

**RURAL URBAN STUDIES UNIT**



UNIVERSITY OF NATAL DURBAN

**MIGRANT LABOUR IN TRANSKEI —  
CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE AT  
THE VILLAGE LEVEL**

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**DEVELOPMENT STUDIES UNIT**

Centre for Applied Social Sciences

WORKING PAPER NO. 2

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by

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Rural Urban Studies Series Working Paper No. 2

Development Studies Unit  
University of Natal  
Durban

1985

**Rural Urban Studies Unit**

The Rural Urban Studies Unit was founded in 1983 by the Human Sciences Research Council for the purpose of studying the dynamics of the links between the rural and urban areas of South Africa. It is situated at the University of Natal and works in close co-operation with the Development Studies Unit.

ISBN NO. 0 86980 467 7

MULTICOPY™ Durban

**Migrant Labour in Transkei -  
Cause and Consequence at the Village Level<sup>1</sup>**

**Section 1. Introduction**

The migrant labour system in South Africa has been of central importance to the growth of the region. However, although a number of writers have emphasized the importance of migrant labour for "homeland" agriculture,<sup>2</sup> much of the debate around migration theory has adopted an historical interpretation,<sup>3</sup> and has tended to avoid the dynamics at the individual level. Further, dualist type analyses tend to stress the 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of migration, and focus upon the decision of the individual to migrate, abstracting from wider political and economic considerations.<sup>4</sup> As a result there has been little attention directed at the existing micro-level conditions at the household or village level and their relationship to the broader economy.

It is argued in this paper that in Southern Africa, the incorporation of households into the migrant labour system is not a matter of choice, and thereby subject to planning directives, but is essential for their survival.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the parameters by which an individual makes this decision are pre-determined by historical conditions that have resulted in the institutionalisation of a 'migrant labour system'. To show this, data from three peripheral areas in Transkei will be examined. In addition, the data in the last section suggests that there is little reason to expect that migration will improve prospects for the development of the supplying areas.

However, theories of the causes of migration will first be outlined.

## Section 2. Theories of Migration

While the development of any causal chain is complex, a number of writers have developed models of migration based upon interlocking 'push and pull forces'.<sup>6</sup> In essence, this approach identifies four forces which act upon the would-be migrant. These are:

1. Urban pull forces, which include urban job opportunities, the rural/urban wage differential and rising urban wage rates;
2. Rural push forces, including rural poverty and landlessness;
3. Rural pull forces, including family life and an attractive rural lifestyle;
4. Urban push forces, such as the absence of family accommodation, and an unattractive urban lifestyle.<sup>7</sup>

This approach has been criticised on a number of grounds. Firstly, although the push/pull model of oscillating migration does suggest a system whereby a migrant moves from his rural home to cities, in search of work, and then returns home, it does not offer any explanation as to how the push and pull forces came into being. For example, Mitchell appears to assume that the oscillating process simply appears, and will continue until the chain of events is broken at some point.<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt to overcome this problem, Wilson, adopting a more historical approach, linked the relative strengths of the push and pull forces to the level of economic development.<sup>9</sup> This approach was taken further by Hattrass, who argued that the forces which affect migration are a function of the rate of social and economic development in both the urban and the rural communities. She suggested that the migration process is both determined by, and is a determinant of the nature of the development path followed in both regions.<sup>10</sup>

To a degree, this approach has been paralleled by some of the more radical analysts.<sup>11</sup> These writers argue that individual migrants should not be conceived of as rational actors, maximising their interests through a system of market forces, but instead, that the movement of migrant workers is a system, and is, therefore, beyond the control of any individual. Consequently, it is necessary to analyse the system and to determine its rules, needs, and effects before examining how individuals conform to it.

In addition, the dualist tradition, by assuming that the rural and urban areas are distinct sectors linked solely by the movement of labour from the rural areas, in search of better opportunities in urban areas, reduces migration to a simple either/or dilemma. That is to say, the decision to move by a prospective migrant is regarded as the outcome of a behavioural-type decision process, whereby the migrant optimises his prospects in view of a set of costs. In this way, this approach would fail to recognise that the migrant labour system was established by the joint action of the state and capital,

in order to meet the labour needs of the latter. Thus the decision to migrate does not simply come about, but is the result of a deliberate policy of inducement. Changes in the rural periphery are therefore linked to the requirements of the capitalist core. This has been termed a process of articulation between the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, whereby the latter is modified to meet the needs of the former.<sup>12</sup> An articulation approach argues that there is little choice in the system of migration, although the consequences may be varied.

At a more general level, a number of other criticisms have been leveled at migration analyses. In particular, Swindell, while acknowledging that models which reduce labour migration to simple dichotomies of push-pull have proved to be inadequate, stresses that Marxian analysis tends to be over generalised, and is often characterized by excessive economic determinism. He argues that migration should be seen as an on-going process, linking the village or rural household, to the modern capitalist economy.<sup>13</sup> Following some of Swindell's suggestions, the strategies available to the migrant and the choices that are made in order to maintain subsistence at the village level will be discussed, taking into account the possible effects of migration and migrant remittances.

### **Section 3. A Transkeian Case Study**

By examining subsistence production, and household maintenance, this study stresses that rural households rely heavily upon migrant

remittances and shows some of the consequences of migration in rural Transkei. The data to be used was gathered in 1982 from three administrative areas in the Umzimkulu district. All households in the fourteen villages established under the programme of Betterment Planning were included in the study area. A sample of 255 households were surveyed comprising approximately one fifth of the total household population. The sample was a stratified random sample and data concerning 1522 people was obtained out of the estimated total population of 6092 (Population Census, 1980).

