

# Introduction: Cultivating the Migration-Food Security Nexus

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In a recent survey of the migration and development research literature, Clemens et al. (2014) argue that the field has broadened out considerably from its traditional focus on rural-urban migration and international remittances. New and emerging areas of focus include human capital investment, global diaspora networks, circular or temporary migration, and the transfer of technology and cultural norms. However, while the migration and development research literature may well have moved 'far beyond remittances', it has arguably not moved far enough. The nexus between migration and food security, for example, remains a peripheral and much-neglected concern (Choithani, 2017; Craven and Gartaula, 2015; Crush, 2013; Sharma, 2012). Clemens et al. (2014) do not mention the subject, and nor is it a priority (or even a presence) in such influential fora as the Global Migration Group, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the UN High Level Dialogues on International Migration, the Global Forum on Remittances, the International Conference on Migration and Development and the World Bank's KNOMAD programme.

There is now a significant body of case study evidence demonstrating that food purchase is a major use of cash remittances across the Global South. In India, for example, Mahapatro et al. (2017) found that remittance and non-remittance receiving households spend a similar proportion of their household budget on food (45-60%), but the overall food spend by remittance recipients is significantly higher. In Southern African countries, Crush and Pendleton (2009) report that food purchase is by far the most important use of remittances by urban and rural migrant-sending households. In Latin America, Acosta et al. (2008) demonstrate that remittance-receiving households spend anywhere between 35 per cent and 75 per cent of household income on food purchase, with a higher proportion in rural than urban areas. Despite such evidence, much more work is needed on the specific food security impacts of remittances on both senders and recipients. As Lacroix (2011: 34) points out, "although there is wealth of research on migrant remittances, none has investigated the relationships between their use at the domestic level and food security."

Some work has begun to emerge on the impacts of migration and remitting on the food consumption patterns and nutritional status of those left behind in rural areas (Adams and Cuevecha, 2010; Anton, 2010; Babatunde and Qaim, 2010; Graham and Gordan, 2013; Zezza et al., 2011). This literature is still too patchy and new to draw any definitive conclusions about the links between nutrition and remitting although there are some suggestive findings. A national study in Ghana, for example, found that migration did not substantially affect total food expenditures per capita, and had "minimal noticeable effect on food expenditure patterns" (Karamba et al., 2011). In contrast, a study of food consumption patterns in Vietnam found that short-term migration had a positive effect on overall per capita food expenditures, per capita calorie consumption and food diversity. Long-term migration impacts were insignificant by comparison with short-term migration, however (Nguyen and Winters, 2011).

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In terms of other gaps in the migration and development literature, there is an economic tendency to view remittances purely as the formal and informal transfer of cash. As a result, the importance of in-kind remitting of goods, including foodstuffs, is often mentioned but largely ignored (Crush and Caesar, 2016). A 2009 World Bank study of the Canada-Caribbean remittance corridor, for example, devoted just two short paragraphs to goods and food remitting in a 163-page report (Todoroki et al., 2009). Even the well-known practice of sending barrels containing food and other consumer goods from Canada and the United States to family members in the Caribbean has attracted little serious analysis (Crawford, 2003). Simmons et al. (2005) provide a classic example of the problem, confining their analysis of remittances between Canada and the Caribbean entirely to financial flows. It was left up to one of their informants to note, in passing, that “we have been shipping down barrels, many, many barrels. We sent new stuff, used stuff, perishable items.” As Bailey’s (2017) work on the “migrant suitcase” confirms, food remittances are often bi-directional, far more so than cash remittances. In trying to account for the general lack of attention to food remitting, Andersson Djurfeldt (2015: 540) observes that in Africa, “transfers of food are invisible in the sense that they run within the family and outside market channels.” Another explanation, following Petrou and Connell (2017: 219), is that transfers of food “make little formal economic sense” without the non-economic context of social relationships of kinship and reciprocity.

In addition to the need for correctives to remittances discourse, there is the neglected question of the relationship between migration and food security in migrant destinations. Here, the migration and development literature is also silent. The importance of the issue has been highlighted in work on the diet-related health outcomes of migration amongst migrant populations by nutritionists and public health researchers. This literature is framed by two main ideas. First, there is what is known as the “healthy immigrant” effect or “healthy migrant” phenomenon (Fennelly, 2007; Rubalcava et al., 2008; Dean and Wilson, 2010; Girard and Sercia, 2013). The argument here is that recent migrants tend to be healthier (across a whole range of indicators) than those they leave behind, than long-term immigrants, and than local populations (Kennedy et al., 2015). There is also considerable evidence that the quality of the diet of immigrants in Europe and North America declines over time as it comes more closely to approximate that of the local population. This empirical observation has given rise to a second hypothesis – the “acculturation thesis” (Ayala et al., 2008; Dharod et al., 2011; Holmboe-Ottesen and Wandel, 2012; Martinez, 2013; Lesser et al., 2014; Sanou et al., 2014; Tseng et al., 2015). The basic argument is that there are culturally-driven forces that encourage or force migrants to eat unhealthy, processed and “fast” foods that are the staple of the native-born in these countries.

