

Radio Free Europe-Tajikistan. June 2, 2011.

Q: You say that "international labor migration from Tajikistan may not be conducive to reducing poverty in that country." Could you please explain it?

A (Kumo): The point is that "which of the population group gains more from migration, the richer or the poorer." If labor migration is more beneficial for the poorer households than the richer ones (for example, if the income of the poorer grows faster than the richer), it is "Pro-Poor".

However, according to my analysis based on panel-data (obtained from the survey, which follows more than 1,400 households repeatedly in multiple time periods), the poorer gains less from migration and they cannot catch up the richer.

Q: What kind of effect has migration for human capital accumulation in Tajikistan?

A (Kumo): Negative, absolutely, for the time being. Young people, who have just finished elementary/secondary schools, try to go abroad (to Russia) to earn money instantly.

For the people who obtained highest level of educational attainment, there is no occupation which is suitable for their capacity. This is not the case only for Tajikistan, but for almost all poor countries.

In the long run, however, people who obtained some kind of occupational function may go back home and contribute to domestic economy. There are such cases in countries with huge labor outmigration. But, again, only in the long run.

Q: How Tajik government can make migration pro-poor?

A (Kumo): A possible measure is to formulate village-level or Makharra-level organized migration. There are already several examples of organized migration, but they are conducted voluntarily or independently by Makharra. The government should support them.

Another point concerns with the migrant receiver, the Russian side. Human security of Tajiks in Russia faces with terrible situation. The poor can be cheated and exploited

very easily. Signing and enforcing mutual agreement between these two countries is indispensable.

Q: Given the current economic realities in Tajikistan will high labor migration will continue?

A (Kumo): Of course YES, as long as the Russian economy continues to grow and the income level of Tajiks remains low. For this and the next decade Russia will keep growing. It is hard to imagine that the average income level of Tajiks will be ten times more (current level of Russia) than what it is now in 20 years.

Possible obstacles are the followings.

First, changes in political relation between Tajikistan and Russia. It seems to be, however, stable because of Tajikistan's geographical/geopolitical situation. Second may be stagnating trends in education level of young Tajiks. Namely, teenagers' Russian language skill.

Q: What kind of impacts could have migration for poor countries like Tajikistan?

A (Kumo): At the micro-level and in the short-run, it can contribute to increase household income level and may be beneficial for individuals. This subjective effect stimulates people in poor countries to migrate abroad.

At the national level, however, as I indicated above, it can have negative effects on human capital formation. Migrants' remittances (inflows of hard currency into poor-home country) will result in overvaluation of domestic currency, and this weakens manufacturing industries of remittance-receiving countries: thus, the country's economy faces with even more severe situation.

In the long-run, return migration may be able to contribute to home country's economy thanks to the knowledge and skills obtained by migrants, but this requires several decades....