Gender-Migration as a tool to development:
The movement of women from Rodrigues Island to Mauritius

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Introduction
This paper examines the movement of women living in the Island of Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius in their quest for better working and living standards for themselves and their family. Rodrigues is a small island of some 37774 inhabitants (CSO, 2009) situated in the Indian Ocean, and is a dependency of Mauritius. One of the particularities of this island is that the Rodriguan society is characterised by the high-prevalence of matri-focal families, where the primary responsibility to provide for the basic needs of the family rest on the shoulders of women. There are two main factors primarily responsible for this situation: the high rate of alcohol-consumption amongst men in Rodrigues, and the high rates of desertion/separation/divorces. In spite of the fact that Rodriguan women are known to be hard-working, taking care of the family is not an easy task in the Rodriguan context, given the scarcity of job opportunities, and the worsening poverty situation.

Purpose
The main aim of this study, therefore, is to evaluate the success of Rodriguan women in upgrading the living standards of their family by migrating to Mauritius for work. The constraints faced at the different stages of this movement are evaluated. The contribution of migrant Rodriguan women to the Mauritian economy, and to that of Rodrigues, is also analysed.

Method
For data-collection purpose, a questionnaire-based semi-structured interview schedule, worked out through the application of the mixed-methods approach, was devised and applied to a sample of 150 Rodriguan women working in the different sectors of activity in Mauritius, and being in Mauritius for 5 years, or less. Their views, with regards to this movement from the agriculture-based Rodriguan economy, to the industry and service-based Mauritius, and the difficulties faced, have been collected for analysis purposes. Data about their participation and contribution to the Mauritian economy as a whole, and to the Rodriguan society have also been computed for analysis purposes. Apart from the survey, secondary sources have also been used for analysis purposes.

Findings
What emerges out of this study is that whether they stay in Rodrigues or move to Mauritius, Rodriguan women have to face very adverse conditions in their day-to-day living. However, whereas staying in Rodrigues will mean only reproducing the present agricultural system and running the risk of facing
poverty at any point in time (e.g. in case of drought), this move to the mainland does have a positive impact on their living standards and the educational progress of their children in the long-run. It is clear; however, that during the initial phase of migration, the living conditions faced can be even worse than their living conditions in Rodrigues. Even if they do not get much help from the state, the solidarity amongst the Rodriguan community living in Mauritius is of great help to the newcomers.

Originality/Value

This work brings a new insight into the Migration problem amongst women in Africa by studying the case of a small matri-focal island economy which is struggling to maintain its autonomy. The key role played by women in the Rodriguan economy is identified and highlighted, and measures needed to improve the present conditions of women migrants are discussed.
1.0 Introduction

Even if the position of women in society has significantly improved over the past decades in terms of increased labour force participation, improved educational attainments, and higher literacy rates, these improvements have not been paralleled by a positive change in women’s overall living and working conditions. In many parts of the world, women are still striving to make both ends meet, undergoing enormous sacrifices so as to create a better future for themselves and for their children. The situation is even more problematic in the predominantly agricultural and rural areas of the developing world, where a high proportion of women live at the margin of poverty. This dramatic situation causes a high number of women to consider leaving their home region or country to look for greener pastures for themselves and their family elsewhere. Still, in spite of the rapidly increasing number of those undertaking such experiences, little research has been done so far to understand people’s motivation to leave their home country, the problem they face in a foreign environment and the personal benefits they extract from this decision to move.

This paper studies the case of women from the island of Rodrigues, leaving to migrate to Mauritius, and aspiring to better living and working conditions. The main aim of this work is to evaluate the success of these Rodriguan women in upgrading the living standards of their family by moving to Mauritius to work. The constraints faced at the different stages of this movement are also evaluated and the contribution that migrant Rodriguan women make to the Mauritian economy, and to that of their home island, are analysed.

