

EMPLOYMENT, LIVELIHOOD AND POVERTY AMONG LOW-INCOME MIGRANTS: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The study theoretically explores the interconnections between employment, livelihood, and poverty among low-income migrants in urban settings, emphasising the livelihood approach as a holistic framework. Migration, driven by rural poverty and unemployment, significantly impacts urban labour markets, with migrants often engaged in informal sectors characterised by precarious work conditions. The livelihood framework identifies five asset types—natural, physical, human, financial, and social capital—that influence migrants' ability to sustain their livelihoods amidst economic uncertainty. Urban poverty is portrayed as multifaceted, encompassing not only low income but also inadequate housing, limited access to services, and social marginalisation. The paper highlights that while migration can diversify income sources, it often leads to exploitation and instability. The study calls for inclusive urban development policies that address the unique challenges faced by migrant communities, advocating for job creation, skill development, and social protection to enhance their livelihoods and integrate them into sustainable urban planning processes.

Keywords: Employment, Livelihood, Migration, Poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

The livelihood approach offers a holistic view of work, migration and poverty among low-income migrants in cities. Migration is one of the most important elements of the socio-economic change of emerging nations. It is intimately related to urbanisation, industry, globalisation and regional differences in development. Rural-to-urban migration has expanded considerably owing to poverty, unemployment, agricultural distress and the quest for improved living chances. Low-income migrants constitute a significant share of the urban labour market and are mostly engaged in informal industries, including construction, household work, street selling, transport services, waste management and small-scale manufacturing. The urban informal sector plays a significant role in the unorganised non-agricultural economy. Low-educated and low-skill-level workers in the unorganised sector have not tapped into the potential that growing markets present. This evidence indicates the need for skills upgrades for improved livelihood chances in metropolitan regions. Most of the poor work in the informal economy, where the fear of eviction, expulsion, seizure of property and essentially no social security insurance is omnipresent. Even parts of the urban population that are not income-poor experience deprivations in terms of

lack of access to sanitary living conditions, and their well-being is hampered by discrimination, social exclusion, crime and violence, insecurity of tenure, hazardous environmental conditions and lack of voice in governance. (National Urban Livelihood Mission, 2011).

Migration frequently gives possibilities to survive and make a living, but migrant workers, nonetheless, experience economic uncertainty, substandard housing, social marginalisation and exploitation. Theoretical discourses on livelihoods suggest that migration is both a result of and a tactic to cope with poverty. Migration may somewhat boost family income but does not definitely remove disadvantages caused by precarious work and lack of social protection. This study conceptually discusses the interrelated aspects of employment, livelihood and poverty among low-income migrants.

2. Livelihood analysis framework

A livelihoods approach to development relies on a conceptual framework that helps analyse and manage the complexity of livelihoods:

Livelihoods are more than income and include the following:

A livelihood is sustainable if it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation, and contribute net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels, both in the long and short term. (Chambers and Conway, 1992) The livelihood framework is a tool to identify the main factors affecting livelihoods and the relationships between them and to define the scope of and provide the analytical basis for livelihoods analysis to help those concerned with supporting the livelihoods of poor people to understand and manage their complexity; to become a shared point of reference for all concerned with supporting livelihoods, enabling the complementarity of contributions and the trade-offs between outcomes to be assessed; and to provide a basis for identifying appropriate objectives and interventions to support livelihoods. The paradigm is based on the assets that families or people utilise to develop their lives (Carney referenced in Rakodi 2002, 2009) The beginning point of the framework is the assets owned, controlled, claimed or otherwise accessible by the rural family. Assets are stocks of capital that may be used, directly or indirectly, to create the means of survival for the family or to maintain its material well-being at multiple levels above survival, which are constitutive of livelihoods. The five asset types include natural capital, physical capital, human capital, financial capital, and social capital.

Natural capital: The land, water and biological resources that are used by humans to provide means of subsistence. It is improved or supplemented when it is subjected to human control, which boosts its production. For certain purposes of livelihood analysis it is advantageous to conceive of natural capital as existing along a gradient from low to high agroecological potential. Physical Capital: It refers to all physical assets that help in

production and have the ability to generate revenue. They include land, housing, cattle, jewellery, agricultural tools and other production durables.

Human capital: Poor people are frequently considered to have just one main asset: their effort. Human capital comprises the health, education and nutrition embedded in individuals, which translate into skills and competencies that are potential sources of labour, management and entrepreneurial revenues.

