

International Labour Out-Migration In Mzimba District, Malawi: Why Persistent?

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Abstract

This article is based on a study that sought to examine the socio-economic impacts of labour migration on families in Mzimba district in terms of education, health, labour supply, intra-family roles, norms, decision-making, and others. Eight villages with the highest number of out-migrants out of 27 in the district were studied. Fifty respondents of households with a migrant member were randomly selected as a sample for the study. Another random sample of 20 respondents from households without-migrants was selected to serve as a control group. The field data were obtained using in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Secondary data were obtained mainly through library research. The study reveals that, overall, households with migrant relatives in South Africa have experienced a change in their welfare; ranging from positive change in socio-economic conditions and/or positive change in their social and family relations. Negative consequences included loneliness, especially for spouse left at home; psycho-social problems, especially for children due to the absence of fathers; and low esteem that females feel when their husbands are absent to the extent of not being involved fully in family matters. On the part of the migrants themselves, they live in untenable working conditions, often illegally, and in most circumstances very unwelcome in the host country.

Keywords: *international labour migration, migrants, remittances, household dynamics*

Introduction

Migration of both skilled and unskilled labour has been one of the survival strategies of many youths in Africa. The types of migrations have been both intra-national as well as international.

In Malawi, large scale migrations to South Africa are still common to-date, more than 50 years after independence. The districts in Malawi that produce many out-migrants, especially to the Republic of South Africa, are Mzimba, Nkhata Bay, and Mangochi. Most out-migrants from these districts are those that are uneducated and unskilled, who are seeking to find any kind of employment apart from the agricultural sector. It has been established that most migration that involves people with low skills is highly associated with poverty reduction. Much of the remittances derived from migrants with low skills are normally sent to their families compared to highly skilled migrants whose remittances back home are minimal. This is because migration of unskilled migrants is short-term and temporary, and basically involves leaving behind close families (Chirwa, 1996).

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Labour migration from Malawi to the Republic of South Africa has been exacerbated by several factors, such as the lack of employment opportunities, low income, poor working conditions, coupled with big differences in wages between South Africa and Malawi (Coleman, 1972). Historically, out-migration was sanctioned by the government of Malawi through a memorandum called the Treaty of International Mine Labour, which was signed in 1967 between Malawi and South African governments. This treaty initially increased the number of people travelling to South Africa. Ten years later, in 1977, out-migration from Malawi to South Africa was prohibited by the Malawian government following the crashing of a plane carrying Malawians to work in South African mines (Chandoka, 2007). Despite the curtailing of government-sanctioned labour migration, unsanctioned migration is still going on apparently because many Malawians have networks that were created by those who earlier went to South Africa and are still living there.

Labour migration can be grouped into three types, depending on what motivates out-migrants to move: voluntary migration, enforced migration, and distress migration (Damon, 2010). In most circumstances forced migration is decided by external forces, for instance politics or war; while distress migration is basically caused by either deprivation, deficiency, or livelihood shocks (e.g., crop failure, famine, and drought), among other reasons. On the other hand, voluntary migration is a result of a migrant's or family's decision-making for purposes of marriage, business, employment, or education (Damon, 2010). Labour migration in Mzimba falls under voluntary migration as most people struggle to reconcile deficiencies in wealth, social status, personal security, and poverty. Due to the high rate of unemployment, low education levels, income inequalities, globalisation, differentiation, time-space compression—just to mention a few—a good number of male Malawians migrate to South Africa, often illegally, in search of jobs.

Research has shown that when migrants get employed, they stay abroad for many years, without going back home. This physical separation often makes the remaining family—especially wives—to experience hardships as they struggle to care for households and their children. The absence from home of those who migrate impacts the remaining family economically, socially, and emotionally. This paper, utilising data from Mzimba District in Malawi, reveals the impacts that international labour migrations has on the households producing the migrants.

Contesting Empirical Arguments on Labour Migration

Many studies attest that in the long-run labour migration can reduce unemployment in the migrant producing countries, either directly through the departure of workers, or through various indirect mechanisms such as migrants leaving open spots for the unemployed or those employees in lower jobs to fill in (Cornelius et al., 2006; Gaude, 2010). It is further stated that the living circumstances of the families left behind usually improve, and may gain better access to better goods, services, improved health, and education (Gaude, 2010).

