



PUBLIC POLICY BLOG

Rural-urban migration: Why do they migrate?

Philip Kavan

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Papua New Guinea's (PNG) population comprises mainly rural inhabitants living on subsistence and semi-subsistence sources of livelihood. The migration from rural areas to urban centres is the outcome of a set of complex factors. They include a lack of (a) rural development opportunities, (b) provision and maintenance of services, and (c) employment.

Some reasons for migrating to urban centres

Absence of income-earning opportunities: Rural-Urban migration is a result of the absence of income-earning opportunities in rural areas. The living conditions in rural environments are tough.

More chances to earn money or obtain a job: A research by Kavan in 2010 found that most of the migrants who migrated to Port Moresby and Lae indicated their main reason as a greater chance to earn money or to obtain a job in an urban centre. This may seem outdated but many of the issues remain relevant.

Lack of access to basic services: Subsistence living is not supported by access to the food market, schools, and health services. The medical and health facilities are better in major urban centres. The desire to improve their socio-economic condition has caused them to migrate to cities and towns.

Provide better education for the children: Some, however, have other reasons for migrating. One of these was to provide better education for their children. The 32.6 percent and 18.6 percent who indicated "other", in the case of Lae and Port Moresby respectively, gave the following reasons: husband got a job or followed husband; to seek medical assistance; came to see relatives and stayed forever; to pursue further education; came to do pastoral work; came to live with parents; temporally visiting relatives; and came to get married (see Table 1).

Safer place to live: Yet others migrate to escape from trouble and fighting or land pressures at home and to distant urban areas like Port Moresby where it is safe to live in peace.

Table 1. The migrant main reason for migration

	Port Moresby	Lae
Reason	%	%
For better education of my children	10.2	10.9
More chances to earn money or work	55.9	56.5
Safer place to live	15.3	0
Others	18.6	32
Total	100	100
Frequency	59	46

Source: Data obtained from a semi-structured interview survey for the participants in the informal sector was generated from the SPSS frequency table.

Rural-Urban migration is a common issue in many developing countries. Other countries tried to control the flow of people from rural to urban areas by using legislation. For example, Zimbabwe introduced the Vagrancy Act (1960) to control rural-urban migration. However, evidence shows that such legislation was difficult to enforce.

How to reduce the flow of people migrating to urban centres

In order to reduce the flow of people migrating from rural to urban areas, the following should be considered:

- Provide better health and education services in rural areas.
- Improved services combined with the creation of employment opportunities will attract people to remain in their communities.
- Review and adjust the minimum wages so that there is reasonable salaries between the urban and rural minimum wages. This will encourage rural migrants to remain in rural areas and not seek higher-paying jobs in urban centres.
- Providing and improving a better infrastructure for connectivity: roads, bridges, and transport. These will facilitate easy access of goods, services, and people between rural and urban areas. For example, fresh food can be easily transported to urban markets but also manufactured goods can easily reach rural outlying areas.

- Investment in rural, high impact and labour – intensive agriculture activities. This will create employment for unskilled or semi-skilled youth. This will make the rural districts attractive for people.

Conclusion

PNG's population is made up of rural inhabitants who live on subsistence and semi-subsistence sources of livelihood. There is an absence of income-earning opportunities in rural areas. Their living condition in rural environments is tough. Moreover, there is a lack of access to basic services such as access to the food market, school, and health services. Therefore, to improve their socio-economic condition, they migrate to urban centres. However, to decrease the flow of people migrating, the government must provide better health services, education services, and infrastructure and create employment opportunities. This will attract people to remain in their communities.

About the Author

Dr Philip Kavan is a Senior Research Fellow in the Economic Policy Research Program at the PNG National Research Institute. He has a Doctor of Business Administration degree from the University of Canberra, a Master of Applied Anthropology and Participatory Development from the Australian National University (ANU), Bachelor of Arts Honours, and a Bachelor of Arts degree (Major in Anthropology and Sociology) from the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG). His research interests include informal economic activities, social and economic issues in development.