Financial capital: Financial capital is the stock of money available to households. These are expected to primarily consist of savings and access to credit through loans, which allow families to make intertemporal changes in income that can be used for consumption, production, and investment.

Social capital: The term 'social capital' reflects the communal and broader social claims that individuals and families can draw on by virtue of their membership in social groups with varying degrees of inclusiveness in the wider society.

Livelihood strategies include coping techniques to react to shocks in the short term and adaptive strategies to improve conditions in the long term. Both assets and the uses to which they can be put are re-mediated by social factors consisting of social relations (including gender, class, age, and ethnicity); institutions (including rules and customs, land tenure, and markets in practice); and organisations (including associations, NGOs, local administration, and state agencies) by exogenous trends (economic trends like population, migration, technological change, relative prices, macro policy, and national and international economic trends) and by shocks (perspectives). They react to shifting demands and opportunities and adjust appropriately. There are three primary methods to which diverse combinations of asset-mediating processes-activities apply: agricultural intensification or extensification, livelihood diversification and migration. The first kind is ongoing or increased dependence on agriculture as a strategy, either by using more resources in conjunction with a given land area or by bringing more land into cultivation or grazing. Migration is one of the causes of diversity, which interacts with labour market issues in family and individual decision-making for survival.

The livelihood strategies' consequences on their livelihood security are some combination of features linked to income level, income stability, a decrease in unfavourable seasonal impacts and a reduction in the overall risk profile of the income portfolio. They generally include a variety of actions to establish asset bases and access to commodities and services for consumption. Livelihood outcomes might become either virtuous or vicious cycles.

3. Employment and Livelihood

The employment issue has been conceptualised in terms of the increasing imbalances between the growing labour force and population, on the one hand, and the current economic structure's capacity for productive

labour absorption, on the other. The poor rural economy causes people to move to metropolitan centers in pursuit of their livelihood. This results in an oversupply in the urban labour market since the limited diffusion of the contemporary high pay industry could not provide enough work possibilities. Poor families tend to employ survival tactics that are a composite of a varied portfolio of activities that cut across traditional economic sectors and transcend the rural-urban divide. Greater flexible labour markets involve greater switching of professions over a person's lifespan, and for low-salary and low-skill employment, they also frequently indicate a requirement to participate in many part-time activities to obtain a minimum acceptable level of income. Thus, the rural migrants going in quest of work possibilities are more likely to take up activities in the urban informal sector. In urban locations, the amount of surplus labour supply and poor productivity employment increases, thus worsening urban poverty.

Poverty is the inability of the person to meet certain minimal fundamental necessities. The inability is defined in terms of some amount of income or spending that is deemed essential to meet those basic demands. Those who cannot reach that level of income or spending are considered poor, while the rest are classed as non-poor. Urban poverty is due to the continual migration of the rural poor to urban regions in pursuit of livelihood. Their inability to find appropriate means of supporting themselves in the rural area leads to the expansion of slums in cities. The below-subsistence level of revenues flowing to workers in this industry inflates the proportion of people below the poverty line and forces them to live in slums. Slums and squatter communities are the physical embodiment of poverty in cities and towns and are a reflection of what researchers term 'a dimension of social exclusion'. According to the Census of India (2001), 41.6 per cent of the country's slum inhabitants are in cities with more than 1 million people. Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai account for nearly one-fourth of the total slum residents. The people living in slums belong to the lower income categories, and it is believed that their potential to save and contribute to the economic systems is restricted. The main cause for the emergence of slums is the migration of poor rural people to economically better-off cities in search of work and livelihood. Such migrants prefer to occupy space on government land that is neglected and in existing slums, imposing further strain on urban space as they find it difficult to afford housing in normal parts of cities. In the process, fast urbanisation feeds into miseries and increases the slum population, especially in the absence of proper transformation of the cities in terms of the availability of facilities and cheap housing. The slum dwellers, however poor, have their own unique ways of livelihood. They do manage to cover their own expenses using their own revenue and resources. The majority of the slum dwellers work in different occupations, contributing to the production process. Besides, the fact that a portion of their income is remitted back home shows the slum residents do build savings depending upon the condition and amount of earnings.

A livelihood systems paradigm provides a useful lens for analysing poverty since it underlines the relevance not just of economic activities, but also of reproduction, consumption and social interactions in guaranteeing livelihoods. This argument is especially true in an urban setting, where poverty is sometimes unseen, living in the cracks of cities, towns and poorer communities and inside the interstices of low-income homes themselves.