The demographic profile of the sample was, in most respects, similar to that in other rural areas of Transkei.<sup>14</sup> However, at the time of the survey, 64 percent of men, excluding children below 15 years of age, were temporarily absent as migrants from households in Umzimkulu, either as workers or job-seekers, suggesting that the Umzimkulu district is characterised by a higher rate of male out-migration than is generally the case.<sup>15</sup> This becomes more dramatic if only the most productive ages are considered (20-50 years). In this group, absenteeism averaged 85 percent, and reached a peak of 95 percent in the 35-39 age cohort.<sup>16</sup>

It could be expected that if the decision to migrate was unaffected by the wider economic system, different demographic groups would have a differential propensity to migrate. That is to say, migration would tend to be age and sex selective. Consequently, regression analysis was undertaken for adults, over 15 years, who were not at school. Residential status was used as the dependent variable, and sex, age, marital status and education level were used as independent or



determinant variables. As sex alone accounted for 49 percent of the variation in migration rates within the sample, it was excluded from subsequent regressions. However, although contingency tables suggested that some groups were more prone to migrate than others,<sup>17</sup> the regression indicated that no other demographic characteristic appeared to be statistically related to increased out-migration. It seems then that all adult males migrate if they are able to find employment and correspondingly, that migration in the Umzimkulu district does not operate in a selective manner, and has become a necessary way of life.<sup>18</sup>

It has also been suggested that distance to a major centre is a factor determining the migration decision.<sup>19</sup> On this basis it could be intuitively expected that higher levels of out-migration might be partly explained by Umzimkulu's relative proximity to Durban (200kms). However, 68 percent of the migrants were employed in the Witwatersrand area some 500kms away.

Whilst there are other theories which offer alternative explanations of migration, such as the notion of "bright lights" whereby workers are attracted to towns in search of a more exciting lifestyle,<sup>20</sup> the assumption of the primacy of economic factors has underpinned both dualistic and neo-marxist approaches to labour migration. Thus, it seems appropriate to examine characteristics of the village economy within the Umzimkulu district, to establish the potential for household subsistence in the absence of remittances from migrant workers. In other words, to determine whether households do enjoy the

luxury of choice or must have access to migrant earnings to ensure long term survival.

#### Section 4. Subsistence Production in the Village

##### 4.1 Introduction

Subsistence income-generating activities which can be undertaken by households are subject to the constraints of the environment, land holdings, labour availability, access to farm implements and other inputs, and the availability of capital.

Generally in the area surveyed, the performance of subsistence production in terms of its ability to meet the needs of the rural population, was found to be poor. This can be deduced from the following summary of the data:

1. If it is assumed that 2,5 bags of maize per person is the minimum quantity needed to sustain an acceptable level of physical health,<sup>21</sup> then less than 14 percent of the households surveyed were capable of producing sufficient maize to meet their needs;<sup>22</sup>
2. Given that the average yield in the area surveyed was 2,71 bags per hectare,<sup>23</sup> and that the mean average family size was 5 permanently resident members, to be self sufficient an average household would require access to a minimum of 4,6 hectare of arable land.<sup>24</sup> As 48 percent were landless,<sup>25</sup> and amongst those who had land, the average plot size was only 3 hectare, only 2,5 percent of the sample had access to sufficient land to have any

hope of meeting the requirement for self-sufficiency in terms of maize, with the existing levels of productivity and technology of agriculture;

3. Given that only one household possessed a tractor and that the minimum number of oxen required for effective ploughing is 4, only 23 percent of the sample had the potential to be able to meet their own traction requirements. Further, as 60 percent did not own any cattle, pooling of oxen by households was also very unlikely. Consequently most landowners were dependent upon outside traction;
4. Finally, due to the high male absentee rate, almost half the sampled households (49,4 percent) did not have an adult male at home. Thus it seems likely that the shortage of available adult male labour will remain a constraint on subsistence agriculture even if all the other limitations were eased.

These points will be discussed in some detail below in order to show the dynamics of subsistence production at the village level. The distribution of the principle factors of production, land and livestock will be examined, and, thereafter non-farm activities and attitudes to farm production.

#### 4.2 The Distribution of Landholdings

All three areas surveyed had undergone 'Betterment Planning',<sup>26</sup> with resettlement occurring in 1964, 1970 and 1975 for Zintwala, Sihleza and Gugweni respectively. In all areas, field plots were planned and

the sizes were set at one hectare in Sihleza, three hectare in Zintwala and two hectare in Gugweni. However, the actual number of agricultural plots to be allocated was not determined at the time. This appears to have led to the partial and uncoordinated re-allocation of land on resettlement, which has in turn resulted in both a high incidence of landlessness, and a skewed distribution of landholdings.

Table 1 shows the distribution of landholdings in the three administrative areas. Landlessness was most widespread in Sihleza with 74 percent of the households still without fields. Consequently, although resettlement should have been completed over thirteen years ago, for most households subsistence production had not been an alternative source of income for more than a decade. In contrast, in Gugweni, land was not allocated according to the proposed plan and, as a result, 47 percent of landholders had access to agricultural plots greater than the planned two hectare.

**Table 1**  
**Landholding by Administration Area**  
**Percentage of Households with Landholdings of:**

Plot size in Hectares	Gugweni	Sihleza	Zintwala	Total Sample
None	38,3	74,0	37,5	48,1
0,5 - 1	14,8	1,4	0	7,9
2 - 3	40,3	17,8	59,4	37,5
4 - 6	6,7	6,8	3,1	6,5

n = 245

It seems that the proposed 'Betterment schemes', far from improving the lot of the people in the villages surveyed, actually made the situation considerably worse. It was not apparent whether this was due to inefficiency, incompetence or deliberate mismanagement, either on the part of the administrators in the bureaucracy, or by the tribal authorities. Further, when the determinants of access to land were examined, chi square tests, using access to land as the dependent variable, and age of head, sex of head and village as independent variables, showed that only when the sample was segmented according to the village in which a household lived, was there a significant difference between the sub-samples with respect to access to landholding.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that "Betterment Planning" has extended the control of the Tribal Authority, but has undermined the tribal system of land allocation whereby the age, sex and marital status of the household head determined access to land.