Labour migration empowers women in the sense that women left behind are more likely to be employed in unpaid family work and subsistence work to enable them support family members (Lokshin & Glinkaya, 2009). Furthermore, such women might engage in activities such as agriculture, both for consumption and commercial purposes. This was observed in China, where labour migration led to a decrease in wage and family work, but significantly to increase in agricultural work by women (Mu & Van de Walle, 2011).

Labour migration does not only contribute to the empowerment of women in terms of production, but also contributes to an improvement in power relations at the family level. Since migration usually involves a temporary departure of an adult male—who in most cases is the head of a household—labour migration bestows upon women the responsibility of the head of a house, who must start making important decisions to maintain a household (Lopez et. al., 2010). However, the sustainability of this empowerment has been questioned by some (e.g., Castles & Miller, 2003): that is does not continue when the migrant comes back, i.e., the responsibility goes back to the men once they return. Thus, in some cases this empowerment has been found to be temporal as it is decreased, or even reversed, when the male migrant comes back: in some cases even decisions that were taken by the temporary female head of the household may be reversed (Emilo, 2007).

Another contending argument is that there are negative aspects that are associated with labour migration to the household of a migrant as the separation of family members in most times affects not only individuals alone but the family unit overall (Orrozo, 1992). The reality of labour migration is that those who are left behind are often impacted negatively by the absence of the migrant member of a family. When it comes to child protection, labour migrants are often forced to leave their children behind owing to either restrictive policies regarding dependants in a host country, or sometimes because the employments migrants get do not provide possibilities of bringing their families. Such scenarios force migrating parents to leave their children behind to be cared for by their relatives. The separation of children from their parents takes a hard toll on them as they start manifesting some psycho-social problems such as sadness, rejection, anger, abandonment, significant behavioural change, and feelings of loss (Damon, 2010).

On the other hand, labour migration also has serious consequences on production (Boyle, 1998). Since most developing countries depend on agricultural production—both in absolute and relative terms—labour migration takes away young active males who could invest labour in farming, and thus contribute to the development of their communities. Furthermore, families are often robbed of heads of households who have full responsibilities of social and economic welfares of their families, which in turn disrupts family cohesiveness. These consequences have enhanced poverty at the household and community levels, indirectly resulting in under-development at national levels (Campbell, 2001). This trend invokes the classical economic reality that as labour becomes scarce, there is a high

possibility that wages may rise. This scenario happened in Mozambique and Malawi, where wages for labour estates rose when many men from these countries migrated to South Africa to work in mines (Robin, 1999).

Furthermore, labour migration may adversely affect those who migrate to foreign countries. Many migrant workers, especially those with low skills, face working conditions that are exploitative; and do not enjoy many human or labour rights (Damon, 2010). When it comes to women migrating without their spouses or companions, they often face problems when it comes to protection (Florida, 2005).

An Overview of Labour Migration in Southern Africa

Southern African countries have a long history of structured and informal labour migration. Since the 19th century, South Africa has always been the key country receiving migrants from other Southern African countries like Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, and Mozambique. During the 19th century, labour migration was one of the most imperative factors that brought together the various colonies and countries of Southern Africa into a single regional labour market (Stampini, 2009). The major production sectors that contributed to drawing a lot of migrants from these key countries were commercial agriculture, and more importantly, the mining sector in South Africa. As such, migrants from these countries have played a major important role in improving economic development in South Africa (*ibid.*).

Labour migration in this region can be explained from two different perspectives: first, from the micro-level where migrants make rational choices to find employment outside their countries of origin; and, second, at a macro-level where people are involuntarily forced to find work and receive cash wage due to rampant unemployment in their own countries (Murdock, 2009). An analysis of labour migration in this region can be traced to the British colonial rule. The imposition of head taxes in its colonies forced many people to look for wage employment elsewhere to meet this obligation (Ricca, 2011). Even for countries in the region that were not under British rule, for example Mozambique, unemployment levels during the 19th century were so high such that the only option that most people had was to migrate to neighbouring countries to escape harsh life realities and poor working conditions (Arthur, 1991).

Nevertheless, in the last two decades, labour migration in Southern Africa has undergone a major reformation. These changes were brought about by a better inter-regional mobility within the region. The major factor contributing to this was the end of the apartheid system in South Africa that used to constrain the movement of many black people, specifically excluding those that were non-South Africans. Now people can travel more freely to and from South Africa (Coleman, 1996). Furthermore, the inclusion of South Africa in regional blocs such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has facilitated and increased the migration of people (*ibid.*).