4. Literature Review

Research on the job status, life, and poverty of low-income migrants shows that their situation is very poor. It brings forth concerns related to the techniques evolved by people from low-income families to cope with the vulnerabilities of the urban labour market. The key method for poverty reduction in the mid-1990s was the livelihood approach. A frequent finding in poverty research is that public provision tends to be biased towards the better-off and more accessible locations, communities and social groups. This situation adds to the material deprivation and poor future prospects already faced by the poor because of inadequate levels of assets and income (World Bank, 1990; Lipton and Gaag, 1993). The growing focus on urban livelihoods is based on a broad acknowledgement of the fact that many segments of the urban poor families in developing nations are vulnerable in relation to their sustainable livelihood systems (Rakodi 1995).

In developing nations, households generally choose several livelihood strategies to diversify their livelihoods in the face of social, economic, political, environmental and historical constraints. The sustainable livelihoods framework analyses the ways in which the ability of households and Communities may pursue or be disallowed from pursuing different livelihood strategies, including migration, in response to prevailing conditions, which affects their well-being and vulnerability to adverse circumstances. The access to different forms of 'livelihood resources' (human, physical, social and environmental capital) and the role 'formal and informal institutions and organisations' play in facilitating or impeding access to alternative livelihood strategies are of particular importance in this process (Scoones 1998). While economic theories consider migration as an adjustment to disequilibria (e.g., intra-sectoral pay discrepancy), a livelihoods perspective sees migration as one of the ways that families and communities use to diversify and sustain well-being (de Haan, 2002). The livelihoods framework covers a wide range of migration causation, from monetary and non-monetary factors to voluntary and forced migration. Decisions are made within a broad context of factors at the micro-level (individual and household circumstances and decision-making), meso-level (socio-economic conditions at source and destination areas) and macro-level (Kothari, 2002).

4.1 Urban poverty and livelihoods

Poverty line analysis based on household consumption indicators does not reflect all the elements of poverty, particularly from the perspective of the impoverished people themselves. Poverty is not only about poor earnings but also employs larger ideas of degradation and instability. Deprivation is the denial of a given level of functioning or competence to a person. Chambers (1983; 1989) adds physical weakness, isolation, susceptibility and helplessness to lack of income and possessions. Starting with income poverty as the most quantifiable, a pyramid is recognised to access common pool resources, state-supplied goods, assets, dignity and autonomy. A review of the research on urban poverty indicates that although the shocks and pressures to which individuals are sensitive are linked to unique events and situations, impoverished men and women in cities often experience a comparable set of causes of vulnerability. These may be roughly classified as sources of

vulnerability attributable to the social context of cities, the nature of the urban economy, the urban environment and urban systems of governance. The urban poor, therefore, have to subsist by engaging in a range of cash-producing activities. In the majority of developing cities the bulk of these revenue-producing activities occur in the informal sector.

Thus, under the livelihood framework, poverty is not only distinguished by a lack of assets and the incapacity to create a portfolio of them but also by the lack of choice with regard to alternative coping techniques. The poorest and most vulnerable families are driven into tactics that allow them to survive, but not to enhance their wellbeing. In urban areas, households try to mobilise resources and opportunities and to combine these into a livelihood strategy, which is a mix of labour market involvement, savings, borrowing and investment, productive and reproductive activities, income, labour and asset pooling, and social networking (Grown and Sebstad cited in Rakodi 2002). Households and individuals change the mix according to their personal situation and the changing milieu in which they live. A household strategy is based on economic activities but may be supplemented by and overlap with migration movements, maintenance of ties with rural areas, urban food production, decisions about access to services such as education and housing, and participation in social networks.

Livelihood methods have argued that the conceptualisation of impoverished people as 'passive' or 'deprived' is challenged by the need for a strengths or assets approach. A core element of the strategy is the need to appreciate that the poor do not necessarily have cash or other savings, but they do have other material or non-material assets – their health, their labour, their knowledge and skills, their friends and family and the natural resources around them. A true grasp of these assets is needed in livelihood methods in order to recognise the potential they may bring and where restrictions may exist. The argument of the proponents is that to start with an analysis of needs is less conceptually acceptable, less empirically sound and of less practical benefit than to start with an analysis of strengths. However, it has also been stated that there is a concern that this focus may limit policy and activities to families who have some assets that they can develop upon and ignore the poorest and the destitute who may be essentially assetless (Rakodi 2002).