Apart from access to fields, households could plant in garden patches, both small tracts of land immediately adjacent to the homestead, and community garden plots. As only one of the fourteen residential areas had a community garden, and the residential plot size allocated in all three administrative areas was only 46 x 46 metres, the potential contribution of garden cultivation to household sustenance is likely to be small. Nonetheless, given the extent of the landlessness, the relative importance of gardens could be far greater than their absolute size suggests. However, the data in Table 2 shows that even when gardens were included in landholdings, 18

percent of the sample were still landless as they owned neither fields nor gardens.

A further 19 percent of the sample did not own gardens, but did own fields.<sup>28</sup>

Table 2

**Field and Garden Ownership**

Landholding	Frequency
Garden and Field	33,5
Garden only	29,4
Fields only	19,1
Neither	18,0

n = 254

#### 4.3 Agricultural Output

With regard to output from fields and gardens, a distinction should be drawn between total production levels, and productivity levels (output per hectare). Whereas low productivity levels may imply that a household is not farming successfully, a low total output means that the household must find an alternative means for survival. In the Transkeian context this means that the household must continue to rely upon the remittances of a migrant labourer.

The data in Table 3 shows the proportion of subsistence achieved from total maize production from both gardens and fields. The vast majority of households were in no way self-sufficient with regards to maize. Indeed, it is not surprising, taking the distribution of land into account, that almost one third of the population did not

contribute at all towards their daily sustenance through agriculture production (29 percent). A further 33 percent were able to produce no more than 10 percent of their subsistence diet. Only 15 percent of the household in the sample were able to grow sufficient maize to meet the subsistence requirements of 2,5 bags per person, and to produce some surplus beyond this point.

**Table 3**  
**Percentage of Subsistence Achieved Output per capita**  
**as a percentage of 2,5 bags of maize**

Percentage of Subsistence Requirement Achieved	Relative Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
0 - 0,9	28,6	
1 - 10	32,6	61,2
11 - 20	5,9	67,1
21 - 50	7,8	74,9
51 - 99	10,2	85,1
100 - 199	11,4	96,5
200+	3,5	100,0

n = 255

turning to productivity levels, Table 4 shows the variations in land productivity measured in terms of output per hectare. As can be seen, the yield per hectare was low with an average output of 2,7 bags per hectare, i.e. hardly above the minimum per head requirement of maize of 2,5 bags per year.

**Table 4**  
**Yield per Hectare**

Bags Per Hectare	Percentage Landholding Households
0,0 - 0,5 bag	21,7
0,5 - 1,5 bags	19,2
1,5 - 2,5 bags	15,7
2,5 - 4,0 bags	20,5
5,0 - 16 bags	22,9
Mean	2,71 bags
Median	2,12 bags

n =114

Yields were however uneven and 23 percent of the land holding households were able to produce between 5 and 16 bags of maize per hectare.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Section 4.4 Livestock**

The second major factor of production in subsistence production is livestock, of which the most important component are cattle. Cattle can be utilised in three ways.

1. to fulfill traction requirements in agriculture;
2. for meat and milk production;
3. as a source of saving or wealth accumulation.<sup>30</sup>

Although the utilisation of cattle purely as a form of saving does not assist in the production of subsistence requirements, it does increase



the economic security of a rural household, especially in times of crisis. A household with cattle is able to sell these in times of hardship, to purchase food and other basic needs, and is also able to benefit from the meat that results from slaughtering or death by natural causes, as well as from milk during the lactation period.

Table 5 presents data showing both cattle ownership and ownership of small stock, that is, goats, sheep and pigs.

**Table 5**  
**Cattle and Small Stock Ownership**

Number of cattle/small stock owned	Percentage of households owning	
	Cattle	Small Stock
None	55.0	63.1
1 - 3	18.8	23.4
4 - 9	18.7	11.1
10 - 14	5.8	1.2
15 - 24	1.7	1.2

n = 255

From this table it is apparent that 55 percent of the households owned no cattle. Sixty one percent of this group also had no land and therefore, virtually no potential for subsistence production. Further, the remaining 39 percent who owned land but no cattle, may be constrained in their ability to farm by the lack of traction power, as will a further 19 percent who owned insufficient cattle for ploughing. These households do, however, have the following alternatives for

fulfilling their ploughing requirements;

1. to plough by hand;
2. to hire in traction power for cash, either in the form of oxen or a tractor;
3. to use reciprocal exchange relationships, and perform services or provide goods or labour to other households, or offer a share of the crop in exchange for having their land ploughed;
4. to lease out their land to a household with cattle.

The first of these strategies imposes an enormous burden upon the women who are required to hoe. It has been estimated that ploughing by this method requires an average of 74 labour days per hectare and, effectively excludes the possibility of completing the hoeing which is needed for weeding.<sup>31</sup> In addition, by using this method, ploughing is completed later than it should be, leading to lower yields.

If a household decides to hire oxen, or to rely upon reciprocal relationships, it is probable that their land will be ploughed only after the cattle owners have ploughed their own land. As a result, this option may also result in late ploughing and lower yields.

Lastly, in order to hire a tractor, a household must have the necessary funds available. This, in turn, is likely to depend upon the size and frequency of migrant remittances. Finally, it should be noted that although subsidised ploughing does occur in Transkei, none of the areas surveyed had received any assistance in 1981.

In summary therefore:

1. one third of the total population surveyed owned neither cattle nor land and;
2. two thirds of the landholding population did not own sufficient cattle to ensure that they were able to plough their land.

Turning to small stock, only 37 percent of the sample owned pigs, goats or sheep. Of these, goats were most frequently owned, with 63 percent of the stockholding households possessing one or more. It can be argued that all small stock can contribute towards a household's subsistence through the consumption or sale of meat after natural death or slaughter. In particular, a number of households indicated that they owned pigs for the purpose of slaughter and sale at pension day markets. Nonetheless, as small livestock were less frequently owned than large, they too can be said to play only a limited role in subsistence production.

