

Going Back Home: Internal Return Migration in Rural Tanzania

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Summary. — While reasons for out-migration are relatively well understood, little is known about why people return to their rural origins. We contribute to filling this gap in the literature by using 19-year tracking data from rural Tanzania to estimate the patterns and determinants of return migration, and we find that return is largely associated with unsuccessful migration. For men, return is linked to poor job-market outcomes at the migration destination, and for women, to the ending of marriages. Female migrants who exchange transfers with relatives at home, and men who are financially supported by their families, are more likely to return.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a rise in interest in internal migration in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, with the emergence of the “African Growth Miracle” (McKay, 2013; Radelet, 2010; Young, 2012), internal migration has become an important topic for policy-makers in Africa. In order to shed light on this area, researchers have attempted to understand the patterns of structural transformation of the African Economies (Bryceson, Kay, & Mooij, 2000; Dorosh & Thurlow, 2014; McMillan & Harttgen, 2014; McMillan, Rodrik, & Verduzco-Gallo, 2014) and hence the patterns of rural-to-urban migration in sub-Saharan African countries (de Brauw, Mueller, & Lee, 2014; Potts, 2010).¹ In the literature this type of physical mobility is, often implicitly, linked to the idea that individuals move in order to maximize their expected incomes (Harris & Todaro, 1970). Despite this re-emerging² interest in rural-to-urban migration, however, most of the internal migration in sub-Saharan Africa remains from rural areas to other rural areas (Castaldo, Deshingkar, & McKay, 2012; Lucas, 2007; Potts, 2013). This type of movement may be motivated by marriage (Beegle & Poulin, 2013; Kudo, 2015), attempts to diversify rural incomes (e.g., Christiaensen, De Weerd, & Todo, 2013), or both (Rosenzweig & Stark, 1989).

While the reasons why people out-migrate internally are relatively well understood, little is known about why people return to their rural origins, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As highlighted by Junge, Revilla Diez, and Schätzl (2013), the existing literature is mainly organized along a success–failure dichotomy. Theoretically, in the Harris–Todaro framework, a return migrant can be understood as an “unsuccessful” migrant; someone who failed to find a formal job in an urban area. The magnitude of return migration then reflects the fluctuating conditions of the urban labor market.³ On the other hand, if out-migration was part of household-level welfare maximization (Stark & Bloom, 1985), return is then “[...] the logical outcome of a ‘calculated strategy’, defined at the level of the migrant’s household, and resulting from the successful achievement of goals or target” (Cassarino, 2004, p. 255). The empirical evidence, largely from international migration literature, often portrays returnees as successful migrants who, during their migration spell send remittances home, return after successfully reaching their

target savings, and after return act as important change agents bringing capital and new skills, and engaging in entrepreneurial activities (De Vreyer, Gubert, & Robilliard, 2010; Dustmann, 2003; Dustmann & Kirchkamp, 2002; Dustmann & Mestres, 2010; Démurger & Xu, 2011; Marchetta, 2012; Piracha & Vadean, 2010; Yang, 2006).

In this paper, we attempt to unpack different patterns of and motives for internal return migration through an analysis of an extraordinarily long panel survey from Tanzania. We use a unique 19-year panel survey designed to track migration from and within the Kagera region in northern Tanzania. The tracking feature of the survey permits us to follow migrants (including return migrants) through their entire migration cycle, from the origin household to their destination (and back, in the case of return migrants), while at the same time also following the non-migrant family members at the place of origin. With three major rounds of data collection (early 1990s, 2004 and 2010), the dataset offers an unprecedented opportunity to analyze and document the extent, nature and determinants of internal return migration in an African context.⁴

Among migrants who left their baseline villages between 1991–94 and 2004, the rate of return migration found at interview 6 years later in 2010 was 14%. In a sample of prime-age (17–45-year-old) tracked panel respondents selected for the main analyses in this paper, the level of return migration was 17%. This corresponds to more than one in six of the original migrants going back home.

In contrast to the narrative emerging from the international migration literature, our results do not support the view that return migrants had a successful migration spell and – despite positive selection into out-migration – return migrants are not significantly different from those who never migrated. While self-selection into out-migration is linked to positive factors, selection into return migration has negative associations. We find that future return migrants as well as their parents have

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lower levels of education and originate from households which – prior to the out-migration event – had lower levels of consumption and asset holdings compared to those of continuing migrants. In addition, for women, returning home is associated with the ending of marriages.

Previous literature has documented how some migrants engage in strategic remitting that buys them an option to return in case of financial or other misfortunes during the migration spell (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2006; de Brauw, Mueller, & Woldehanna, 2013). Our data on remittances do not provide support to this self-insurance hypothesis. In contrast, we find that returning men in our data receive considerable assistance from their home communities during their migration spell. While for women, mutual exchange of trivially small gifts with the extended family in the home community is a predictor of return. We believe that these transfers proxy for frequency of contact and we therefore interpret this finding to mean that women who maintain close links to their origin family are more likely to return.

