During the webinar your microphone will be muted, however you can send questions for the presenter using the Q&A button.

If time permits there may be opportunity for further questions at the end of the presentation.

There will be polls included in this presentation, you will have 1 minute per question to respond.

The speaker column can be minimized using the options in the top left corner of the tab.

This webinar will be recorded and the recording will be added on UNU-WIDER YouTube channel.

WIDER Webinar | Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak | Yale University
Discussant | Barbara Barungi | Imara Africa Consulting
Chair: Kunal Sen

Responding to COVID-19 in developing countries

30 June 2020
Mobility and Migration during COVID-19
Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak
Yale University
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Observed trends:

Migration episodes of <12 months:
- Substantial fraction of households

What is the fraction among households in the United States?
A. <1%
B. 1-5%
C. 5-15%
D. >15%
Why Focus on Migrants?
...short-term migration is a popular livelihood strategy in many developing nations

Observed trends:

- Migration episodes of <12 months:
  - Substantial fraction of households
  - Comparison: 0.2% of U.S.

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- Concentrated among identifiable regions and sub-populations
  - Typically poor, often rural
  - 2-3 times national average

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Why Focus on Migrants?

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**Migration episodes of <12 months:**
- Substantial fraction of households
- Comparison: 0.2% of U.S.
- Concentrated among identifiable regions and sub-populations
- Typically poor, often rural
- 2-3 times national average
- Concentrated at specific times of year
- Peak season accounts for more than half of annual rate
There is room for policy work to understand the local characteristics of migration

Policy implications:

Policy analysis should focus on:

- Which populations are at risk?
  - Market-level effects in areas with high migration
  - Migration linkages to areas of high exposure
- What time of year are they at risk?
  - Migration occurs when local opportunities are scarce
  - Often related to agricultural cycle
  - Early return means future income will be lower

There is room for policy work to understand the local characteristics of migration
## Samples studied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government to Government (G2G) Visa Lottery</strong></td>
<td>Sample of households that participated in a visa lottery which awarded visas for Bangladeshis to work in Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cox’s Bazar Panel Survey</strong></td>
<td>Representative sample of both refugees and Bangladeshis living in the refugee affected Cox’s Bazar district of southern Bangladesh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Lean Season</strong></td>
<td>Sample of rural, landless households in agricultural communities in Northern Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nepal Seasonal Migration</strong></td>
<td>Sample of rural, poor low-income households from two of the poorer districts in Nepal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evidence on migration and income during COVID from a visa lottery

The effect of migration on earnings:

Previously, households that migrated due to the visa lottery earned 18-100% more than lottery losers.

COVID-19 lowered income by 31% among non-migrant households.

What happened to income for migrant households after COVID-19?
A. It remained the same.
B. It fell, but not by as much.
C. It fell by the same amount.
D. It fell by even more.
Lottery winners have gone from being better off to being worse off than lottery losers.

Previously, households that migrated due to the visa lottery earned 18-100% more than lottery losers.

COVID-19 lowered income by 31% among non-migrant households.

Migrant households are even worse off and earn 36% less than non-migrant households during COVID-19.
Income and food security among migrant families have dropped more than income and food security among non-migrant families across multiple samples.
Remittance income declined for migrant-sending households in Nepal & Bangladesh

**Bangladesh**
- Remittances represent a disproportionate share of income losses for both lottery winners and losers.

**Nepal**
- Households in Western Terai received an average of 4900 NPR in late 2019
- This fell to 1,700 NPR last month

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*Income Losses by Category*

*Total Remittances*

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Observed trends:

- Returnees
  - Because many migrants were forced to return
  - Both from India and from cities in Nepal

Male Migration

- Observed trends:
  - Returnees
    - Because many migrants were forced to return
    - Both from India and from cities in Nepal
...and also because those still away are sending less money back

Observed trends:

- Remittances also drop
  - Migrants still away are also sending less money back home
  - Drops 57% from ~Rs. 4600 to Rs. 2000
Reasons why migrants don’t make up lost remittance income in local labor markets

Traditional barriers to reintegration for returning migrants:
• Labor market skills from migration do not transfer to local occupations
• Loss of economic or social network while migrant is away

New barrier unique to COVID-19: Stigma from risk of illness
• In a BRAC survey, 40% of returnees say they were not supported by friends and relatives.
• Visa lottery winners are 25% less likely to attend Friday payers.
  • There is no difference in prayer overall, only the social component.
• In Cox’s Bazaar, people with COVID symptoms are 33% more likely to be denied medical treatment if they traveled in the past two weeks.
Returnee Presence is associated with COVID-19 symptoms

- Strong correlation between returning migrants and self-reported common COVID-19 symptoms
- In both Cox’s Bazar and visa lottery samples, likelihood of reporting symptoms at least doubles for households reporting a returning migrant
- The relationship is much weaker in the NLS sample, which consists of primarily domestic migrants

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At the meso-level, COVID incidence is positively correlated with infection intensity at migration destinations.

- X-axis plots the exposure-intensity measure based on migration linkages to international destinations by district.
- This is positively correlated with the number of quarantines (left) and number of distress calls (right) per district.

[Graphs showing correlation between exposure intensity and quarantines/distress calls]

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Food security among migrant families is already worse than in a typical lean season.
The impact on migrant households will be even greater during times of year when local labor productivity is typically low.
The impact on migrant households will be even greater during times of year when local labor productivity is typically low.
Executive Summary of migration-COVID links evident in the data

- Remittances of migrant workers are an important source of income for households in South Asia
- Migrant sending households have experienced sharper declines in income
- Migrant returnee presence in the community is associated with COVID-19 symptoms
- Returning migrants face stigma, which makes labor market reintegration difficult

Policy Implication

WB estimates a 22% drop in remittances in South Asia
Bangladesh only collected 1.08 billion USD in April 2020, a 25% YOY drop from Apr 2019

Ensuring that households that rely on remittances meet their basic need should be a priority
Support migrants to reintegrate into local labor markets or repatriate to destinations
Impending lean seasons in Nepal and Bangladesh may exacerbate these effects

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