#### Section 4.5 Non Farm Activities

Non-farm employment opportunities in Umzimkulu were almost exclusively limited to participation in the informal sector. Only 6 percent of households had a family member in formal work nearby the area and this employment was diverse, ranging from school teachers and nurses, to forestry workers and temporary farm labourers. In contrast, 55 percent of the households were engaged in some form of informal sector employment.

Handicraft works, was the most widespread activity and was undertaken by 36 percent of those engaged in informal employment. Its popularity probably reflects the fact that it can be carried out between the daily chores of women, and requires low cost inputs. Capital appeared to be an important limiting factor in informal production and 64 percent of the activities required only a labour and time inputs. The majority of activities reported involved low skill levels, small scale production processes, or were simply services. As potential earnings from these types of activity tend to be low, they can only be at best a means whereby wage or agricultural incomes can be supplemented.

#### **Section 4.5 Attitudes to Subsistence Production**

Attitudes can be indicative of the perceived importance of an activity. When households were questioned about difficulties which they faced with subsistence production, 68 percent of those with land said they had no specific problem. Of all those with problems, including the landless, 37 percent were unable to suggest any solution, nor were they able to suggest a person or institution to assist them. In Lesotho, Gay found similar negative attitudes towards conservation issues in agriculture and Turner has argued that these attitudes are primarily the result of the migrant labour system in which farm work is regarded only as an adjunct to wage labour. Thus, the farm is seen as a home, rather than as a productive unit, suggesting that the system of migrant labour has become a way of life and people have entirely adapted to any social hardships that it causes.<sup>32</sup> It seems likely that this is also true in Transkei and

reinforcing this view, in response to a similar question concerning difficulties encountered as a result of household members absent as migrants, 48 percent of the respondents stated that they were not experiencing any problem. Of those who did identify a problem area, 51 percent cited inadequate transportation linkages.

In summary, the inadequacy of subsistence production within Umzimkulu suggests that wage labour is, by far, the most important means whereby households meet their day to day needs.<sup>33</sup> The absence of sufficient landholding, or stock holdings places a severe constraint upon agricultural production. Other income-generating activities are limited, and generally, farm work was not regarded as a viable alternative source of income to wage labour. Thus it seem very probable that the operation of these factors is a fundamental cause of the high out-migration found in Umzimkulu.

#### **Section 5. Meeting Day to Day Subsistence Needs**

The creation of a need for a cash income has had a central role in Southern African economic development. Writers in the radical tradition have drawn attention to the ways in which the state and capital co-operated in the search for black labour, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>34</sup> For example, the use of taxation, to prize blacks off the land and into the job market, formed one important strategy. Clearly, the position has changed dramatically during this century, and at present many of the most essential day to day needs of rural households can only be met through

cash transactions.

In order to examine the extent of their reliance on a cash income for the fulfilment of daily needs, the sample was asked to identify problem areas with regard to their minimum needs and the way in which each need was actually realised. When this meant walking long distances, waiting in a queue, or generally by employing labour intensive methods, the method was categorised as "Using Labour Time". Where a need was met through the purchase or hire of a good or a service, the method was classified as "Using Cash Income". Finally where the strategy employed meant the use of undesirable or inferior substitutes (such as aloe stumps or karoo bush in place of firewood, or muddy water in place of clear), it was categorised as "Undesirable Substitution". Table 6 lists the major needs and the existing methods of obtaining these, as well as the percentage of households who were experiencing difficulties with each need.

**Table 6**  
**Typology of Existing Methods of Meeting Essential Needs**

Need	% Using Labour Time	% Using Cash Income	Percentage Undesirable Substitution	Percentage of Sample with Problem
Fuel	35,9	52,1	12,0	92,1
Water	66,9	0	33,1	62,3
Transport	71,7	22,4	5,9	75,8
Communication	13,9	5,6	80,5	25,4
Medical	36,9	66,1	2,0	61,1
Building Materials	24,5	75,5	0	94,9
Food	1,6	61,2	37,2	56,8
Education	0	40,5	59,5	49,8

n = 255

The data in this table indicate the following:

1. The problems relating to fuel, medical assistance, building materials and food were most frequently overcome by using the household's cash resources. In the case of fuel and building materials, this meant the purchase of loads of wood, either from wood-carrying tractors, which drove into the villages or from Harding in white controlled South Africa.<sup>35</sup>

In the case of medical assistance, the expense was due to the cost of hiring a taxi in order to transport a patient to the nearest clinic or hospital. As an example of the cost of this, in one interview, a respondent had paid the equivalent of a month's supply of firewood to be conveyed from her house to the clinic, a distance of some 5 kilometres.

Finally, in the case of food production, the landless households were forced to purchase all of their staple requirements. Other costs include the hire of fields, oxen or tractors for subsistence production. In addition, the low productivity suggests that even amongst the households who did cultivate, many would have to purchase staple foodstuffs.

2. Problems relating to water and transport were most frequently overcome by expending more labour-time. This meant that a member of the household must walk long distances to collect water, or to link up with the transport system. In addition, queueing for

water was often inevitable, as women had to wait until the meagre flow of a spring had filled up their containers.

3. Problems relating to communication (postal services) and education were most frequently overcome by accepting undesirable substitutes. In the case of post this meant the use of informal hand post, that is, entrusting a letter or remittance to a friend or relative traveling between the village and town. Substitution in education occurred when children simply stopped going to school either because the high school was too far away, or because the household could not pay school fees.

In conclusion, although rural households avoid cash expenditure wherever possible by adopting one of the other types of strategy, the majority of households were forced to rely upon a regular cash flow. It appears therefore that the migration of labour in search of work is imperative for the continued survival of rural households.

