrancy in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town and Ottawa: Idasa and IDRC, 1995), pp. 68-81.
- 17 David McDonald, John Gay, Lovemore Zinyama, Robert Mattes and Fion de Vletter, "Challenging Xenophobia: Myths and Realities about Cross-Border Migration in Southern Africa" (SAMP Migration Policy Series, No. 7. Cape Town, 1998).
- 18 For example, certain questions were left unasked, or were asked in ways that obscured or downplayed the gender dimension. Questions were asked about parents, grandparents and "immediate family members" migrating, but not specifically about husbands (or wives).
- 19 For logistical reasons, in Mozambique only the southern third of the country was surveyed.
- 20 The Lesotho team made an individual decision to select a sample in which men and women were equally represented. In Zimbabwe and Mozambique, the samples were selected randomly from the entire population. My observations about in-built sampling bias therefore apply only to the latter two countries.
- 21 "Challenging Xenophobia", pp. 8-13, 21-4.
- 22 On the employment potential of foreign-owned small enterprises, see C.M. Rogerson, "International Migration, Immigrant Entrepreneurs and South Africa's Small Enterprise Economy" (SAMP Migration Policy Series, No. 3. Cape Town, 1997).
- 23 *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries*.
- 24 Understanding both men's and women's migration in terms of a "household strategies" approach must be the starting point for democratic, non-sexist migration policy; Sylvia Chant, "Households, Gender and Rural-Urban Migration: Reflections on Linkages and Considerations for Policy" *Environment and Urbanisation* 10(1), 1998.
- 25 *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries*, p. 198.
- 26 Sally Peberdy and Jonathan Crush, "Trading Places: Cross-Border Traders and the South African Informal Sector" (SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 6, Cape Town, 1998).
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 For example, the bilateral labour agreements between South Africa and neighbours Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana represent the main means of legal access to the South African labour market. The primary benefi-

ciary of the bilaterals (and for whom they were designed) is the South African mining industry which hires only male contract workers. A small number of female agricultural workers (in Lesotho) are recruited under the bilaterals. However, the South African government is now threatening to terminate such arrangements by 31 January 1999. No such threats have been made to male mine migrancy.

29 Republic of South Africa, *Draft Green Paper on International Migration* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1997).

30 The Green Paper, like the Labour Market Commission before it, recommends that the bilaterals should be scrapped. The reason given is interesting: that they discriminate against some South Africa employers (which is true), and not that they discriminate against female migrants (which is equally true).

31 *Draft Green Paper*, p. 19.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 26. According to one commentator, “temporary residence and work permits issued to SADC citizens should not prevent them from bringing immediate dependants” although this is nowhere explicitly stated as such in the Green Paper, a fact that has produced some confusion; Jonathan Crush, “It Strikes a Good Balance” *Crossings* 2(1), 1998, p. 5.

33 *Draft Green Paper*, p. 23.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

PUBLISHED BY:

SOUTHERN AFRICAN MIGRATION PROJECT
6 Spin Street
Church Square
Cape Town 8001



PARTNERS:

Idasa (South Africa)
Queen's University (Canada)
Sechaba Consultants (Lesotho)
ARPAC (Mozambique)
University of Zimbabwe

This project is funded by the
Canadian government through the
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).