Errol D'Souza (2001) has stressed the issue of secure livelihoods. The principle of equality and opportunity provides the reason, and the notion of secure livelihoods is the right vehicle for harnessing the full effect of this principle.

4.2 Migration within Livelihood Strategies

The focus here is on the problem of migration as part of the labour usage undertaken by rural families in their search for a better life. Migration is an important livelihood diversification and survival strategy for poor and non-poor families throughout most of the developing globe. Where resources are few, moving away may be the major way people improve their lives and feel better off. Whole populations may be on circular migratory

patterns in certain cases, such as in dangerous regions such as rural drylands. Other homes or groups in similar circumstances may send out surplus labour on a seasonal basis to provide remittances or build up savings. These might be used to sustain consumption in slack seasons, offer insurance against shocks or support investment.

Severe poverty may “push” individuals to migrate permanently, thereby exacerbating deprivation in the absence of insurance against loss of livelihood. Migration procedures are often entrenched in social and cultural interactions, historically and mediated via familial networks. This may include promoting movement for certain demographic and ethnic groups while excluding others. The poor are extremely exposed to food insecurity and other harmful impacts from risk, shocks and stress, which are exacerbated by bad conditions and the absence of social support and livelihood stability (Chambers 1989, quoted in Ellis 2000). Thus, the poor are the most likely to need livelihood diversification options such as migration. But the main message of the livelihoods framework is that the poor are a heterogeneous population, with varying access to resources and institutions and, consequently, various capacities to adopt measures such as migration.

Migration is a well-documented phenomenon, and there is a lot of work available in this area that provides intriguing insights into the techniques employed by individuals, families, or communities to improve their livelihoods (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003; Haan, 2000). The theoretical literature and empirical evidence concerning migration decisions have been grouped into two approaches:

- (i) individual utility maximisation behaviour (Todaro, 1969; Harris and Todaro, 1970) and
- (ii) intertemporal family contracts (Stark, 1990; Stark and Bloom, 1985; Stark and Lucas, 1988) In the former case, the decision to migrate to cities would be determined by wage differentials plus the expected probability of employment at the destination. High rural urban migration can continue even when high urban unemployment rates exist and are known to the potential migrants. If the migrant predicts a relatively low likelihood of obtaining a regular wage job in the first period but expects the probability to improve with time, then it would be reasonable for him to move. Intertemporal family contract models of migration assume that movement is a risk diversification strategy by households and a market imperfection in rural capital markets. (Collier and Lal, 1986; Stark, 1982). The main idea of these alternatives models based on household utility maximisation is that the choice to move is not chosen by an individual, but household members also play a part.

Economic theories consider migration as a choice of people who want to improve their economic situation. Much sociological and anthropological literature has viewed migration in a negative context. Migration occurs as a last resort of the poor in response to economic, demographic and environmental shocks leading to their exploitation and further impoverishment (de Haan 1999). In recent years there has been growing interest in a more balanced perspective on migration in the sustainable livelihoods framework (see de Haan and Rogaly 2002). This demonstrates that:

- 1) Some people do move in response to crisis, for many people migration is also a key livelihood strategy in the face of physical, economic, social and political adversity; and
- 2) The effects poverty and vulnerability have on migration and the consequences of migration for well-being are very context-specific.

Upward income mobility involving locational (rural-urban), occupational and industrial shifts of the individuals and their incomes along with progressively better economic opportunities is considered to be one of the most important features of economic growth. (Kuznets, 1966). It is the urban economy that is normally expected to give chances for increasing productivity by creating jobs in the high-productivity industrial sector and contributes to eliminating abject poverty (Mills and Becker, 1986). Urbanisation, however, has not been effective in fulfilling this role in many Third World countries. The present economic structure has not been able to productively absorb the rising labour force.

Even with a decelerated migration of rural migrants to the metropolis, planners and policymakers are faced with one of their most perplexing difficulties: the productive absorption of the labour force (Todaro 1978). The economy-wide implications of the unrestricted supply of labour in relation to demand include open unemployment, underemployment, and poor productivity, which lead to abject poverty for a large percentage of people in the cities. The proliferation of slums, not only because of the housing constraint but also of the poor incomes of the workers engaged in low-productivity jobs, has become an endemic aspect of the process of urbanisation in the developing nations.