In the face of such a dire need for a cash income for survival the usefulness of individual migration decision analysis based on push and pull factors must be questioned. Clearly rural deprivation on such a scale constitutes a 'rural push' and equally clearly higher urban wages will act as an 'urban pull'. However, this does not add a great deal to an understanding of the dynamics and effects of the migration process. Further, the household might act as the principle decision-maker and the wishes of the individual may not actually be an important factor in the decision. Consequently, to analyse migration in terms of a 'push-pull' approach not only ignores the historical



roots of the migrant labour system but also the relationship between economic growth at the centre, and the forces acting on the periphery which will determine the decision to migrate, as well as the growth path of both areas. Some of these effects will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

## **Section 6. The Effects of Migrant Labour**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The first part of this paper examined some of the causes of migrant labour and showed that it is not an optional process. Instead, the shortage of income generating opportunities is so acute that households must have access to wage labour if they are to survive. This section will examine some of the consequences of migration for the supplying area identified in the literature. Thereafter, data from this study will be statistically tested to identify which of these effects occur in rural Transkei.

It is often assumed that the movement of labour from rural areas would have a positive long term effect on agricultural productivity.<sup>36</sup> However, a number of studies have argued that the loss of able-bodied men from rural areas causes a reduction in agricultural productivity.<sup>37</sup> In Transkei it has been suggested that it may not be the additional amount of labour that influences productivity, but that entrepreneurial ability or the ability to make decisions about money improves when a male is at home.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, it is possible

that attitudes regarding the productive role of the farm might also change.

The effects of migrant remittances have also been the subject of some controversy. Whilst a number of writers have suggested that remittances can be used to increase a rural household's working capital, Oberai and Singh found that the majority of their surveyed households in India were using remitted money for consumption rather than for investment.<sup>39</sup> In addition, households with experience of migration, may adopt consumption patterns reflecting a transferal of urban tastes, which leads to the use of remittances for increased consumption.<sup>40</sup> However, where levels of living are low, consumption expenditure may often be functional, and could induce significant improvements in labour productivity. Further, the receipt of remittances could free other funds for investment, or could permit the accumulation of savings which might, at some time, be invested.

An alternative form of investment is that into capital and skills with which to engage in informal activities. In a number of studies it has been argued that the money and skills brought back by migrants stimulates the production and use of non-traditional goods and skills. For example, motor vehicle repair and the resale of consumption goods from towns in the village. In this way, the potential for income generation within the village could be enhanced by access to a wage income outside the area.<sup>41</sup>

Amin, however, argues that any capital which accumulates in the rural supplying region, is allocated in a way that is detrimental to its

long term development. He suggests that within the core-periphery dichotomy, the migrant labour system ultimately benefits the core, and underdevelops the periphery through the adoption of unsuitable investment expenditure.<sup>42</sup> Examples of this include the adoption of labour saving technologies, as well as investment in formal education that is best suited to employment at the core. However, once dependency upon wage labour has been established, remittances do allow for investment in the education of children, thereby improving their chances of both employment, and of better paid jobs. Consequently, despite being inappropriate for subsistence or peasant agriculture, rural households have little option but to invest in formal education as long as employers reward such investment.<sup>43</sup>

On the social consequences of migration, it has been suggested that return migration increases the rate of rural modernization. This would seem to refer to a more widespread, and rapid adoption of social and economic changes.<sup>44</sup> However, the absence of a male household head could place undue stress upon the wives who remain at home, and encourages them to adopt a "safety first" approach to change and to avoid taking unnecessary risks.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, space precludes a comprehensive assessment of these conflicting views. Nonetheless, it is possible to determine whether any relationship exists between participation in the migrant labour system and some of the factors discussed above. It should be stressed that a micro-economic analysis on the effects of migration at the household level is, necessarily, limited, and the structural and

historical conditions of migration from Transkei should not be neglected.<sup>46</sup>

## 6.2 The Effects of Migration for Households in Umzimkulu

The probable consequences of out-migration will depend on whether the sample households who have access to a regular flow of migrant earnings:

1. save part of their income for deferred consumption or investment;
2. invest in assets which improve their agricultural productivity;
3. invest in, or have skills which permit them to engage in more "modern" informal activities;
4. invest in better or more education for their children;
5. are more willing and able to adopt new ways of doing things, or, alternatively;
6. are unwilling to take unnecessary risks;
7. purchase luxury consumer items;
8. suffer a loss of agricultural productivity due to the absence of a resident adult male.

To make a consistent examination of these factors, the sample was divided into two groups. Those households who stated that they had one or more migrants, who remitted part of their wage, at least as

often as four times a year, were categorized as having a regular remitter who was also an oscillating migrant.<sup>47</sup> Those households who stated that they received money only intermittently, or not at all, were categorized as not having a regular remitter. The use of these categories means that individuals who had left Umzimkulu permanently and severed all ties with their rural families, were not included. Out of a total of 290 male and female migrants, 69 (24 percent) were not remitting regularly. These emigrants came from 66 households and of these, 52 households had a migrant but no regular remitter. Their absence is assumed to have little or no impact upon the household. Clearly, this assumption can be questioned, as although they may have fully adjusted to this loss, it is also possible that these households might be the most poor, suffering both from a shortage of labour, and a lack of a reliable cash inflow.

Other limitations should also be noted. Firstly, the stage in the household's life cycle is not taken into account. For example, although a household consisting of a retired migrant and his wife, whose children have established their own homes, may not be receiving remittances, in the past they could have accumulated assets or suffered losses as a result of migrant labour. Secondly, the impact of migration is not analysed for different wealth groups and finally, the actual amount that is remitted is not taken into account only its regularity. Despite these limitations, some indications for further research can be provided, which may lead to the development of a more sophisticated framework for the analysis of the consequences of migrant labour.

On the basis of the preceding discussion above, a number of surrogates have been selected as indicators of the consequences of migration. These are:

1. The use of a savings account.
2. Investment in agriculture, indicated by the ownership of a planter and/or a plough; by ownership of more than a span (4) oxen, and by the hire of tractors to meet ploughing requirements.
3. Participation in informal activities which either require a specific skill that is not in any sense "traditional".<sup>48</sup>
4. Investment in education, indicated by the attendance of children at school<sup>49</sup> and by children with an education level higher than standard 4.
5. "Modernization", indicated by ownership of a modern or tin roofed house, and by membership in a self-help group.
6. "Risk avoidance", indicated by the cultivation of no other crops in the garden other than the traditional mix of maize or sorghum and pumpkins.
7. "Taste Transfer", indicated by the ownership of a radio.
8. Finally, the impact of an adult male living at home is shown by the correlation between the presence of a male, and the average productivity of the land for 1981 and 1982.

