

Fifth ISLE-IAWS Joint Panel

Framing Migration and Development from a Gender Perspective

December 18, 2018: 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm

Much has been written on issues of migration, yet the question of framings and framing practices remains occlusive to gender integration, thereby tending to obscure gendered assumptions and realities within which the debates are embedded. This Fifth ISLE-IAWS Joint Panel will focus on how issues have been 'framed' and illustrate what (hitherto unresearched /underresearched) themes emerge when 'framings' are gender-sensitive: the purpose is to unravel the conceptual and institutional macro and micro underpinnings of prevailing socio-economic realities that characterise the gendered migration continuum in the present context of what passes for 'development'. Four issues are thus identified:

- 1. *Gender Critique of Official Labour Migration Data:*** official data collecting agencies (Census and NSSO) conceptually designed for a particular development paradigm fail to capture existing ground realities marked by the predominance of the temporary; also, this macro level failure to estimate the scale of short-term and circular migration among both men and women has tremendous developmental implications which to that extent remain invisible and unaccounted. Additionally, official statistics records an overwhelming proportion of women who have given 'marriage' as reason for their migrant status. At one level, while feminists have been at pains to point out how part of this figure could camouflage those migrating for work as well, considerable research work still needs to be done to comprehend the status of such women post their marriage.
- 2. *Migration as a Continuum:*** migration is not necessarily a one-way linear process as perceived within the broader paradigm of labour and livelihoods

with one gender moving out for paid work while the other is left to combine paid and unpaid work and keep the household going at one end. Central to this theme are the issues of sectoral, regional, horizontal and vertical movements of workers and their earnings, the nature and level of dependence on remittances (local and international), the extent of permanent temporariness. One recent illustration is that of the impact of demonetisation which compelled urban migrants to return to their rural roots, to carry back remittances in the form of grains which helped families maintain at least minimal nutrition levels: the rural therefore subsidising the urban informal sector.

3. Local Recruitment Practices: Implications for Migrants: several recruitment practices have been identified in current literature in both rural and urban settings; however, gendered issues remain mainly outside much of the debate, as do the structural underpinnings of recruitment across the migration continuum. These several recruitment practices generate different types of employment which interlock semi-feudal bondage and semi-feudal patriarchy and normalise wage theft not only for the marginalised sections but also for the 'literate' women among the 'non-worker category'. Capital is rendered invisible through legal procedures and processes, with only recruiters/contractors appearing as exploitative, while corporate strategies of recruitment and labour management escape recognition and justice. Various forms of exploitation and wage practices translate into differential outcomes for men and women, often aided and abetted by gender insensitive laws that do not always differentiate between migration and employment opportunities. Central to this theme are the issues of marital insecurity, of sexual exploitation, of an acceptance and normalisation of violence that is in-built into all structures.

4. Role of State: Bringing a gender perspective to the theme of Migration and Development and framing our questions from a gender-sensitive lens ipso facto means that we need to explore and question the role of the State in

India whose pursuit of a particular development paradigm has forced households across the spectrum into decisions that render migration for the vast majority not necessarily a matter of choice but of necessity. In other words, unlike much of the current studies on migration that take the development paradigm as given, we need to 'bring the State right back-in' and situate our research within the larger development paradigm. This would also mean asking other kinds of questions as well, such as: does all migration connote development failure? Why is success of policies very often measured by how much they have been able to stop migration and/or bring back the migrants?

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