One of the oldest hypotheses, the 'over-urbanisation thesis', suggests that deterioration in the land-man ratio in the agricultural sector causes the rural people to relocate to urban regions in pursuit of livelihood (Hoselitz 1957). " Subsequently, the rural migrant workers are believed to create a condition of unlimited supply of labour in the urban job market, especially in industry, in the wake of limited possibilities for labour absorption in the organised sector. "This results in a residual workforce absorption in the informal sector, which is believed to be typically marked by poor productivity. The below-subsistence level of salaries for workers in this sector exaggerates the proportion of people below the poverty line and drives them to live in slums. Some of these claims are formulated by the probabilistic models, which claim that the rural-urban predicted income differences are significantly bigger for the rural poor than for the non-poor, and hence the poor have a stronger inclination to move to urban regions (Harris-Todaro 1970; Todaro 1969). The migration process occurred in two stages. Migrants entered the urban traditional sector (informal sector) in the first stage owing to their restricted access to the modern sector (formal sector). In the second stage, with the growth in length of stay, workers in the urban traditional sector are likely to gain skills and go on to the formal sector or what he termed 'eventual accomplishment of a more permanent modern-sector job'.

The spill-over theory argues that rural poverty fuels urban poverty. The mechanism is provided by the persistence of the urban informal sector due to rural-to-urban migration and the overlap between urban informal sector employment and urban poverty. Urban 'pull' factors meet the rural 'push' variables, causing urban in-migration and contributing to the labour supply.

These concepts, however, have been contested at several levels. Banerjee and Kanbur (1981) pointed out that the inclination to move is greater among the medium-income groups than the bottom or upper-income groups. To conclude that impoverished villagers are more inclined to move from the fact that poor communities expel more migrants commits an ecological fallacy (Lipton, 1980). In addition, the explanation of urban poverty in terms of rural spillover has also been questioned on empirical grounds (Mitra 1992, Mills and Mitra 1997). No evidence was discovered by Papola (1981) and Banerjee (1986) to support the premise that migrants were concentrated in the bottom rungs of activity, the informal service sector.

Banerjee and Bucci (1994) discuss the Delhi labour market. It was established that around one-half of the rural migrants migrated after pre-arranging a job, after getting guarantees of employment from an urban-based source. Informal sector occupations are pull factors for migration, not only a stopgap arrangement, as the probability model implies.

The argument here is that migrants in low-income families seek to live close to employment, and the function of the contact is not limited to just information about jobs. The co-villagers, relatives, kin, and friends have a strong inclination to reside in the area of the early settlers, mainly because the employment gained through connections is relatively comparable to the jobs of the individuals, especially in the case of manual and unskilled jobs, as reported by Banerjee (1984). In minor manufacturing and maintenance operations, self-employed workers usually have their firms on family premises (Sethuraman 1976). Sometimes the danger of destruction arises from their incursion onto public land, and continual observation of the unit of operation may be necessary. Many of them choose to live near the job because of the reduced cost of living, communal latrines, and supply of drinking water.

The greater the cultural and ethnic diversity of an area or country, the more likely it is that migrants will tend to live in and around the regions where their relatives reside. Also, the actions of the early entrants and late entrants are largely the same. Sharing family or individual endowments is almost a necessity in achieving economic objectives.

Previous studies have highlighted the high prevalence of movement among low-income families in the city, as well as the relevance of contact-based migration in the context of job seeking. Generally rural migrants are successful in acquiring their first choice of jobs. Information obtained from metropolitan connections shapes job expectations. Thus, the job hunt after getting the first urban position is not spectacular, which means that

employment obtained via personal relationships is considered the ultimate goal (Banerjee, 1986, 1991; Banerjee & Bucci, 1994). The occupations of the contact individuals and the new entrants tend to be identical due to inadequate knowledge of the contact individuals, which causes congestion and a frequency of low pay rates in certain activities. This physical segmentation of the employment market is exacerbated by the heterogeneity of the city's economic structure, with specialised industries located in distinct zones (Dupont & Mitra, 1995).

Individual inclinations to live in the vicinity of the workplace and in the regions where their contact individuals dwell also lead to surplus supplies of labour, poor bargaining power for the workers and, consequently, meagre salaries (Mitra, 1992, 2004).

It is not the purpose to evaluate this large literature on a fascinating issue but merely to illustrate how migration as part of livelihood strategy should be accommodated in the framework. Who migrates, what pattern and kind of migration are created, and what consequences – short or long term – follow for the lives of the families rely on the capabilities and asset base of the households and access to opportunities via information. In this paradigm, for the poor families, migration is a coping method by dispersing risk geographically and occupationally, while for the other households it is an accumulation strategy.