The discussion earlier indicates that it could be anticipated that all the indicators would occur more frequently in the households with a regular remitter. The data is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
Indicators of the Consequences of Migrant Labour

Characteristic	% without regular remitter	% with regular remitter
Saving at a bank or building society	26,1	41,0
Ownership of planter or/and plough*	35,1	50,9
Ownership of more than a span of cattle	21,5	25,7
Hire traction*	14,0	17,2
Skilled Informal sector participation	10,6	25,5
Children at school.**	68,8	64,9
Children with Std. 4 or more**	73,1	63,5
Modern type or tin roof house	35,1	44,7
Membership in a self-help group	48,9	49,7
Cultivation of non-traditional crops	45,7	56,5
Ownership of a radio	23,4	34,2
	n = 94	n = 161

\*. As only landholding households were considered, the sample sizes were 43 and 93 respectively.

\*\*.. As only households with children between the ages of 6-18 years were considered, the sample sizes were 64 and 129 respectively.

Examining each of these characteristics in turn, there was a statistically significant difference between access to a savings account and the household's access to remittances.<sup>50</sup>

Thirty five percent of the whole sample saved at a bank or building society. Households with a regular remitter had a higher incidence of savings accounts than those without a remitter (41 percent against 26 percent). Clearly, it is easier for households who are receiving a regular flow of income to build up a savings account. Moreover, Cobbe has suggested that migrants recognize a "life-cycle problem" whereby they have to provide for consumption needs for a larger period than they can expect to earn an income as migrant workers. Consequently migrants are likely to defer consumption until retirement.<sup>51</sup> This type of saving does not have any impact upon agricultural productivity and it is difficult to equate savings with agricultural investment.

There was no statistically significant difference between the groups with regard to any of the agricultural investment indicators. However, more landholding households with a regular remitter owned a planter or a plough (71 percent) than did households with no regular remitter (66 percent).

Although there was no significant difference with regard to the ownership of a span of cattle, when the actual number of cattle owned was used a variable, the chi square statistic was significant.<sup>52</sup> It seems, therefore, that although access to remittances does not necessarily improve the likelihood that a household will own sufficient cattle to meet their traction needs, it may have some effect upon a household's ability to enlarge its herd, either for productive use, or as savings. Finally, although more households with



a regular remitter hired tractors or additional oxen to plough their land, there was no difference between the groups.

There is a significant difference between the subsamples when divided according to participation in capital-using or skilled informal sector activities.<sup>54</sup> A greater proportion of households with access to a regular cash income were engaged in such activities. As a corollary of this, as informal sector participation of all types was approximately similar, with 45 percent of both groups participating, households without a cash flow were concentrated in the more labour-intensive, and possibly more badly paid, activities.

Turning to investment in education, there is no significant association between access to remittances, and either children aged 6 to 18 years at school, or the educational achievement of this group. It seems, then, that the ability of a household, or a young adult, to complete his/her schooling is not related to the household's access to remittances. Instead, it may be more likely that children will continue their schooling as long as facilities are available, or as long as they feel that the returns from education will be sufficiently high. In this way, education might be seen to be a way in which a person/household can break out of a poverty trap, and earn a better wage.

There is no relationship between access to remittances and any of the indicators of 'modernisation'. However, there is also no significant relationship between risk avoidance and remittances. Thus it would seem that either the "modernity", or otherwise, of a household is not

meaningfully measured by the indicators that have been used, or that "modernity" is due to some factor other than the receipt of regular remittances. Finally, there was no statistical evidence of taste transfer although slightly more households receiving a remittance owned a radio.

Turning to the effect of male absenteeism upon agricultural productivity, Table 8 shows the productivity, measured in bags of maize per hectare, of those landholding households who do not have an adult male at home, in comparison with those who do.

**Table 8**  
**Productivity and the presence of a Male at Home**

Bags / Hectare	% hh with No male at home	% hh with Male at home
0 - 0,4	25,5	32,9
0,5 - 1,5	21,8	15,8
1,75 - 2,5	23,6	10,5
2,75 - 4,0	21,8	15,8
5,00 - 16,0	7,3	25,0

n = 55      n = 76

The data in this table indicate that a larger percentage of households who had an adult man permanently at home, produced 5 bags of maize per hectare or more, although there were also more of this group in the lowest productivity category (33 percent as against 26 percent of the households without a resident male). This somewhat inconclusive result suggests that for some households, possibly distinguished by

some other characteristic such as wealth, the presence of a man does improve the productivity of the land. However, amongst the intermediate group, an adult male at home has little if any effect. It is then not possible to argue that male absenteeism tends to reduce the agricultural productivity of all households, as either a result of a shortage of labour or entrepreneurial ability.

This analysis suggests that there is little justification in arguments that migratory labour, per se, positively or negatively affects subsistence production, agricultural investment, educational investment or modernity. In only two indicators, access to saving accounts, and participation in skilled or capital intensive activities, was there a significant difference between subsamples distinguished according to access to regular remittances. However, these differences may simply lead to greater rural differentiation of the type discussed by Murray and Spiegel.<sup>54</sup> It would seem then, that the determinants of these indicators have historically been established, and that present access to remittances simply affects quality and quantity in the fulfilment of essential, day to day, needs.

#### **Section 7. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that theories of migration which simply focus upon the forces which push or pull an individual worker to and from urban areas, have little to offer as an explanation of the perpetuation of migratory labour in Southern Africa. Firstly, they

tend to neglect the historiography of the process, and as this paper suggests, they are of little value in examining cause and consequence at the village level. The data showed that there were no demographic characteristics which determined out-migration, other than the sex of the individual, which is a product of segregationist legislation. There was, however, evidence of an absence of any real potential for substantial income generation within the village. In addition, many of the most basic needs of the household could only be met through cash transactions. Thus it is suggested that migratory labour is not optional, but is in fact a necessary condition for the survival of most households in rural Transkei. Consequently, the root causes of migration should be sought in the historical establishment of the system of cheap labour through oscillating migration, and the mechanisms which maintain it today.