Research on immigrants from Asia (Nguyen et al., 2015; Oh and Saito, 2015), Latin America (Guarnaccia et al., 2012; Vahabi et al., 2011; Vera-Becerra et al., 2015) and Africa (Delisle et al., 2009; Gele and Mbalilaki, 2013; Méjean et al., 2007; Okafor et al., 2014; Renzaho and Burns, 2006) suggests that irrespective of origin, one of the major consequences is a decline over time in dietary quality and diversity and an increase in over-nutrition or obesity (Guendelman et al., 2011; Sanou et al., 2014; Tarraf et al., 2017). Similar findings have been reported from a sub-set of studies focused on the experience of refugee populations (Hadley et al., 2007, 2010; Dharod et al., 2013; Nunnery and Dharod, 2017). Both the healthy immigrant and acculturation arguments have been developed and tested almost exclusively in the context of permanent migration and settlement from South to North. Neither has been applied in any systematic way to temporary migration from South to North or migration within the South itself (so-called South-South migration).

What exactly are food security and insecurity and how are they to be defined, measured and related to broader systemic processes such as the transformation of food value chains, the rapid urbanization of the Global South, global food price crises and, of course, internal and international mobility? The standard definition of food security was developed at the 1996 World Food Summit, namely that “food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an

active and healthy life” (FAO, 2006). This definition has four main elements: (a) *food availability* including the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports; (b) *food accessibility* defined as access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; (c) *food utilization* through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met and (d) *food stability* which means access to adequate food at all times including periods of sudden shocks (such as an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (such as seasonal food supplies).

While there is broad agreement on the need to consider all of these different dimensions of food security (as well as others such as cultural acceptability and food safety), there is lively discussion on how food security is best quantified and measured (Carletto et al., 2013; Coates, 2013; de Haen et al., 2011; Headey and Ecker, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2015; Maxwell et al., 2014). After surveying the field, Coates (2013: 188) presciently concludes that “measurement efforts and the policies that flow from framing and quantification have advanced unevenly, stymied in part by the conceptual and technical challenges inherent in capturing a multi-dimensional problem.” That said, there is little awareness in this rather technocratic debate that part of the complexity and challenge derives from the fact that households and their constituent members are not static and fixed in space. As a result, there is failure to incorporate the lived reality of individual and household migration, cash and in-kind remittances, and the spatially-divided household in which consumption in one place can profoundly affect food security in another.

This special issue aims to further the dialogue between the migration and food security agendas by presenting a selection of inter-disciplinary research papers by researchers from both sides of what is still a considerable divide. The main objective in publishing these articles in *International Migration* is to alert the migration community to the importance of seeing food security as central to understanding the links between migration and development. All of the articles address different aspects of the migration-food security nexus but all are grounded in empirical research in different parts of the world using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The first two articles focus on the relationship between cash remitting and food security. In their article on Ghana, Atuoye et al. examine the impact of internal migration from the Upper West Region of the country and whether migrant remittances alleviate food insecurity in the region. The authors collected data from 1,438 households across a region in which two-thirds of households were found to be severely food insecure and 34 per cent have at least one member with a migrant worker in another part of the country. Using ordinal logistic regression, the article constructs three models to examine the link between remittances and household food security. Amongst the findings were the existence of spatial variations in food security across the region, a positive relationship between food security, occupation and income, and a relationship between household size and food security. Households headed by widows and those with a Muslim religious affiliation were also likely to be less food secure. The district with the highest levels of out-migration is the most food secure in the region. In general, however, the study did not find that remittance receipts had a significant impact on household food security. In part, they attribute this finding to the effects of losing agricultural labour through migration but conclude that given the high levels of poverty in the area, remittances are generally insufficient to make a difference to food security status. As they note: “remittances may only help to manage the symptoms of food insecurity but not achieve food security entirely.”

In the second article, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope takes up the issue of spatial variability in remittance impacts on food security through a comparative analysis of Jamaica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The study is based on in-depth farmer interviews, focus group discussions and stakeholder consultations in the two research sites, both of which are major sending areas for permanent and temporary migrants to North America. According to the informants “it was evident that migration influenced food production and accessibility in various direct and indirect ways.” However, the

impacts varied from place to place. Emigration of key household members potentially reduces the agricultural labour force with negative effects on food production. However, temporary migrants (particularly those on seasonal overseas work programmes) are able to participate in local farming in the North American “off season”, reducing the negative impacts of absence. Remittances were largely spent in both areas on household consumption including food purchase. In Jamaica unlike St Vincent, remittances were also used to purchase land with a positive impact on farming activities. For Thomas Hope, the Jamaican model is preferable and, she concludes, greater efforts to support small farming could increase the extent to which international migration would support food production and food security.

