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Mapping the Linkages Between Food Security, Inequality, Migration, and Development in the Global South

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Introduction

In 2018, Louise Arbour, former UN Special Representative for Migration and lead architect of the Global Compact for Migration, articulated the relationship between migration and development in highly optimistic and celebratory terms (Arbour, 2018). Her comments focused on the voluntary forms of migration and their related development consequences. International migration was characterised by Arbour as an "overwhelmingly positive" process for migrants as well as their sending and receiving communities, a "potent motor for development", and an "instrument of prosperity, not as a failure of development". She went on to emphasise that migration and development can be mutually supportive processes, operating as a "virtuous circle" that involves beneficial activities, practices, and processes which lead to equally progressive results.

This untempered enthusiasm for migrants as agents of development exemplifies the contemporary framework of "migration and development" that

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emphasizes the beneficial development-based outcomes of migration for both sending and receiving countries (Faist & Fauser, 2011). The "migration and development nexus" has received much attention from international organisations and national governments. It includes some consideration of the various forms of development as drivers of migration, the linkages between globalisation and migration, and the potential for connecting these two aspects in policy design and execution. Yet, as Crawley et al. (2022) have recently argued, the complex set of structural inequalities that affect migration at local, national, and regional scales and shape its consequences for migrants, their sending communities, and others, have not received adequate critical attention. As Crawley (2018) suggests, the "developmental potential of migration is neither straightforward nor inevitable".

Just as the relationship between inequality, migration, and development remains under addressed, the linkages between food security, migration, and development have been similarly neglected (Anns, 2020; Carney & Krause, 2020; Crush, 2012, 2013; Orjuela-Grimm et al., 2022). Crush (2012, 2013) has previously noted that the key theme of food security has been largely overlooked in the discourse on migration and development, as well as in migration studies. For example, in their discussion on famine-led migration, Sadliwala and de Waal (2018) have underscored the cursory reference to food insecurity in the Global Migration Compact to draw attention to the disregarded connections between acute food crises and population mobility. These omissions are highly problematic since food is essential for survival and food security constitutes a core measure of human security and human well-being. As a starting point, Crush (2013) identifies two distinctive dimensions to the linkages between migration, development, and food security: first, the various ways in which migrants take care of their food needs, and second, the ways in which they utilise their wages in the destination country. In addition, Crush and Caesar (2017) propose a research and policy focus on two additional linkages: the relationship between remittances and the food security of both senders and recipients, and the reasons for variability in migrant food security in relation to South-South migration. Carney and Krause (2020) further suggest that a focus is needed on the food security of "migrants on the move". All these aspects can be concretely connected with the configurations of inequality in the origin and destination areas and the spaces in-between.

This chapter provides a corrective in several ways. First, we address their relevance to the ongoing discussion on migration and development within academic and policy circles. We broaden this dialogue beyond regular population flows to and from countries in the Global South to include involuntary and irregular forms of migration. Third, we treat food security and inequality

as central themes to capture the multidimensional linkages between migration and development in the context of diverse forms of cross-border and international migratory flows in the Global South. Drawing on a newer body of studies that focus on food security and South-South migration, we highlight the various interactions between migration, food security, and inequality in the Global South.

Inequality, Migration, and Food Security

UNDESA (2015) outlines two key dimensions of inequality: inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcomes. Inequality of opportunity occurs in terms of unequal access to services such as education, health, or employment. Inequality of outcomes occurs when individuals have uneven living standards related to disparities in wealth/incomes, health, education, and food security. Inequalities associated with migration are also often intersectional and multidimensional and tied to structural inequalities within and between countries in the Global South and North (UNU, 2022). Migration processes are a highly visible reflection of global inequalities in terms of wages, labour market conditions, opportunities available to individuals and groups, and general living standards (Crawley, 2018). Migration as a process and migrants as social actors are embedded in "elementary mechanisms" and landscapes of inequality in both origin and destination areas with opportunity and outcomes stretched over space (Safi, 2020). Furthermore, migration can trigger new inequalities and intensify existing asymmetries in both the sending and receiving areas (see also Crawley and Yete this volume).