The other major driver of migration to South Africa is the prestigious connection the country has with the global economy. This has opened various opportunities that migrants expect to tap on. On another note, the growing unemployment and increasing trends in rural and urban poverty in most of Southern African countries have been a pushing factor for many people to move out of their countries in search of better livelihoods (IOM, 2002).

Migration Patterns in Malawi

Most of Malawi's labour migration trends could be easily explained and understood in the context of the underlying socio-economic realities prevailing in the country. High levels of rural-urban migration within the country and labour migration to Southern African countries have eventually defined migration patterns in Malawi. According to the current Development Index, Malawi is a least developed country (LDC). The economy is heavily dependent on primary commodities, with agriculture being paramount in the country's economy. Skilled people in Malawi have internally migrated to urban areas, and a few have migrated to other countries in the region, especially South Africa, in search of better economic opportunities. As such, labour migration seems to offer a pathway for people to escape poverty as migrants try and find better job opportunities elsewhere.

According to the 2008 Malawi population census, the country had by then an approximately over 13m people, with the population almost being equally divided into 6.7m females and 6.3m males. Most recent statistics indicates that, by January 2016, Malawi had a population of 17,474,544 people (MDGs Report, 2016). With a youthful population where those with age between 1-40 years is 52.2% of the whole population, this age structure gives an indication that the country will continue to experience high population growth for many years to come. In this scenario, if this young age group does not find any appropriate employment or livelihood opportunities within the country, then trends in migration to urban areas and to other more attractive international destinations will continue to increase.

Generally, Malawi's Northern regions – and Mzimba district specifically – have for a long time been perceived as conventional labour reserve areas. Out-migration from Mzimba dates back to the 1990s when the two dominant migrating ethnic groups, the Tonga and Tumbuka, started out-migrating in search of employment. To a great extent, the migration of these two ethnic groups was enhanced by the British colonial government that allowed people's movements to South African gold mines for wage labour to pay for head taxes. Thus, taxation and the process of labour recruitment instigated the prevalent movement of people from Mzimba district to South Africa (McCracken, 2008).

Labour migration has been a continuous process due to its perceived benefits for both the sending and the receiving countries (Jansen, 2010). For Mzimba district, out-migration has somehow positively contributed to offset the effects of unemployment, but it has also greatly provided some form of economic

emancipation through the creation of small businesses, monetary remittances, and the transfer of knowledge from the recipient countries (Davies, 2010). On the side of the receiving countries, in-migration has had the problem of labour scarcity propped up; while on a positive note it has reduced labour shortages. This article aims to establish if benefits accruing from out-migration have trickled down to migrants' households.

Methodology

This article utilized data obtained from Mzimba district, in Northern Malawi. In determining the sample, it was important to include administrative units at the community level that have high numbers of out-migrants. Systematic sampling was used to obtain two sets of household respondents from each village of the 8 villages that fit the above categorization. One set was from households that have had or have a migrant family member, and another set was from households that have no migrant family member. A detailed list of out-migrants was obtained from the district offices based on the 2008 Malawian population and household census. Respondents were randomly selected from the list obtained from the district offices, as well as a list obtained from health centres that keep records of families of out-migrants.

A total of 8 out of 27 villages with the highest number of out-migrants in Mzimba district were chosen and migrant families identified. A sample size of 50 respondents, representing 15% of the out-migrant population, were randomly selected from the list obtained from the district council's office and health centres. Another sample of 20 respondents from households without migrants was randomly selected from the study villages to serve as a control. Since this study was essentially qualitative in nature, primary data were obtained through the use participatory rural appraisals such as in-depth interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. Nevertheless, some quantitative data were collected as well. Secondary information was obtained mainly through library research.

Discussion of Findings

The findings based on the data obtained from Mzimba district are presented along the following thematic areas: socio-economic and demographic factors of migrants' households, reasons propelling migrants to move, remittances and investments patterns of out-migrants' households, and the occupations of other household members. Where necessary, these are compared with the control households that had no migrants.

Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Most migrant households in all the 8 villages consisted of 80% females and 20% males. This shows that the main labour out-migrants from Mzimba district are males. The few males found in the households were either elders or those from the

control group. Men are the most mobile and leave their spouses behind. It is only under few circumstances would women migrate, and normally it is when requested by their husbands to join them in the receiving country. On another note, sisters could be requested by their brothers to join them in the receiving country to optimise the wage money to be remitted home. This was confirmed during one female focus group discussion:

"Usually we allow men to go and provide for us women; and we have to look after the children back home. If we both go, who is going to look after the children? And in some cases, we have to take care of the husbands' parents who also need to enjoy the benefits of their children's toil when they remit some money home."

