

Migration in the Caribbean area

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Most peoples of the Caribbean originated centuries and generations ago in countries of Africa, Asia and Europe. Migration is part of history and also of present day reality. Seasonal labour circulation among the islands was common as well as more permanent type migration into other Caribbean territories that offered greater opportunity.

In the late 19th century, a degree of economic integration took place in the region partly because of considerable American investments which were concentrated in the sugar and banana industries, and in related infrastructure such as ports, transportation, etc. The uneven distribution of those investments led to uneven economic development in the region – a major factor underlying the strong propensity to move in search of a livelihood. Labour migration is a deeply institutionalized strategy for economic subsistence and advancement in the Caribbean (Guengant 1992).

However, the economic push-pull explanation for intra-regional movement cannot, on its own, account for the persistence of intra-regional movement that continues despite economic problems in many receiving societies, e.g. high unemployment and a growing external debt. It is evident that, rather than being pushed and pulled passively by economic forces, individuals are actively pursuing and creating new opportunities for social mobility through migration (Duany 1992).

Caribbean territories with population pressure and a limited supply of 'free' land (e.g. Barbados), as well as those experiencing economic underdevelopment or stagnation (e.g. Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Kitts-Nevis, Anguilla etc.) became major population donors within the region (Basch 1982,12). At times emigration has even been actively promoted through public policy. Barbados justified its practice on the grounds of high unemployment and population pressure even after immigration restrictions had been put into place in 1962 by Britain (Marshall 1979, 45).

Regional migration

Trinidad, on the other hand, has traditionally attracted migrants from neighbouring West Indian territories. Besides being one of the larger islands with a population deficiency, the development of the plantations and a corresponding need for labour, occurred later than in other territories. Even when the demand for labour subsequently decreased with the decline of the sugar industry in the 20th century, Trinidad continued to be a destination for migrants from neighbouring territories that were experiencing conditions of economic stagnation.

A major migration catalyst in the Caribbean was the failure of many governments to reorganize their economies in the context of a crisis in the agricultural sector. Although the

market for sugar declined, jobs and viable income were not generated through diversification and industrialization. As Trinidad developed its mineral economy in the first half of the twentieth century, the country was an attractive migration destination for persons from other Caribbean territories. The opening of the U.S. military bases during World War II created construction and service jobs with the result that migration from the smaller islands rose once again. It was not until the late sixties that Trinidad became a migrant-generating country (Simmons and Guengant 1992a).

In the Caribbean, the largest recent movements of people have taken place between contiguous territories such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and Guyana and Suriname (see Duany 1994: 102). Within the region, the number of Grenadians, Vincentians and Barbadians who have moved over time into Trinidad, is also significant. In the meantime, measures to stem intra-regional migratory flow have not had priority in the Caribbean. Nor have consistent or effective measures been put into place to control overstaying or clandestine entry. Nationalism in the Caribbean is embedded in the wider Caribbean regional identity—a configuration which is, at base, the salient factor that underpins intra-regional migration as a livelihood strategy. The ability to resettle in neighbouring territories has at times, provided an intra-regional solution for nationals of politically repressive regimes, one example being the previous regime of Guyana.

As there is common language and cultural affinity in the region, migration flows have not presented a dramatic need for resettlement or integration services. Caribbean receiving societies make few domestic structural provisions for the integration of immigrants. Immigrants have generally been accommodated within the existing social service infrastructure. The strain is felt particularly in health,

social service and education sectors, because the level of increased demand was not taken into account in planning stages. Immigrant relocation is not perceived as a matter requiring qualitative changes in the services. State officials see it rather as a question of service capacity. Nonetheless, within the context of chain migration, informal networks are an indispensable supplement to public sector services.

External migration

In the last forty years, intra-Caribbean migration was estimated to be about half a million, representing 10 per cent of all Caribbean migration over the same period (Simmons and Guengant 1992b). During this time, approximately one million migrants left the Caribbean for Europe and 3.5 million 'documented' Caribbean migrants have settled in North America (including Puerto Rican emigration to the United States). The large outflows to Britain and subsequently since the late 60s, to the United States and Canada, can be seen as part of the economic transformation of the Caribbean economies in a changing international environment, reflecting the increasing integration of the Caribbean labour markets into those of the metropolises (Guengant 1992). It is estimated that population growth in the Caribbean would have been about 80 per cent greater than it actually was, had large-scale emigration not taken place (Simmons and Guengant 1987).

International migration has been at times conceptualized as a societal 'safety valve'. In the case of Trinidad, a capital-intensive mineral economy developed along with the corollary phenomenon of 'jobless' growth. The subsequent fall in oil prices, economic downturn, as well as the application of IMF structural adjustment policies have brought about radical change in peoples' lives. Reduction in spending on social and welfare services, growing unemployment and worsening con-

ditions of life for families increase the propensity for migration of both unskilled and professional persons.

Of late, it can be seen that emigration has two faces – safety valve in times of socio-economic strain but, in the long term, loss of the countrys sorely needed human capital. An example of the latter is the emigration of trained nursing personnel from Trinidad to North American countries.

Conclusion

Migration constitutes one of the most perplexing dilemmas of development process - the phenomenon of massive and historically unprecedented movements of people from the rural countryside to the burgeoning cities and to overseas destinations.

In terms of social development in both Africa and the Caribbean, internal migration can be seen as a historical process, predating or associated with colonial rule, in which labour moved away from the rural areas to provide needed manpower for urban industrial growth. Rural-urban migration was viewed favorably in the economic development literature. In these regions, the surplus labor in the urban areas, gradually migrated overseas. For African, the nearest territories of attraction were Western Europe. Caribbean people initially moved to Europe, but have of late migrated to North American countries. Chain migration also facilitates rural migration overseas in the Caribbean case.

Migratory movements in these regions are seen as (1) colonial legacy and (2) attributed chiefly to the lack of development. The internal, intra-continental, and external migration are generated in large part by economic motives.

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