Safi (2020) identifies three intersecting channels through which migration interacts with inequality dynamics: economic, legal, and ethno-racial. Economically, as a key feature of the capitalist system, international migration nourishes stratified and segmented exploitative labour regimes in terms of types of work available, wages, and other benefits. Labour migrants fall (and often fail) predominantly in poorly remunerated, less stable, and less attractive employment towards the bottom end of the labour market. Legal processes of categorisation through a variety of migrant statuses (temporary workers, irregular migrants, students, accompanying spouses, asylum-seekers, refugees, seasonal migrants), and border control procedures affecting modes of entry, bring differential rewards and benefits. As non-citizens, most migrant groups receive fewer rights and protections. As the final aspect of social stratification, other cross-cutting divisions, especially gender,

nationality, ethnicity, and race, exert a decisive influence over access to occupations and positions in the labour market. The ethno-racial categorisation of migrants and related biases exert a strong impact on the economic, social, and political rights of migrants and on uneven access to resources.

Although discussed primarily for South-North migration, the concept of "migrant precarity" and "hyper-precarity" has been used to emphasise their "lifeworlds that are inflected with uncertainty and instability" (Lewis et al., 2015, 581). This condition of precariousness can typify the migrants' working and living conditions, which have a strong impact on their own food insecurity, those of their households in these receiving settings, and their dependents in the sending areas. Similarly, "migrant marginality" highlights the disadvantages and vulnerabilities faced by various categories of migrants and this marginalisation is seen as a predecessor to entrenched inequalities (Netshikulwe et al., 2022). Food insecurity is thus a stark outcome of migrant precarity (Ramachandran et al., 2023). Equally importantly, it is a crucial indicator of the existing social and economic inequalities with which individuals and groups are associated.

As Klassen and Murphy (2020,1) have noted, "access to food is an important marker of how well a society distributes its wealth, reflecting the state of political accountability, economic redistribution, and the society's commitment to uphold the right to food". Shaped by the four dimensions of food availability, food access, food utilisation, and food stability, food security occurs when individuals, households, and groups have physical and economic access to safe and nutritious foods that fulfil their dietary requirements and food preferences for active, healthy lives. Food security and insecurity are inextricably intertwined with poverty and inequality. If migration is a symbol and expression of inequality within and across countries globally, including those in the Global South, then food security is a key measure and expression of these asymmetries.

Food Security, Migration Aspirations, and Actions

An emerging body of work has confirmed that food insecurity tied to escalating inequalities and asymmetries within and across countries and regions can fundamentally influence migration aspirations, intentions, and behaviours. At the macro-scale, Smith and Wesselbaum (2022) find a

significant positive correlation between food insecurity at origin and out-migration, and a positive correlation between out-migration and within-country inequality in food insecurity. At the regional scale, Sadiddin et al. (2019) show that in sub-Saharan Africa, food insecurity raises the probability of individual desire to migrate to another country and this aspiration increases with worsening food insecurity. At the household level, personal and/or external shocks, such as job losses, declines in household income, food price hikes, and inflation, inevitably exacerbate the food insecurity of individuals and families and drive out-migration. A recent longitudinal study in southwest Ethiopia, for example, documents an increased migration propensity among young male and female members in households that had suffered severe food insecurity or farm loss shocks (Lindstrom et al., 2022).