On why a household can have both male and female children out-migrate, one elderly respondent intimated that:

"... when my son migrated, he found it hard to look after my big family, he managed to secure a job for his sister and thus sent transport money for her to join him. This is however very rare to happen. As we are talking, they are both in that country."

Age of Respondents

Most respondents were within the age range of 21-30 (28.6%) and 31-40 (24%) (Table 1). Thus, almost half of the respondents were in their most productive age group. Furthermore, most of the female respondents were either newly married or had been in marriage for a year or two before the husband travelled to South Africa. Most young men find it easy to leave the country in search of employment or business opportunities in South Africa, and many other Southern African countries because culturally it is expected that a man must fend for his family.

Table 1: Age of Respondents (N= 70)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 20	12	17.1
21-30	20	28.6
31-40	17	24.3
41-50	7	10.0
51-60	6	8.6
61 and above	8	11.4
Total	70	100

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Educationally, a majority of the respondents (52.4%) had attended primary education (nevertheless, almost all of them indicated they had not completed all levels of primary education), and even those who indicated that they had secondary level education (28.6%), most had only attained junior high school (Form 1 and Form 2) education. Only 2 individuals had attained some tertiary education, representing 2.9% of the sample; whereas only 1 had a bachelor degree in education, and another one had a certificate in teaching (Fig. 1).

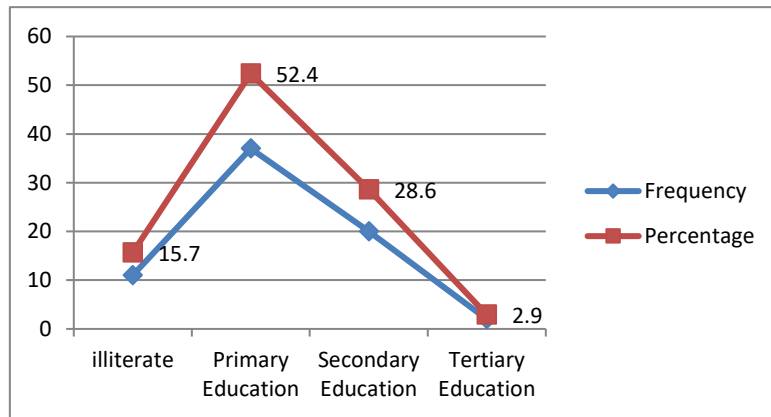


Figure 1: Education Level
 Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Even though most of the respondents had attained some education, a reasonable percentage of (15.7%) were illiterate. What can be deduced from the education attainment of the respondents is that most people in the sampled areas do not consider education a priority. This fact is collaborated with the apathy that the respondents had towards education as they do not even bother to follow up on what their children learn at school. Upon inquiring about the performance of their children in schools, most respondents were indifferent. One of the female respondents had this to say:

“Most of the times our children do not tell us how they are faring in school. When we inquire on what they learn at school, some of them tell us that what they learn nowadays and the style of pedagogy being used is different from what we, elders, went through. So, even if they tell us what transpires at school, we elders cannot comprehend!”

Main Occupation of Respondents from Surveyed Households

Most members of the surveyed households (54%) were unemployed, and were not engaged in any substantial work for gain. As such, they only rely on remittances sent home from time to time by emigrants (Table 2). The second largest population of the respondents were involved in domestic farming to support their households.

Table 2: Main Occupation of Respondents (N=50)

Main Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Employed	4	8
Farming	15	30
Self-employed/business	4	8
Unemployed	27	54

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

This finding was corroborated with data from the Mzimba district profile that, apart from those who were unemployed, most of the rest of the families were involved in subsistence farming (ILO/Ministry of Labour, 2011). A small number of people (8%) were employed as casual labourers, and as housemaids by well-off households, especially those with educated children who are employed or doing businesses in the city. Most of those that were self-employed were basically low-skilled labourers like carpenters or bricklayers.