The analysis of the impact of migration on the village economy implies that a household's participation in the migrant labour system no longer simply undermines the subsistence economy in the supplying region, as was the case in the past. Largely, this is because the productive base of these areas has effectively been destroyed. However, it is not true to argue that access to a wage income significantly improves households ability to farm, or its "modernity". Instead, migrant labour would appear to perpetuate the dependency of peripheral areas, such as Umzimkulu, upon the South African core, for daily subsistence. In this way, access to employment as a migrant worker ensures that the migrant's family has the option to remain in Transkei. However, this relationship is dynamic and may change as the social and economic hardship of

maintaining a home in Transkei increases due to factors such as environmental degradation, over-crowding, and political dissatisfaction. If this burden exceeds that perceived from the risks and costs of illegal urbanisation in the urban areas of South Africa, or of legal urbanisation in Transkei, together with the physical and social costs of moving, entire households may relocate into the urban areas. In view of the rate with which 'illegal' urbanisation is growing, as well as the rapidly expanding peri-urban areas around Umtata, it would appear that in some rural areas this position could have already been reached.

Financial assistance by the Rural Urban Studies Unit, established by the HSRC, and the National Planning Committee of Transkei is hereby acknowledged. Views expressed and conclusions drawn are those of the author, and should not be regarded as necessarily reflecting those of the HSRC or the National Planning Committee. The author also wishes to acknowledge the assistance of colleagues in the Development Studies Unit, University of Natal, in particular Prof. Jill Nattrass, Carey-Ann Phelan and Dr Paul Wellings, as well as Dr. Ter Haar and Reg Barry in Transkei.

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3. For example, see Arrighi, G., "Labour supplies in Historical Perspective : A study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia", in *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, April 1970, Frank Cass & Co, London, pp.197-234; Crush, J., *Uneven Labour migration in Southern Africa : Conceptions and Misconceptions*, Working Paper, Department of Geography, Queens University, Ontario, 1984; Lacey, M., *Working for Boroko : The Origins of a Coercive Labour System in South Africa*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981 and Levy, N., *The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982.
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5. Arrighi made a similar point when he distinguished the "discretionary" and "necessary" material requirements of a society, and suggested that participation in the money economy has shifted from the former to the latter. Arrighi, G., op cit, p.206. In South Africa, see also Nattrass, J., *The Migrant Labour System and South Africa's Economic Development, 1936 - 1970*, Unpublished Phd thesis, Department of Economics, University of Natal, Durban, Wilson, F., *Labour in the South African Gold Mines*, Cambridge University Press, African Studies Series 6, Cambridge, 1972.
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7. The operation of these forces can be used to explain the observed tendency of migrating labour to select younger, better educated males, which would deprive the rural areas of the more able workers. For example, see, Bogue, D.J. and M. Hagood, "Differential Migration in some Regions and Cities of Latin America in the period 1940-1950. Methodological Aspects and Results", in **Proceedings of the International Population Conference**, Paper No. 127, United Nations, New York, 1961; Caldwell, J.C., "Determinants of Rural-Urban Migration in Ghana" in **Population Studies**, Vol. 22, No. 3, November 1968, Population Investigation Committee, London, pp.361-377; Miller, A., "Migration Differentials among Occupation Groups, U.S., 1960" in **World Population Conference Report**, WPP/WP/1979, United Nations, Belgrade, 1965.
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11. See Burawoy, M, "The functions and reproduction of migrant labour : Comparative material from Southern Africa and the United States", in **American Journal of Sociology**, Vol. 81, No. 5, March 1975, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 111, pp.1050-1085; Massey, D., "Class Struggle and Migrant Labour in South African Gold Mines", in **Canadian Journal of African Studies**, Vol. 17, No.3, 1983 Canadian Association for African Studies, Ottawa, pp.429-448; and Standing, G., "Migration and Modes of Exploitation : Social Origins of Immobility and Mobility", in **The Journal of Peasant Studies**, Vol. 8, No.2, January 1981, Frank Cass & Co, London, pp.173-211.
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14. Bureau of Market Research, **Income and Expenditure Patterns of Black Households in Transkei, 1979**, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1980.
15. The Bureau of Market Research study found absentee rate of 48,8 percent for the same group. Moll found a lower level of absenteeism in the Qumbu district of 45,5 percent, whilst Muller and Tapscott found the somewhat higher level of 54 percent.

Bureau of Market Research, op cit, Table 2.1 and Table 29.1.  
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16. It must be realised that this figure refers only to those who have successfully migrated. It excludes those men who would like to find employment elsewhere, but have not succeeded in doing so, and as a result remain in the area.
17. That is, married men, between 25 and 35 years of age with between a standard 1 to standard 7 pass.
18. A similar conclusion has been drawn by Natrass, J., "Migrant Labour and Underdevelopment : The case of KwaZulu" in **Black/White Income Gap Project, Interim Report No. 37**, Department of Economics, University of Natal, 1977.
19. Zipf, G.K., "P1 P2/D Hypothesis : On Intercity movements of persons", in **American Sociological Review**, Vol 11, No 6, December 1946, American Sociological Society, pp.677-685.
20. For example, see Gulliver, P.H., **Labour Migration in a Rural Economy : A Study of the Ngoni and Ndenduli of Southern Tanganyika**, East African Studies, No. 6, Kampala, 1955.
21. Estimate taken from : **Energy and Protein Requirements**, F.A.O. Nutritional meetings Report Series No. 52.
22. Calculated as follows: Total household output/No. of hh members permanently in Transkei = number of bags of maize per member.
23. As shown in Table 2.
24. Minimum requirement of maize productivity of household x number of household members permanently in the Transkei.
25. This is well above the figure found by Muller and Tapscott, op cit, for two villages in the South West region of Transkei (23,3 and 28,6 percent of a sample of 202 and 161 households respectively).
26. The historical roots of Betterment Planning are to be found in the 1930's and 1940's with increasing government concern over the deteriorating environment in the bantustans. Betterment schemes initially included stock-limitations and control of agriculture practices. After the Tomlinson Commission, Betterment Planning was extended to include the establishment of rural villages and the demarcation of land into residential, arable and pastoral areas. See Yawitch, op cit, pp. 25-31.
27.  $\chi^2 = 105,6$ ;  $df=13$ ,  $\alpha = 0,0001$ .