Migration-related aspirations are generally higher among individuals and households that face regular deficits in sufficient quantities of nutritious food. Migration is a common livelihood and risk diversification strategy for marginal households facing food insecurity due to economic shocks (Smith & Floro, 2020). Poverty and food insecurity have been identified as key inter-linked determinants of internal migration in the Global South (Choitani, 2017). However, their relationship with international migration is not uncomplicated due to the higher barriers and risks associated with such movements. The nuances of these linkages, and the role of food security and insecurity in migration dynamics, are less understood, and the absence of in-depth research hampers an adequate understanding of the connections. Clearly, the poorest facing severe food insecurity may not be able to migrate despite strong aspirations to do so because of weak access to formal channels of migration. When they do move, it may be across shorter distances to neighbouring countries and using risky informal channels. Short- and long-term migration from rural communities in the South can also exacerbate gender-based inequalities. In Nepal, for example, improved food security from migrant remittances has occurred but at the expense of intensified gender inequality (Kim et al., 2019). While male Nepali migrants face tough working conditions in India, the women left behind have to assume complete responsibility for farming, as well as housework and child care.

Exogenous factors and other developments that deepen existing disparities between individuals, households, and groups have cascading detrimental effects on food insecurity and can lead to increased migratory flows to other countries. A combination of income inequality, poverty, social insecurity, violence, and dire effects of climate-related events have significantly increased food insecurity and, in turn, generated "knock-on effects" including migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (IOM and WFP,

2022; WFP, 2017b). Carney (2015) draws attention to what she calls an "unending hunger" caused by deepened structural inequalities in Mexico with international migration as a common coping strategy. As one outcome of existing and/or intensifying local inequality in migrant-sending areas, food insecurity can thus operate as a powerful "push factor" for migration in most areas of the Global South. Smith and Floro (2020) study the linkages between food insecurity, gender, and migration desires and behaviour in low- and middle-income countries. They argue that migration intentions increase monotonically, and migration preparations decrease with the severity of food insecurity. Women are less likely to have migration intentions and preparations due to gender-based inequalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp relief the robust connections between food security, inequality, and mobility, with short-term and long-term implications for migratory dynamics, migrants in destination settings, and their sending communities. The pandemic triggered an unprecedented and multidimensional crisis of inequality, including gender-based inequities, intensified extreme poverty, and heightened food insecurity (Crush & Si, 2020). COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing imbalances in the labour market and unravelled recent efforts to lower economic disparities on a global scale (Narayan et al., 2022). Global travel bans, lockdowns, and other public health measures to limit contagion have produced disproportionate negative effects on the socioeconomic and health well-being of migrants. Income losses, limited access to relief measures, greater exposure due to their work and living conditions, increased remittance responsibilities, and rising anti-migrant tendencies have exerted new pressures, leading to a significant deterioration of migrant food security (Crush et al., 2021). Although its full effects are still unfolding, some new studies have suggested that migration surges will be long-term global effects of the pandemic and related structural changes (Smith & Wesselbaum, 2020). Longitudinal surveys with Guatemalan farmers recorded a recent three-fold increase in emigration intentions (Ceballos et al., 2022). Despite some improvements in incomes, food security, and dietary diversity, over half of the households were borrowing to cope and had not yet fully recovered from pandemic-related shocks.

Crises, Food Insecurity, and Survival Migration

The linkages between South-South migration, inequality, and food security are particularly transparent with respect to involuntary forms of migration (Chikanda et al., 2020). The *Global Report on Food Crises* notes that in 2017, some 15.3 million persons were displaced by six of the world's worst conflict-related food crises: in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan, Northeast Nigeria, and Somalia (FSIN, 2018). In conflict situations, many individuals experience what Carney (2019) has described as "food-specific violence". Access to food resources and food availability can be weaponised and used to control certain groups, greatly deepening power asymmetries between individuals and communities. The destruction of food sources and rural infrastructure, coalescing with large-scale population movements and other events such as natural disasters, can forge pervasive chronic food insecurity (Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2018). Widespread inequality can persist in crisis-affected settings even after violent conflicts end (Bircan et al., 2010). Access to food resources and food availability can influence the dynamics of violent conflicts. Food insecurity grievances, especially in areas with weaker food supplies, can escalate into violent social and political struggles (Koren & Bagozzi, 2016). Economic hardship and severe forms of food insecurity were major contributory factors to the flight of Syrian refugees to Jordan and Lebanon, although the act of migration only worsened their food insecurity (WFP, 2017a).

