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Internal Remittances and Climate Resilience in Morocco:

The Invisible Hand that Feeds

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BACKGROUND

Morocco stands at the crossroads of diverse migratory movements, assuming an increasing role as a transit and destination country but, most significantly, as a country of origin. Remarkably, international remittances from Moroccans residing abroad accounted for more than 8% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022.¹ Income from remittances is particularly significant in a context where the livelihoods of agricultural areas are being increasingly negatively impacted by climate change and diminishing accessibility of water resources.²

Amidst this landscape, the role of internal remittances – that is, funds systematically transferred from internal migrants to their families, often living in rural areas – has been significant under-explored. Internal remittances are not as well studied as international remittances, despite the more significant proportion of internal migrants (compared to international migrants) and their higher socioeconomic impacts.³ A study conducted in Sub-Saharan African countries concluded that internal migrants are as likely to remit as international migrants.⁴

Raising awareness regarding internal remittances is important for two main reasons: first, it allows further insights into the multifaceted challenges confronting internal migrants; and second, it provides a foundation for informed policy recommendations that are consistent with solutions that support internal migrants and Morocco's social development. Empirical data relating to internal migration amidst a deteriorating environment in Morocco reveals that internal remittances are critical to the decision-making process of those who move, since there is a social expectation that migrants will support the families that remain in the communities of origin.⁵ Many migrants perceive sending remittances as a moral obligation since they feel responsible for their families and want to support the households in their region of origin.⁶ For internal migrants, this obligation can negatively impact their quality of life because it adds to the financial pressures often associated with urban environments, in particular when there are relatively high levels of inflation, such as has been felt during the last year.

¹ Values from The World Bank Data website at (<https://data.worldbank.org/>) under category Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) – Morocco.

² M. Hssaisoune, L. Bouchaou, A. Sifeddine, I. Bouimetarhan, and A. Chehbouni, 'Moroccan Groundwater Resources and Evolution with Global Climate Changes' (2020) 10(2) *Geosciences* 81.

³ M. Berriane, H. de Haas, K. & Natter, 'Social transformations and migrations in Morocco' Migration Institute Working Paper (2021).

⁴ J. Bredtmann, F. Martínez Flores, & S. Otten, S, 'Remittances and the Brain Drain: Evidence from Microdata for Sub-Saharan Africa' (2019) 55(7) *The Journal of Development Studies* 1455.

⁵ C.S. Ferreira Fernandes, F. Alves & J. Loureiro, 'Human Mobility and Environmental Degradation: Shaping Rural Morocco'. (2023) 62(1) *International Migration* 78.

⁶ L. Ou-Salah, "“Soon water will be worth gold!” A qualitative study of how environmental factors are considered during migration decision-making in the Moroccan and Belgian context' Doctoral dissertation, University of Antwerp (2023).

Since internal remittances remain an almost invisible issue in policies and research relating to climate mobility, this policy brief aims to highlight their importance and advance a list of suggestions to improve future knowledge and understanding of this issue.

ISSUES

Shortcomings in information about remittances in Morocco became especially apparent in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel restrictions forced previously informal international remittances to be instead transferred through formal channels. The ‘forced’ use of digital solutions to transfer money back to Morocco led to an increase in officially registered remittances⁷ and revealed the shortcoming in knowledge about international remittances, despite various institutions collecting data systematically on this specific variable. While this increased knowledge about international remittances is welcome, knowledge about *internal* remittances remains almost exclusively a vast space of unknowns.

In other countries, policies regarding internal remittances – including facilitation of child allowances and cash transfers in countries like Mexico, Uganda, and Zambia – have improved communities’ resilience to climate shocks and other negative impacts of climate change.⁸ In Morocco, however, internal remittances are not well understood. They are not being systematically analysed at a national level⁹ and there are no legal and policy frameworks to support relevant data collection.

The traditional support system of remittances in Morocco is mainly based on family solidarity.¹⁰ In the context of climate change and increasing environmental degradation, internal migrants’ remittances are valuable for supporting the adaptation and resilience of home communities. This is particularly important given that a large portion of Morocco’s population (and the economy) depend on agricultural activities that are highly vulnerable to climate variations.