28. The lack of a garden may be the result of unfavourable terrain, infertile or stony soil, the overcrowding of residential areas, as well as the lack of funds to fence a garden in order to protect it from marauding goats and sheep.
29. In 1981, average yield in the Umzimkulu district was estimated to be 7.5 bags per hectare, the high estimate for Transkei was 4.2 bags per hectare and the low estimate was 3.6 bags per hectare. Osmond Lange, et al, *The Statistical Base for Planning Service Centres, N.E. Regions, Transkei*, Report to the Transkei Government, 1982. 1982, p.20. Thus although the Umzimkulu district as a whole were high, the sample areas within Umzimkulu had a lower yield per hectare than the lowest estimate for Transkei as a whole. This may be in part attributed to the size of agriculture plots, as well as to the poverty of the sample. However, productivity data such as that contained in Table 4, have a number of implicit limitations. For example, as is the case with the sample, the figures may drastically understate the actual productivity levels as they do not account for maize that is consumed whilst it is still green. Other problems with productivity data includes; the difficulty of accurately measuring field sizes, different methods of harvesting and measurements which do not specify whether the maize is shelled or unshelled.
- If the maize estimated to have been consumed during the green stage is added into the mean output per hectare as found in this survey, this increases the mean from 2,71 bags to 4,06 bags per hectare. This includes maize that is eaten during the 'green' or 'soft dough' stage from mid-December until harvest. As this is a period of approximately four months, Merle Lipton has estimated that green maize consumption accounts for at least one third of the total product. Moreover, Lipton's estimate is based on the assumption that subsistence production is adequate for self-sufficiency in maize. Where self-sufficiency does not occur, the supply of green maize might account for a higher proportion of total output. Lipton, M., "South Africa : Two Agricultures", in Wilson F., et al, (eds) op cit, pp.73.
30. To be sold if needed, or utilised in inter-household wealth distribution, as in the case of dowry payments (lobola).
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33. Spiegel has found a similar result and argues that economic activities in the village provide only a small supplement to the income which accrues from migrant labour; Spiegel, A.D., **Migrant Labour Remittances, The Development Cycle and Rural Differentiation in a Lesotho Community**, Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977. See also Swart, N.J., **Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the economic development of the Republic of Ciskei**, Reviewed by J.D. Lotter, 1984, in **Development Southern Africa**, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1984, Development Bank of Southern Africa, Sandton, pp.106-115.
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37. In particular, Skinner, E.P., "Labour migration among the Mossi of the Upper Volta", in Kuper, H., (ed.,) **Urbanization and Migration in West Africa**, University of California Press, 1965, pp.60-84.
38. Westcott, G., op cit, p.146. However, it must be realised that such a cause - effect relationship is difficult to justify, as other factors, besides out-migration, may be placing strain upon agricultural productivity (soil erosion, population pressure, environmental degradation), and hence, may be responsible for both lower productivity, and increased out-migration.

39. Working capital may be needed to finance ploughing and planting, as well as to purchase improved seed and fertilizer. Writers in the former group include Cobbe, J., "Rural Development in Lesotho", in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, October 1982; Africa Institute of South Africa, Pretoria, pp.125-126; Murray, C., *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho*, Cambridge University Press, London, and Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1981 and Waters, A.R., "Migration, Remittances, and the Cash constraint in African Smallholder economic development", in *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 25, No. 3, November 1973, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.435-454. Otherwise, Oberai, A.S. and H.K.M. Singh, "Migration, remittances and rural development. Findings of a case study in the Indian Punjab", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 119, No. 2, March-April 1980, International Labour Office, Geneva, pp.229-241.
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46. Micro analysis tends to present a static picture, and does not show the changes which take place as the household moves through its life-cycle. In addition, there is a tendency to examine the rural household in isolation from the broader regional and national picture. Finally, many changes may take place at the village level, which have their origin at the capitalist core.
47. In other words, a migrant who regularly returned to his home in Transkei, even if only in December of each year.
48. For example "tradition" skills are taken to include, amongst others basket work, making mudbricks and farm labour. "Modern" skills include bricklaying, welding and car repairs, as well as tasks which require the ownership of some capital good, such as a sewing machine or handmill. Clearly, such division is open to subjective error.
49. The oldest person still at school was 25 years old.
50.  $\chi^2 = 5,01$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $\alpha = 0,025$ .
51. Cobbe, J., op cit, p.136.
52.  $\chi^2 = 7,8$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $\alpha = 0,05$
53.  $\chi^2 = 7,25$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $\alpha = 0,007$ . Although not a central theme of this article, this result may have interesting implications for the role of migrant remittances for informal sector activities in rural areas. Research questions might include the sexual breakdown of the type of activity, the question of return migrants, and the leasing of capital stock.
54. Murray, C., "Migration, the Developmental Cycle in Lesotho", in Van Binsbargen, W.M.J. and H.A. Meilink, **Africa Perspectives, 1978/1 : Migration and the Transformation of Modern African Society**, Africa - Studie Centrum, Leiden 1978, pp.127-143, and Spiegel, A.D., "Changing Patterns of Migrant Labour and Rural Differentiation in Lesotho", **Social Dynamics**, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 1981, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, pp.1-13. This will have important consequences for developmental projects in terms of who can benefit from different forms of assistance or advice.

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