

Intergenerational Occupation of Migrants can be Broken for Better Jobs

An interview Tushar K. Nandi and Saibal Kar



Indira Gandhi Institute
of Development Research



CENTRE FOR
POLICY
RESEARCH



IRIS Knowledge Foundation



National Institute of
Urban Affairs

Intergenerational Occupation of Migrants can be Broken for Better Jobs

An Interview with Tushar K. Nandi and Saibal Kar

Tushar K. Nandi and Saibal Kar are Assistant Professors at Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. In this interview they say that short-term migration can increase intergenerational occupational mobility. There has to be policies from the government to enhance the skills of internal migrants. The different types of skills the short term migrants acquire from different jobs can be utilised to break intergenerational occupational trap.

Sir, your paper ‘Short-term Migration and Intergenerational Persistence of Industry in Rural India’ is very interesting. What made you to take up the subject of short term migrants and intergenerational mobility?

Well, one answer to that stems from the fact that India as a country generally undergoes fairly little, and if at all, slow social mobility. At the background, the incapability of pulling individuals from various strata of the society into mainstream economic activity remains a crucial concern for us. Migration, it has been shown analytically before, could improve the achievements of individuals even without active public policy support - indeed it could replace some of the public policies aimed at development outcomes. We found that short-term migration can increase intergenerational occupational mobility thanks to the skill and capital accumulation by migrants during their migration spell.

Do you find that the chances of taking the family job or the father’s job more in urban areas or rural areas?

Intergeneration persistence of occupation is high in rural areas than in urban areas. Our paper studies the rural context; but the point is more often than not, the short-term return migrants shall choose to take up an occupation different from that practiced by the household/father.

Is there a gender variation in people taking up their family jobs?

Our analysis focuses on male. Similar analysis for female is equally important for our

understanding of intergenerational occupational persistence and role of migration in it. It is possible to extend the present analysis in this direction. A relevant question for an analysis for women would be whether daughters' occupation is similar to her father's or that of mother and what role education plays in this correlation. One could also extend the analysis if educational outcomes lead to substantial change of occupation among women. It may be conceived as a future project that will need strong support from primary survey as well as secondary data.

Is there any research or data on which family job the return migrants go back to?

There is substantial research on return migrants' occupational choice. They focus on international migration and developed countries. Ours is one of the first studies focusing on India and domestic migration. As for the data, in India we don't have very good data for an analysis of return migrants' occupational choice, though internal migration in India is much higher than India's international migration and internal migration in other countries. Data problems, Indian researchers face, are manifold – like if migrant and his parents live in different households, information for two generations is not available in Indian data. This creates a severe hurdle for any analysis for women, as information for married daughters who live with in-laws is not collected when parental information is recorded.

Sir, what is the relevance of your study for policy purposes?

The main policy response is that social mobility via economic mobility is a crucial factor that has strong positive externality (meaning, the achievements of one individual has positive impact on many other individuals, communities) on the society and is a source of sustainable economic development. The ability to break the low level equilibrium trap present in most rural locations in India is of paramount importance for the success of concerted economic development in the country. Migration and change of occupation resulting from the accumulation of physical and human capital during the migration phase is a conduit of such success. At the policy level there is no initiative to enhance skill formation of internal migrants. Short-term migrants also face different problems during migration spells - like housing, bank account, access to health care etc. It would be of societal benefit to design public policy to exploit the skill reshuffling potential of short-term migration to break intergenerational occupational trap.