Although violent conflict has long been seen as one of the main drivers of enforced "survival migration" (Betts, 2013), recognition of the nexus between conflict, food insecurity, and survival migration is more recent. The 2017 *Global Report on Food Crises,* for example, identifies conflict and the widespread instability it causes as key determinants of acute food insecurity (FSIN, 2017). Food insecurity is also an important contributing factor in the occurrence and severity of the armed conflicts and generalised violence that result in large-scale cross-border migrations in the Global South (WFP, 2017a). Violent conflict severely disrupts and damages regular social and economic processes tied to food systems, such as crop production, the operation of markets and trade, and the circulation of food and other commodities. Vulnerable households lose access to a wide range of resources necessary for survival, and migration becomes necessary to escape and survive (FAO, 2016). Conflict and crisis generate acute and chronic food insecurity and operate as the main determinant of large-scale displacement (WFP and FAO, 2022). Thus, violent conflict, forced migration, and food insecurity often feed into and intensify each other (FAO and IFPRI, 2017).

Food insecurity is also a ubiquitous feature of prolonged economic crisis. Global economic crises and recessionary periods exacerbate deeply embedded socioeconomic hierarchies and produce food security shocks, especially for marginal households with meagre financial resources. Political mismanagement, financial collapse, and hyperinflation contributed to sharp economic contraction, very high unemployment levels, accompanied by widespread deterioration in food access, surges in food costs, and a large-scale exodus to neighbouring countries. Carril-Caccia et al. (2022) estimate that severe food crises affect the directionality of migration, which is increasingly heading to other countries in the Global South. Venezuela and Zimbabwe are good examples in different regions of the Global South. Massive shortages of basic food commodities tied to the country's economic crisis were the final precipitants of out-migration for many Venezuelan migrants to other countries in Latin America (Pico et al., 2021). As one participant explained: "The main reason I left Venezuela was that I couldn't get groceries like milk to feed my granddaughter, and when that happened, I couldn't stand it anymore" (Pico et al., 2021, 6).

Economic and political crises are commonly accompanied by negative changes to labour markets, and low-wage, less skilled workers are likely to be the first to face retrenchment an important driver of the migrant exodus to neighbouring countries. However, survival migration does not automatically mean the restoration of food security. As one Zimbabwean migrant in South Africa noted: "the people in Zimbabwe will be expecting us to feed them and not vice-versa. But we are struggling here" (Crush & Tawodzera, 2016). Persistent difficulties in securing regular income along with the urgent and unrelenting need to support relatives in Zimbabwe contributed to high levels of food insecurity and poor dietary diversity among Zimbabwean migrants in South African cities (Crush & Tawodzera, 2017).

Nawrotzski et al. (2014) also found significant differences in the long-term food insecurity of migrants and refugees in northeastern South Africa during the 2008 global food crisis. Former Mozambican refugees experienced the greatest declines in food and livelihood security. Migrant households fell behind non-migrant households in food security by 2010. Inflation, rising food prices, and recent developments, such as the war in Ukraine, have magnified pandemic-related shocks and stressors to forge a "global food crisis" (FAO, 2023). The latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report identifies a sharp spike in moderate and severe food insecurity in 2020, followed by significant surges in severe food insecurity a year later (FAO et al.,

2022). Food insecurity is a "consistent condition" for Afghan refugee families in Pakistan (Khakpour et al., 2019) and for refugees in camps and urban spaces worldwide.

Remittances and Food Security

Migrant remittances have become an increasingly significant part of the resources of left-behind households, with important implications for their expenditure and consumption patterns (Ebadi et al., 2020). Studies focused on migrant-sending areas have shown that households receiving international remittances are more likely to be food secure than those who do not (Moniruzzaman, 2022; Regmi & Paudel, 2017). Other work has shown that remittances expand household food expenditures in sub-Saharan Africa and improve the long-term food security of recipients (Ajefu & Ogebe, 2020). The intensity of the impact on the food security of recipient households is also correlated with national income (Sulemana et al., 2022). Lower income countries with larger cohorts experiencing poverty and poor living standards experienced the strongest positive effects on their food security. Another study found that the level of food supply tends to be higher in developing countries with high remittance flows (Subramaniam et al., 2022).