Main Occupation of the Respondents from the Control Group

This group of respondents produced very interesting results contrary to the study's expectations. Many people in this group (30%) were employed, although the jobs were not blue-collar as most of them were working either as housemaids, messengers, or in timber companies. An almost equal percentage was unemployed (30%), and just staying at their homes. Very few (8%) were self-employed (Fig. 2). What can be deduced from these data of the control group is that people from households that do not have a migrant member seem to be more entrepreneurial as quite a substantial number of people (25%) were self-employed and were conducting businesses.

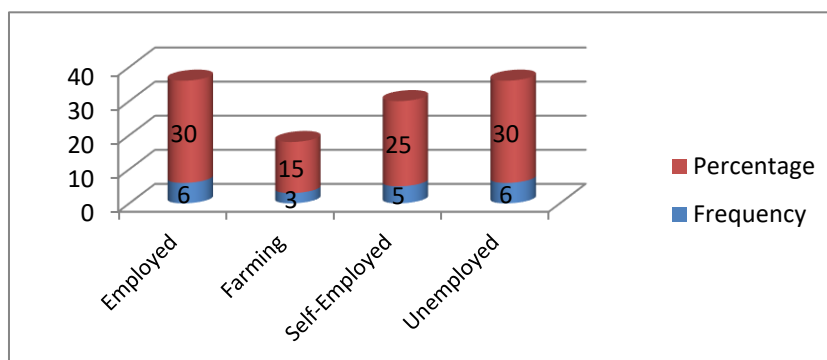


Figure 2: Main Occupation of the Control Group

Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2016

Factors Influencing Out-Migration

The responses regarding factors that influence people to migrate were varied. Many people cited low income (46%) as the major reason that instigates people to migrate to South Africa (Fig. 3). Another major factor was unemployment (22%) (this was purported to mean work other than agriculture), and poor socio-economic status of a family. Others moved to South Africa to work and attain a certain level of savings (10%) for establishing businesses when they return home. On the other side of the continuum, very few were forced to migrate due to family conflicts (6%).

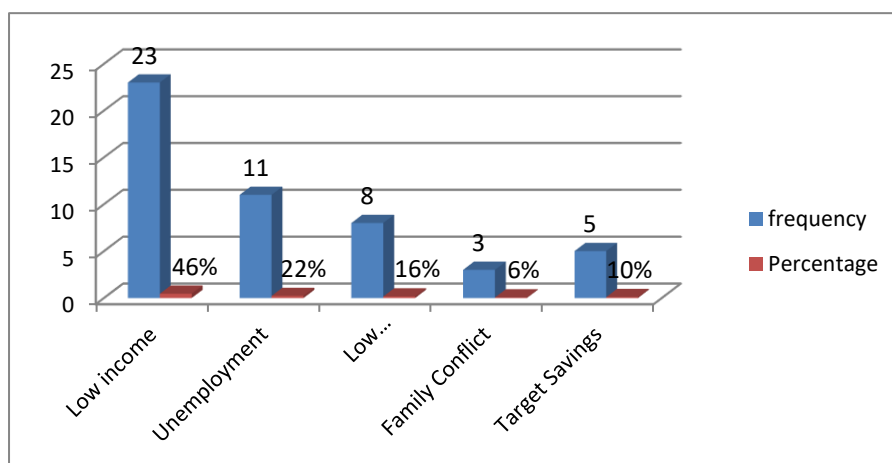


Figure 3: Factors Influencing Migration to South Africa

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

It can be argued that it is due to economic insecurities that people were compelled to migrate. This is a classical evidence ascertaining that poor economic conditions in many countries is a big trigger for labour migration from economically poor to relatively richer countries. The following excerpt from a female respondent in a focus group discussion support the above:

“With the type of farming that we have, it is very difficult to harvest enough to feed the entire family, and as such my husband decided to go to South Africa to look for employment so that the little he shall be sending from there can support us here. So far it is working.”

Most of the labour migrants leave their spouses and children at home. It was established that many of those that migrated to South Africa were married (78%), as opposed to only 22% who were not married (Table 3).

Table 3: Marital Status of Emigrants

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	39	78
Unmarried	11	22

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

As such, it was family responsibilities and the quest to meet familial obligations that were the major pushing factors for those migrating as they were looking for ways to fend for their families. One elderly lady said:

“I asked my son how he was going to look after his wife if he had no formal employment and without any income to buy farm inputs such as fertilizer. I told him that it would be embarrassing if he failed to look after his wife and kids when most of his friends were in South Africa and looking after their families.”