Once back home, return migrants do not seem to stand out in any positive way from the non-migrants in the home communities. Again in contrast to the evidence in the international migration literature, we find that the returnees do not seem to be more entrepreneurial than the non-migrants; if anything, the opposite is true. In addition, despite considerably higher per capita consumption levels during the migration spell, after their return the consumption levels as well as the asset holdings of return migrants are similar to those who never left the home community. Moreover, chronic illness rates are higher among the male returnees compared to the non-migrant and continuing migrant peers. Finally, using subjective questions on well-being, we also find that the returned women are less satisfied with their lives than both non-migrants and continuing migrants. These findings support the notion that return migrants are largely unsuccessful migrants – past migration spells are not associated with any clear welfare benefits relative to those who never left the baseline villages.

In the next section, we relate this paper to previous literature in the field and highlight the few contributions there have been to internal return migration in Least Developed Countries. In Section 3 we describe our data and sample selection, while in Section 4 we examine the migration movements and compare the characteristics of non-migrants, continuing migrants and return migrants. We discuss our econometric approach in Section 5. Section 6 presents the regression results of predetermined selection into, and more recent determinants of, return migration. In Section 7 we study the association between migrants' remittances and the decision to return, while Section 8 gives an account of how migrants fare in their home communities after return. Section 9 concludes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Return migration usually occurs after a single long migration spell. This is in contrast to seasonal, temporary, or circular migration, which are characterized in the literature by systematic and regular movements between the place of origin and the destination (Constant, Nottmeyer, & Zimmermann, 2013; Gmelch, 1980; Potts, 2010; Skeldon, 2012; Vadean & Piracha, 2010). Return migration is usually seen in the literature as a permanent or semi-permanent return to the place of origin (King, 1986).

There exists a substantial body of literature on international return migration. One of the earliest contributions in this literature is King (1978) that offers a framework for examining

return migration. For a useful overview on various return migration theories in this context, see Cassarino (2004). Junge *et al.* (2013) offer a comprehensive literature review on return migration – both internal and international – focusing on the success–failure aspect. Complementing these existing reviews, our literature review focuses solely on the empirical evidence on *internal* return migration.

The empirical analyses of reverse internal migration patterns in an African context have focused on macro level accounts of reverse rural–urban flows. Recent urbanization studies using, for example, satellite imagery have shown that the high population growth rates in urban areas observed in many sub-Saharan Africa countries have slowed down, or are even stagnating (e.g., Beauchemin, 2011; Potts, 2009, 2012). This picture is supported by findings from a national household survey in Ghana, where high rates of urban-to-rural migration flow may, at least in part, be explained by return migration flows (Castaldo *et al.*, 2012).

To the best of our knowledge, only two papers discuss the actual return decision in an African context, both of them being based on data from Kenya. Owuor (2007) examines the importance of a rural connection for urban migrants. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the author finds that male migrants who cannot support their families cope by sending their wives and children back to the place of origin. This strategy provides the family with access to self-produced food from rural farming activities. Falkingham, Chepngeno-Langat, and Evandrou (2012) study the return migration decision and its determinants for older (50+ years) urban migrants in the slums of Nairobi, using a destination-based panel survey over a 3-year period. They find that 13% of their sample had left Nairobi (presumably for their original home area); the existence of children living outside the slums was an important pull factor, and age and poverty represented typical push factors.

Other empirical analyses of internal return migration in developing countries originate from Thailand, Vietnam and China. In the Nang Rong district of north-eastern Thailand, 26% of migrants returned over a 6-year period (Piotrowski & Tong, 2010). Using surveys representative of the rural population in three provinces in Thailand and three provinces in Vietnam, Junge *et al.* (2013) find that 31% of the Vietnamese and 26% of the Thai migrants return to their local areas of origin within a 3-year window. The cross-sectional return rates in China are similar and estimated to be between 25% and 38% (Démurger & Xu, 2011; Wang & Fan, 2006; Zhao, 2002), although these numbers may also capture circular migration due to institutional barriers to migration (the *hukou* system), as identified by Hare (1999) and Hu, Xu, and Chen (2011).

The empirical analyses of Chinese return migration to rural areas are all based on interviews with households in the origin communities, and collected as cross-sectional data (Démurger & Xu, 2011; Wang & Fan, 2006; Zhao, 2002). Common areas of focus in these studies are self-reported reasons for return and the ways in which the economic activities or occupational choices of the returnees differ from those of the non-migrants. Démurger and Xu (2011) characterize return migrants as successful when the migration experience has enhanced their skill to such an extent that they engage in entrepreneurial activities and become self-employed or obtain a high-ability job. The success–failure dichotomy is less clear cut in Zhao (2002), which highlights the importance of having a non-migrant spouse to whom to return as a central element in the return decision. Family reasons are also important determinants of return in the study by Wang and Fan (2006), who also stress the negative reasons for selection into return migration rather

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