Analysing a World Bank living standards dataset for Nigeria, Obi et al. (2020) conclude that remittances are a "veritable instrument" to meet short-term and long-term food security for households during food crises. These effects were most pronounced for female-headed households, who are at greater risk of food insecurity. Another assessment found a significant correlation between remittance receipts and food security in all regions of the Global South (Ebadi et al., 2020). Households not receiving remittances were much more likely to be severely food insecure in sub-Saharan Africa as well as Southeast, South, and East Asia. In some countries, such as Liberia, Yemen, Haiti, and Nepal, the non-receipt of remittances was significantly associated with moderate and severe food insecurity. Households in the lowest income quantiles were also the least likely to receive remittances.

Informal food transfers are an important part of remittance landscapes with consequences for the welfare and food security of both sending and receiving households (Crush & Caesar, 2017). One-third of migrant-sending households in one survey of five Southern African countries had received food remittances (Frayne & Crush, 2018). Transnational food transfers improve food supply between sending households. While food remittances may not always enhance dietary diversity, they can ease the harsh burden of absolute

hunger and enhance food accessibility. Remittance receipts also function as informal support mechanisms in contexts of weak or absent social welfare systems and improve the general well-being of recipient households. While remittances bring various benefits to recipients, the pressure to constantly remit can worsen migrant vulnerabilities in destination areas (Ramachandran & Crush, 2021). Due to this responsibility, migrants remain tied to mechanisms and structures of inequality and food insecurity in both origin and destination areas (Ramachandran et al., 2023).

Migrants, Food Environments, and Informality

Migrants play an increasingly important role in local and national food systems and supply chains in origin and destination countries. Cross-border migration can support local food production systems in the sending areas. For example, migration from Nicaragua to other Central American countries has sustained small-scale agricultural systems and food production in that country (Carte et al., 2019). Left-behind household members engage in small-scale agricultural practices by producing and remaining on the land in a difficult social, political, and economic environment. Migration has therefore eased rural poverty for farming households and stemmed deagrarianisation. In Southeast Asia, there is evidence that some forms of labour migration have transformed agrarian livelihoods without leading to the complete or absolute exit from agricultural production (Kelley et al., 2020).

Migrants can be key employees and actors in food production, distribution, and retailing in destination countries. This is well-documented in the Global North. However, less work is currently available in relation to South-South migration. The labour-intensive, low-skilled, and often poorly remunerated agricultural sector, including fisheries, livestock, forestry, and other agriculture-related activities, is the largest employer of migrant workers in Algeria, Botswana, Cabe Verde, Liberia, Namibia, Niger, and Nigeria (AU, 2017). Nicaraguan farmworkers face long working hours, physically demanding manual labour, repeated exposure to pesticides, and are often denied their legitimate rights in Costa Rica (Poirier et al., 2022). A new ILO (2021) study shows that female and Myanmarese migrants receive much lower wages and temporary contracts in Thailand's agricultural sector. Migrants from Zimbabwe and Lesotho play a vital role as cheap and exploitable labour on large commercial fruit and vegetable farms in South Africa (Bolt, 2015; Kudejira, 2019).

Migrants are under-recognised participants in local food environments in the urban areas of destination countries. Food environments include the spatial distribution of food outlets such as formal and informal retail food shops, markets, restaurants and are shaped by socioeconomic relationships and structural inequalities (Vonthron et al., 2020). These foodscapes are composite arrangements of formal and informal sector activities in which migrants, especially women, actively participate. Migrants feed cities working as street vendors and small- and medium-scale traders engaged in food retail operations. For example, migrants work in the Malaysian food service sector, with Rohingya refugees active but largely invisible in wholesale fresh markets and other groups placed in restaurants and outdoor food stalls (Muniandy, 2020).