Thus, it is evident that many of those migrating were peasant farmers (70%), daily wage casual labourers (10%) whose incomes were meagre, or outright jobless people. The lucky few (6%) had the chance to work in the private sector, such as in timber lumbering because Mzimba district has one of the biggest forest reserves called Chikangawa. A smaller population was self-employed (4%) (Table 4).

Table 4: Migrants Occupations Before Migration

Profession	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Farming	35	70
Self employed	2	4
Government service	0	0
Private Sector	3	6
Daily wage labour	5	10
Jobless	5	10

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Note: None of the migrants had any formal employment either nor were they students.

Establishing the Economy of Migrants' Households

It is normally difficult to establish the economy of a rural household, especially an annual income, though this may be one of the most important indicators of a family's socio-economic status. However, we made an attempt to deduce the annual income by establishing household expenditure, and adding to the household monthly consumption of maize (because this is major staple food for most of the households) to come up with a rough estimate of the monthly income of households. This was then rounded up to reflect an annual income of the households. An overwhelming majority of the households (44%) were found to belong to the income category of up to MK50,000, followed by 32% households that were in the income bracket of MK50,001-MK100,000, and 24% households being in the bracket of MK101,001-MK150,000 (Table 5). These findings supported the earlier assertion that the economy of households in Mzimba is not good as stated in earlier observations, thus concluding this to be a major factor that prompted many people to migrate from Mzimba to other countries, especially to South Africa.

Table 5: Household Income Before Migration of Household Member

Annual Income MK	Frequency	Percentage %
Up to 50,000	12	24
50,001- 100,000	16	44
100,001- 150,000	22	32

Note: MK1 = US\$ 0.0013

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

On the other hand, ownership of property in a society defines the social status of a household in a community. Possessing a residential house shows how a family is well-off, especially in rural settings. A significant percentage of the respondents

(64%) did not own a residential house to the extent that even those who were in matrimony were still living with their parents. As for other types of wealth, a small number (8%) of households had plots for farming, whereas 6% of the households owned businesses.

Table 6: Ownership of Property Before Migration

Ownership of Property	Frequency	Percentage
Residential property	11	22
Commercial Property	4	8
Business	3	6
Nothing	32	64

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

To further exemplify the above, one of the respondents had this to say on the issue of owning property:

“We usually admire most of our friends whose husbands have gone to South Africa and after a while we see that they have built either their personal houses or houses for rent in their villages. As such we also encourage our husbands to do the same. After all who would want to remain behind? If there is chance, let him use it. And if he is intelligent enough, well, we all see the results.”

We tried to find out what kind of wage labour migrants do when abroad by inquiring from their relatives at the households. Although this can be argued to be questionable in obtaining the correct information, we believe that migrants would be open to their kin and kith, though in some instances they might tell their families not to reveal what they are doing abroad for fear of drawing more migrants, and hence jeopardise their jobs. One of the respondents had this to say:

“My son told me that when people ask, I should say he is doing daily manual labour work, but he assured me that he is doing well. At least I can see from what he sends and the support he gives to his brothers.”

Nevertheless, information from most relatives revealed that most migrants (32%) were casual labourers, 18% were seasonal workers, 24% were permanent workers, while the rest of the respondents (26%) had no idea of what kind of jobs their kin were doing abroad (Table 7).

Table 7: Types of Migrants’ Job Abroad

Migrants Job Abroad	Frequency	Percentage
Daily labourer	16	32
Seasonal Worker	9	18
Permanent Worker	12	24
No idea	13	26

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Effects of Overseas Earnings

For the impact of migration to be felt at a household level, it is important to establish the amount of earnings that a household receives from their relatives who had migrated. This would be more informative if the earnings of the migrants abroad were known. Knowing a migrant's earnings was somehow shrouded in secrecy, as one of the male respondents said:

"It is difficult for us to ask, it's as if we are being strict or we want to find out how they spend the money where they work. That is hard because we are also mindful of the differences in currencies so we only understand and accept what they indicate to us."

To find out the impact of migration on families that remain behind, one must have some estimates of the earnings of the migrants. It is difficult to draw conclusions here, but this would only give an indication of the situation. Not all families were sure of the earnings of their family members abroad, and they indicated that this was based on what they told them.

