Transnational migration and the involuntary return of undocumented migrants across the Thai-Cambodia border

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Abstract
Migration from Cambodia is a major livelihood strategy for rural families, with most having at least one member migrating in search of work. Under-investment in the agrarian economy together with unequal access to resources leaves many rural Cambodians with little option but to migrate. Thailand is their number one destination. Most have an undocumented status, putting them at risk of arrest and deportation. Political instability and the breach between policies and actual practices of Thailand and Cambodia generate the conditions for migrants' precarious lives of uncertainty and insecurity. Interviews with Cambodian migrants and members of their families are examined to gain insight into migrants' motivations and strategic decision-making. The involuntary return of migrants from Thailand in June 2014 provides the lens through which the significance of migration strategies and the impact of return on family livelihoods are studied. This article demonstrates the complex, dynamic nature of migration and its essential role in livelihood strategies of poor transnational Cambodian families. Conceptualizing migration decisions at the local level within the broader political economy casts light on the pervasive nature of migration, despite the high risks and precarious conditions under which undocumented cross-border migration takes place between Cambodia and Thailand.

Dr Robert Nurick is executive director of the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme (migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk) at the University of Sussex. His research focuses on undocumented migration between Cambodia and Thailand. Robert is responsible for the programme's uptake strategy ensuring findings reach broad audiences. Robert has experience designing action research processes building on community priorities, perspectives and capacities. Through training and adult learning, he supports organisations and communities to co-create action plans for development. Robert is an honorary fellow at the University of Melbourne and he continues to play a consultancy role in the company he established in 1997 (developmentfocus.org.uk).

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