4.3 Livelihood concerns in Cities

"The nature of urban poverty is the outcome of the continuous influx of rural poor into the urban areas in search of employment, their failure to earn sufficient means for their sustenance there and the consequent growth of pavement and slum life in the cities," observe Dandekar and Rath (1971).

The literature on the new urban economics explains the existence, size, and forms of urban areas. It sees the city as a market reaction to possibilities for production and revenue (Mills, 1967). The rise of numerous economic activities has created job possibilities of various sorts in different regions of the city. The job searchers react to such chances and changes taking place in the city according to their skills and capabilities. To save their commuting expenses, they dwell in and near their workplaces. Such behaviour places a demand on land and housing. The emergence of slums and low-income families is an indication of the number of elements that operate concurrently to form and impact the complex process of urbanisation. The development of slums highlights the link between the alteration of urban space, population migrations and social recompositions, which are all essential elements impacting the urbanisation process and city planning.

Mitra (2010, 2012) discusses the importance of social capital. The idea of "social capital" provides a substantial foundation for understanding how urban labour markets work in developing nations. The research links social capital (conceptualised in terms of different social networks) to its important responsibilities in supplying job market information to low-income homeowners in metropolitan locations. Indeed, social relationships are useful

for most workers at the bottom rungs of the internal sector, helping them secure a minimal source of subsistence.

Mitra (1994) studies the pattern of urbanisation, especially city growth in India; the employment structure in the cities; the impact of rural-urban population movement on the urban informal sector; the interlinkages between rural and urban poverty; the incidence of slum population and shortage of basic amenities in various cities; and the residual absorption of slum inhabitants in low-productivity activities. To overcome these challenges, it stresses the significance of creating gainful work in the urban regions. Mohapatra (2009) explains the reasons and motivations of rural-urban migration in general and the emergence of slums in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, in particular. It demonstrates that following relocation from their original regions, the economic situation of the slum inhabitants, mostly scheduled caste and scheduled tribes in Bhubaneswar, improved. Findings of his research reveal that the “push” factors in the rural regions, rather than “pull” factors, comprise the primary role in the process of rural-urban migration and construction of slums in the urban areas.

In the context of the urban difficulties of emerging nations, much concern has been voiced about the geographical distribution of people and the size distribution of cities. One of the primary problems is that large cities in the emerging nations are too huge or are expanding too fast, making them fiscally and administratively unmanageable, creating regional economic disparities, political turmoil and substantial urban disamenities, including crime, pollution and congestion.

Hence, there is a lack of research on the economic activities of slum dwellers. Much of the work on urban poverty and livelihood systems has drawn conceptually and methodologically from studies of rural poverty. The survival of the low-income families in metropolitan environments has been a source of major concern in development economics research. No comprehensive research has been done and concluded on the slum’s economic culture. There have been no research studies to reduce poverty and vulnerability among urban poor households by enabling them to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, leading to an appreciable improvement in their livelihoods on a sustainable basis through building strong grassroots-level institutions for the poor.

6. Summary

The livelihood framework is distinct from conventional economic models that interpret migration as a function of wage differentials and labour market imbalances. The livelihood framework considers migration as a survival and coping strategy of poor households confronted with economic insecurity, limited rural opportunities and social vulnerabilities. Low-income migrants diversify their livelihood base via several employment and informal sector activities to maintain themselves in the face of uncertainty and adversity.

The research shows that urban poverty is not only a matter of low income but also a complex state, which includes precarious work, substandard housing, limited access to essential services, social marginalisation and susceptibility to exploitation. The high proportion of migrants in informal employment exposes them to unpredictable pay, unsafe working conditions and lack of social security protection. Rapid urbanisation and poor infrastructure and inexpensive housing have also resulted in the proliferation of slums and squatter communities that are obvious signs of urban poverty.

The livelihood approach emphasises both the agency and resilience of migrant families. Migrants sustain numerous livelihood activities despite harsh conditions, create indigenous coping strategies, contribute to urban production systems and assist rural families via remittances. Access to different types of capital (human, social, financial and physical resources) and institutional frameworks that either enable or hinder possibilities determine their livelihood choices.

Therefore, the difficulties of low-income migrants call for solutions beyond income-based poverty alleviation. Inclusive urban development policies are needed to provide livelihood stability via job creation, skill development, affordable housing, social protection, health care, education and access to essential urban amenities. Sustainable urban development can only be realised if migrant communities are included in urban planning and governance processes and are acknowledged as key contributors to economic growth and social change.

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