Many respondents (56%) had no idea of how much their relative migrants were getting, while 44% revealed that they knew how much their relative migrants were earning. Furthermore, almost an equal number of households were receiving remittances monthly and bimonthly, though the amount varied from time to time. A smaller number of households (18%) were receiving money only when migrants visited home. The general finding here is that the level of migrants' remittances back home is low.

The modalities used in the remittances were varied. However, many of the migrants (56%) were using courier services in the form of drivers and other transporters that travel to and from Malawi every day. None of the migrants were using bank wire transfer in remittance transactions. A small number of migrants (16%) used post offices in sending remittances, while 28% used fellow returnee migrants to remit their money home (Table 8).

Table 8: The Modality Used to Send Remittances

Process of Remitting	Frequency	Percentage
Bank	0	0
Returned Migrants	14	28
Post Office	8	16
Transporters	28	56

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Here, people did not use modern methods of remitting money due to, among others, low level of education of family members that militate against them taking aboard modern technologies, and also not being aware of how banks and other money service providers (e.g., mobile phones banking) operate. Furthermore, many of the households are in rural areas, far away from towns where they could easily access banking services or other money service providers. Many seem not yet ripe to embrace change in new technologies of money transacting.

Most households in the study area used remittance money to modify their homes by buying household assets to replenish ones that were sold when a migrant was raising transport money, or buying new ones. Others used it to settle loans that the migrant took when going abroad, or any loan that a household may have taken to offset family obligations, especially when a migrant had not sent remittances in time. Nevertheless, as stated elsewhere, many households (40%) were using remittances to construct houses. This was found to be true as most households that had migrants in South Africa had houses of cement bricks.

Table 9: Uses of Remittances

Uses of Remittances	Frequency	Percentage
Home development	18	36
Pay off loans	12	24
Marriage rights	0	0
Construction of a house	20	40

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Contribution of Labour Migration to Development in Mzimba District

The migration of people from Mzimba district to South Africa seems to have had a positive effect on the general welfare of the people in the study area. Many respondents (44%) believed the change was not only in improved housing, but also in a much better lifestyle. Other respondents claimed that due to their relatively better living standards compared to others, people had started recognising their position in the society, and accorded them leadership roles, as one lady intimated:

“Before my husband travelled to South Africa, I would not be invited for village development meetings; and sometimes during meetings they could not ask me to say anything. But after my husband went and started sending me household items, and after we built a new house, many people come to me for advice; and I am now invited in many development meetings in the village. In fact, I am a committee member of two projects.”

Since primary school education is offered freely by the central government, only those who had children in secondary school could indicate if migration of people has had any effect on education. Families that had secondary school children showed improvements in education levels. Furthermore, 20% of the respondents indicated improved housing, and this was duly visible to the researcher (improvement in this case was taken to mean a brick house and or those roofed with iron sheets) (Fig. 4).

Furthermore, more probing revealed that some of the households receiving remittances were able to establish some businesses, and others were able to join village savings and loans societies, something they were not able do before.

Though families in Mzimba reported relative socio-economic benefits from migration as manifested physically through the improvements in houses and lifestyle, on the other hand they also reported negative impacts. Since most of the

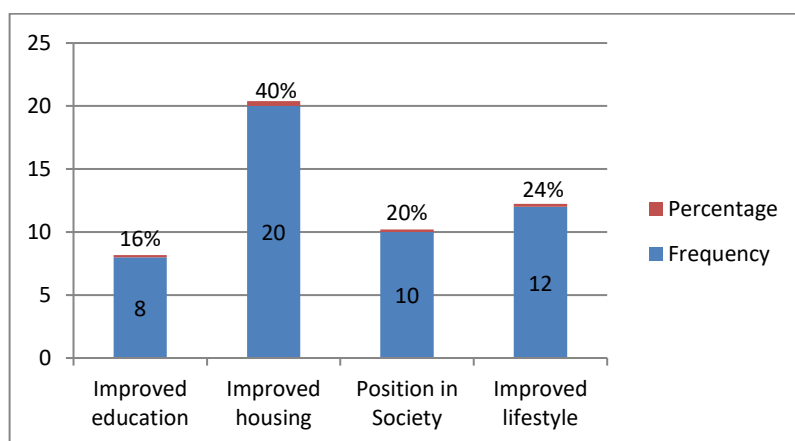


Figure 4: Labour Migration Contribution to Development

Source: Compiled from the field data, 2016

migrants (30%) were married people, and often with children, typically the wives were unable to properly instil discipline to their children. This has led to the cropping up of inappropriate behaviours among young household members simply because disciplinarians, who are mainly men, are absent from home. Another adverse effect of male migration was loneliness experienced by the remaining spouses, and personal insecurities due to the absence of a male head of a family (Table 10).