The argument that seasonal agricultural migration to Canada and the US can be accommodated by the agricultural cycle in the Caribbean, and positively contribute to food security in the area through remittances focuses, draws attention to the food security situation of migrants themselves when abroad. In the context of the new “triple win” orthodoxy around temporary work programmes, it is important to ascertain whether this extends to the neglected area of food security. In their article, Weiler et al. critically examine the extent to which Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) shapes food insecurity, both in Canada and in countries of origin. Their primary conclusion is that “SAWP provides migrant households with increased food access, but at a high cost.” Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with over 150 farm workers, employers, officials and advocacy groups in Ontario and British Columbia, as well as interviews with families in Mexico and Jamaica, they argue that “the SAWP has changed little, perpetuating the conditions of migrant farm workers that lead to food insecurity.” Long working hours, isolation in rural areas, inadequate food preparation and storage, and diets that are low-cost, energy-dense and nutrient poor combine to increase general food insecurity and lead to poor health outcomes. Central is the paradox that temporary farm workers in Canada “produce fresh fruits and vegetables, and yet they often lack access to healthy, affordable food.” In sending areas, the expenditure of remittances can lead to diversified and more nutritious diets and reduce hunger but “because SAWP contracts are temporary, inconsistent and unpredictable, any gains in food security are precarious.”

The next article, by Carney, draws attention to the need for a gender lens in examining the relationship between food security and migration. The contribution is based on nearly two years of ethnographic fieldwork with Mexican and Central American migrant women in Santa Barbara County, California, selected because it has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the state. She identifies food insecurity as a central motive for migration: everyday struggles over food insecurity, and the inadequacy of remittances received from other family members, constitute powerful reasons for migration to the US. However, while food insecurity underpins the decision to migrate, migrant women in the US are acutely aware of the “third labour” (in addition to wage labour and domestic labour) of caring for the food security of households back home. As Carney shows, migration only poses a new set of food security challenges for migrant women in the US who struggle with challenges of food access, affordability and quality. As she concludes, “women seeking an alternative . . . through the process of migration arguably absorb additional health risks” when they migrate in response to the search for food security in the country and community of origin.

The final two articles in this special issue focus on the food security of migrants at their destination in the context of South-South migration by examining the case of migrants and refugees in South African cities. Like Carney, Hunter-Adams focuses on the plight of migrant women (primarily refugees). Her in-depth interviews and focus groups with women focus on their subjective experience of food differences between where they are and where they have come from. Her informants noted that their diet in South Africa was inferior, unnatural and unvaried, compared to home. Other differences included the need to rely completely on food purchase and the increased consumption of fast foods and junk foods. Some were unable to access the greater variety of supermarket offerings “due to the complex interplay of financial and social security, fear of xenophobic encounters,

and language barriers.” Hunter-Adams argues, quite plausibly, that the physical boundaries of the migrants’ food environment are constrained by safety concerns to areas where they are less likely to encounter the plague of xenophobic violence that afflicts South Africa (Crush et al., 2013).

The final article by Crush and Tawodzera is based on a survey (supplemented with in-depth interviews) designed to measure levels of food insecurity amongst Zimbabwean migrant households in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The study found that in addition to the well-documented vulnerabilities of police harassment, unemployment and xenophobic violence, migrant households experience extremely high levels of food insecurity. Food security is measured with the widely-used FANTA indices (Coates, 2013) and reveal extreme levels of food insecurity, recurrent hunger and food shortages, and lack of dietary diversity amongst migrants. The article argues that in addition to income fluctuations and the high cost of survival in South African cities, migration itself is integral to the food insecurity experience. Food insecurity in Zimbabwe is one of the major drivers of migration to South Africa and, at the same time, migrants in South Africa have a strong obligation and desire to remit to impoverished relatives at home. This means that the food insecurity of household members in Zimbabwe is mitigated by remittances, even as remitting reduces disposable income for food purchase and leads to increased food insecurity in migrant households.

The articles in this special issue are indicative of lines of enquiry and methodologies that could fruitfully be deployed in other contexts. At the same time, while there is a clear need for much more research and generalization about the links between migration and food security, it is important that the policy implications of this exercise are not lost. At the global level, there is a clear gap in policy thinking about the interactions between migration, development and food security. Both agendas would benefit from a conversation with the other. Unfortunately, the fault does not only lie with migration policy-makers and thinkers. The international food security agenda is resolutely rural, focused on raising smallholder agricultural production, and pays very little attention to mobility, cross-border linkages, and flows of remittances and food. It is as if nobody moves in the world of international food security and nobody eats in the world of global migration and development.

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