A survey of informal food vendors in Cape Town, South Africa, found that more than half had migrated from other African countries (Tawodzera, 2019). Migrant vendors and traders sell a wide range of reasonably priced cooked and uncooked food products, including fruits and vegetables, on the streets and at transport hubs in poor neighbourhoods not well served by formal grocery stores and supermarkets. They also operate *spazas* (informal grocery shops) and adopt practices such as low markup, credit purchases for regular customers, and bulk-breaking and selling food in miniscule quantities (such as a single bread slice). Nevertheless, migrant food vendors operate in an extremely hostile environment, face rampant xenophobia, with repeated attempts by authorities and citizens to curtail their activities. Migrant street food vendors and spaza operators have faced recurring bouts of xenophobic violence, including physical attacks, looting of stock, and arson in South Africa (Crush & Ramachandran, 2015). Frontline migrant food workers have been targets of racial prejudice and xenophobia in other countries as well (Muniandy, 2020).

Migrant Destinations, Inequality, and Food Insecurity

The social and economic inequalities experienced by migrants in destination countries are another important component of the linkages between inequality, migration, and food security. Although not all migrants experience food insecurity at their destination, it is a core aspect of migrant marginality and precarity in the Global South (Ramachandran et al., 2023). The multiple layering of inequalities that migrants are exposed to can rapidly forge pathways to extreme or hyper-precarity with cascading effects on food

insecurity. These inequalities in opportunity and outcomes include exclusion from formal labour markets and/or incorporation in the most menial and dangerous jobs, decent work deficits, erratic work opportunities, inadequate incomes, substandard housing, weak social protection, and discriminatory treatment by the state. Demands for bribes from police, difficulties in renewing legal residence permits, and arrest and deportation without due process all compound vulnerability to food insecurity. For example, Carney and Krause (2020) show that food insecurity and stress were greatly exacerbated for young irregular Haitian male migrants in the Dominican Republic during periods of intensified immigration policing. Migrants transiting through Mexico are forced to rely on migrant shelters, and beg, or offer their services in exchange for food (Deschak et al., 2022). Poverty, racialised violence, stigma, and food insecurity often operate as a vicious cycle in the lives of migrants with precarious migration status (Carney & Krause, 2020).

Gendered biases and gender-based inequities intersect with other forms of discrimination to produce unique hardships for female migrants and differential experiences by gender identity. Most female asylum-seekers and refugees in Durban, South Africa, are forced to skip meals and consume less than their other family members (Napier et al., 2018). Although placed in households with abundant food, Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore often go hungry, are given smaller food portions and less desirable food, and rely on spoilt food or leftovers from their employers' plates (Mohamed, 2017). Food is used as a deliberate tactic to reinforce their low position and weak rights.

Conclusion

Our chapter argues that greater research attention needs to be paid to the intersections between migration, inequality, and food security. As a stark outcome of socioeconomic asymmetries within and across countries and regions, food insecurity is a core challenge of equitable and sustainable development. In this mapping exercise, we position food security and inequality as core components of an emerging research agenda on South-South migratory flows and mobilities. Drawing on recent case study evidence from across the Global South, we identify five distinctive dimensions to the dynamic linkages between food security, inequality, and migration. First, we showed how food security and inequality of opportunity and outcomes interact to influence migration motivations and actions. Second, by providing a discussion of various forms of crisis scenarios and conflict dynamics, we analysed how and

under what circumstances food insecurity becomes the main driver and final trigger of forced displacement. Third, we assessed the role of food and cash remittances in addressing the food insecurity of households in sending areas and destination countries. Fourth, we discussed the role of migration and migrants in the food systems and food environments where they often labour under difficult, unequal, and hostile conditions. Finally, we connect migrant precarities with the food security status of various categories of migrants in transit and in destinations. By mapping the ways in which these linkages act upon South-South migration, we aim to temper the celebratory narratives of the migration-development nexus.

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