Table 10: Problems Caused by the Absence of Migrants

Problems because of absence of migrant	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of parental control	14	28
Misbehaviour	15	30
School dropout	7	14
Personal insecurities	8	16
Loneliness	6	12

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

One lady aptly put it thus:

"Most of the times I am not invited to family or clan meetings since my husband is away. Sometimes family decisions are revealed to me through my husband over the phone. It makes me very sad as I am not consulted although I am very close to them than my husband who is far away."

On the very extreme, an insignificant number of respondents reported neither advantages nor disadvantages of migration. These families were not bothered in any way by the absence of a migrant as it did not affect the family setup. These people maintain that there was no change in their lifestyle, in the education of their children,

or in any area of socio-economic development. Further, they indicated that there was no change of cultural values due to the departure of a family member. A scrutiny of these households revealed that their relatives that had migrated were not remitting monies back home, hence the indifferent attitude towards them.

Conclusion

Despite the availability of fertile soils and ample land for farming in Mzimba district, labour migration rates keep rising as many people continue to leave for South Africa seeking employment or better-paying jobs. Using data from Mzimba district, this study attempted to show the impacts of migration on the households in the district. The findings have revealed that, predominantly, labour migration has had significant impacts on the development of households in the district.

It has been established that remittances contribute, albeit in a small way, to the expansion of demand in a domestic economy. It is generally acknowledged that the use of remittances in many places is dominated by expenditure on land, housing, basic staples, and other consumables. However, remittances in Mzimba district were used to buy household assets, agricultural inputs and machinery, paying for secondary education, and meeting other social or religious obligations. Furthermore, remittances are also commonly used to settle loans incurred to finance the cost of migration.

What can be deduced from this article is that investment in Mzimba district can be seen in the form of their consumption expenditure. As earlier noted, most achievements that migrant families have realised are at a basic level, for instance, improved housing, improved diets, and better clothing. These aspects put together have a higher probability of increasing future productivity of households. Furthermore, the propensity of families to build better housing from remittances present an opportunity to rent the houses if things get tough, hence a chance of establishing regular cash flow for the family.

Based on the findings, we can propose recommendations at three levels. First, the Malawi government should integrate the issue of labour migration in its development policies instead of condemning it. The government should seek to empower the young growing population in the country by opening more economic opportunities through the establishment of medium and small enterprises that will provide employment to the ever-increasing job seekers. Hand in hand with this, the Malawi government should endeavour to hasten the provision of different vocational skills to its young people so that they can employ themselves. This is a clarion call for the government to establish many vocational training schools to train people in different skills. In doing this, priority should be accorded to districts that have been traditional senders of labour migrants like Mzimba, Mangochi, and Nkhata Bay. On another note, the Malawi government should consider establishing short-term legal channels for people interested in temporary migration to destinations where there is high

demand for labour. This would not only ensure that the government knows the number of its people outside its borders, but it will also likely enhance the benefits of labour migration.

Other stakeholders in rural areas like Mzimba—e.g., non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—should seek to empower members of households that are left behind by migrants. This can be done by establishing and facilitating different development programs such as starting self-run businesses, establishing revolving funds that could offer some small loans to people to start businesses, etc. For those families that are in dire need, NGOs could start food for work programs to help them. Furthermore, they can also advocate to the government to develop a social protection policy to cater for both migrants and family members that are left behind. If this is done, it would increase migrants' responsibilities towards the families left behind. NGOs can do this by hosting awareness campaigns to inform people of the benefits of a social security policy.

There is a need to change the mindset of rural people, especially those from traditionally migrant-spawning districts such as Mzimba district. The dynamics of labour migration have greatly changed now such that not only positive impacts can accrue from these dynamics, but negative ones as well. On this note, we recommend that families that are left behind should not solely depend on remittances for their sustenance as any unforeseen eventuality can happen to the migrant who may fail to remit, thus jeopardising the wellbeing of the families. In this, there is a need for having social security policies as proposed above. Members of such families can organise themselves in like groups (same age, gender, etc.) and start revolving funds, such as village saving loans (VSL) groups, which can help one another financially (especially those that receive remittances frequently) to start up small businesses and be self-sustaining.

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