While migration has been actively used in Morocco as a form of diversifying the livelihoods of small farmers through the sending of remittances from the migrants,¹¹ official policies that address climate change adaptation and sustainable development in general rarely acknowledge the role of migration.¹² Such policies therefore do not contribute to the development of tools and spaces for gathering data and systematically seeking to understand this complex issue. Additionally, these social obligations under intergenerational socio-economic solidarity in Morocco are impacting

⁷ I. Olivie & M. Santillán O’Shea, ‘The Role of Remittances in Promoting Sustainable Development. Directorate-General for External Policies’ European Parliament (2022).

⁸ C. Costella et al, ‘Can social protection tackle emerging risks from climate change, and how? A framework and a critical review’ (2023) 40 *Climate Risk Management*, 100501.

⁹ C.S. Ferreira Fernandes, F. Alves & J. Loureiro, ‘Human Mobility: The Invisible Issue in Climate Change Adaptation Policies - The Case of Morocco’ in W. Leal Filho, M. Kovaleva, F. Alves, & I.R. Abubakar (eds), *Climate Change Strategies: Handling the Challenges of Adapting to a Changing Climate* (2023) 441–457.

¹⁰ A. Oulidi & K. Diakité, ‘Access to Social Protection by Immigrants, Emigrants and Resident Nationals in Morocco. In: J.M. Lafleur & D. Vintila (eds), *Migration and Social Protection in Europe and Beyond*, IMISCOE Research Series, Vol 3 (2020).

¹¹ World Bank Group ‘Country Climate and Development Report’ (2022).

¹² Ferreira Fernandes et al (n 9).

negatively on the quality of life and financial security of some migrants, due to their feelings of responsibility to send remittances to their families.¹³

Issues relating to internal remittances sit within the context of more general deficiencies in Morocco's social protection systems.¹⁴ This makes understanding the impacts on intergenerational dependency and multi-spatial households even more important. There have been recent reforms aiming to improve such systems,¹⁵ with the goal of establishing social protection system that is extensive and diversified.¹⁶ For example, *Law 09-21* expands medical coverage and childhood allowance and create unemployment benefits.¹⁷ However, social protection systems may not yet reach the poorest and most vulnerable.¹⁸ For example, the benefits of *Law 09-21* are mainly exclusive to workers with stable formal employment, while the prevalence of informal employment is very high.¹⁹

A better understanding of the scale and impact of internal remittances in Morocco, through a climate and environmental lens could help ensure that such remittances effectively contribute to reducing vulnerabilities in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. It could also enhance the potential of internal remittances to be positive forces in climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Governments and their partners should develop and/or improve institutional data collection regarding internal remittances to capture the contribution of remittances to household livelihoods and resilience to climate change and environmental degradation.
2. Research is required to analyse the impacts of internal migration and remittances in different contexts around the country, acknowledging that the impacts of environmental degradation depend on the biophysical characteristics of the local territories, and they can affect local ways of life and culture.
3. Human mobility considerations should be integrated into policies and institutional frameworks relating to climate change adaptation, loss and damage, sustainable development, and agriculture. This will also ensure consistency between international agreements and internal actions.

¹³ Ferreira Fernandes et al (n 5).

¹⁴ H.A. Mansour & Y. Benmouro, 'Social protection reform in Morocco in the aftermath of COVID-19' (2023) 23(2) *Global Social Policy* 348.

¹⁵ N. Chadli & S. Boutouil, 'Les mesures entreprises par les pouvoirs publics pour faire du Maroc un État social par excellence' (2023) 6(3) *Revue Internationale des Sciences de Gestion* 651.

¹⁶ World Bank. 'The World Bank Group's Engagement in Morocco, Fiscal Years 2011–21' Country Program Evaluation, Independent Evaluation Group (2023).

¹⁷ *Loi n° 09-21 Relative à la Protection Sociale du 22 chaabane 1442* (5 Avril 2021).

¹⁸ M. Aleksandrova & C. Costella, 'Reaching the poorest and most vulnerable: Addressing loss and damage through social protection' (2021) 50 *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 121.

¹⁹ G. Lopez-Acevedo, G. Betcherman, A. Khellaf & V. Molini, « Paysage de l'emploi au Maroc : recenser les obstacles à un marché du travail inclusif ». Pleins feux sur le développement international (2021).

4. Social protection systems should be further developed to address national specificities and social norms, recognising the role of informal employment and sending of internal remittances in shaping the specific vulnerabilities of internal migrants.