2.0 Literature Review

Based on Newtonian physics, the Gravity Model is a mathematical representation of migration as gross bilateral movements driven by relative economic (that is, “push and pull”) factors but conditioned by distance decay effects with the scale of the migration so-generated depending on the population sizes at origin and destination. Thus, certain areal attributes (for example, high real wages) attract workers and others (for example, high unemployment) tend to encourage outmigration and to repel potential immigrants. In fact, the contention that “differences in … wages are the main cause of migration” (Hicks, 1932) is the basis of the oldest and most elementary approach to migration, namely the classical approach. However, its flaws are numerous. Kothari (2002) argues that many non-moving individuals and households from a sending area are likely to be, or become, chronically poor. They are unable,
unless ‘forced’, to choose migration to ameliorate their circumstances due to prohibitive financial and economic costs, as well as such factors as limited access to networks and disadvantage in terms of skills, knowledge and physical mobility. It ignores not only the financial costs, but also the psychological costs which are incurred when an individual is separated from family, friends and familiar surroundings (Grant and Vanderkamp, 1976).

The classical approach is also based on the movement of homogenous workers to healthy local labour markets and cannot account for migration to areas of economic upheavals, or where fewer job opportunities exist as compared to his/her home region/country. Harris and Todaro (1969), for instance, developed a model of migration in order to explain how the urban areas of developing countries could simultaneously experience high unemployment rates and high in-migration rates. The Harris-Todaro (HT) model is a particularly simple variant of the human capital approach in that it abstracts from all non-labour market considerations. The driving force behind migration is greater expected (discounted) lifetime income in urban areas arising from the latter having an exclusive ability to attract and maintain modern industry. The important contribution made by the model to migration theory is that this differential in earnings could be eradicated not only by lower wages in the urban industrial sector but also by higher urban unemployment which, by lowering the probability of finding industrial work, reduces the expected gains from rural-urban migration. (Variants of the Harris-Todaro model see equilibrium restored via the cumulative effects of in-migration either through increasing the expected initial duration of unemployment or by reducing the probability of industrial employment in each and every period before retirement – that is, workers are hired for one period at a time).

The classical approach also ignores the other non-labour market motives for migration, such as local amenities (including a new climate and environment): it is not only relative labour market conditions which enter migration deliberations. A utility-maximizing individual must weight each variable which varies over space according to his/her tastes/preferences. A move entailing a better climate but worse employment prospects may be undertaken by some but not by others.

Sjaastad (1962), on his part, contributes to the literature by shedding light on the human capital approach to migration. In his writings, he puts forward that migrants move where the present value of lifetime benefits (both earned and external) net of immediate migration costs is maximised. Thus migration is a form of investment. In any time period, the marginal potential migrant in any gross migration stream is indifferent between staying put and moving; that is, the current costs of migration are equal to the corresponding discounted future benefits. Clearly, other things being equal, the longer
a potential migrant has to recoup the immediate costs of migration through net benefits at the
destination, the more likely he or she is to migrate (although such gains will obviously be more heavily
discounted, the more time-distant they are). Hence, the young are expected to exhibit the greatest
propensities to migrate. This is indeed the case. This tendency is bolstered by an important life-cycle
factor: that is, that having offspring of school age tends to reduce the mobility of households.

In recent years, these assumptions have been challenged by the New Economics of Migration literature
(Stark and Bloom, 1985). A key insight of this later approach is that migration decisions are not made by
isolated individual actors but within larger units of interrelated people, typically families. Households,
subjected to risk, capital market imperfections or relative deprivation, enter into implicit contractual
arrangements with migrants in which they fund the costs of migration and/or education and migrants
subsequently provide remittances or savings in return. Altruism and/or the expectation of subsequent
benefits such as inheritance provide incentives for migrants to honour their side of the obligation.
Families act collectively not only to maximise expected income but also to minimise risks to income,
acquire social status within an embedded hierarchy and overcome a variety of market failures, like
capital and credits markets (Stark and Taylor 1989). Recent studies have modelled the migration choice
being made from a self-selected group with observable single characteristics such as skills, education,
family migration and found that migration has a positive effect on the family’s social class.

Portes (1995) has further approached migration as a question of long-term economic adaptation.
Migrants are viewed not only as individuals carrying their personal skills, but also as members of groups
and participants in broader social structures that affect in multiple ways their economic mobility.
Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-
migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and share community origin
(Portes and Rumbaut 1996). They increase the likelihood of internal movement because they lower the
cost and risks of moving and increase the expected net returns to migrate. Network connections
constitute a social resource that people draw on to gain access to various kinds of financial capital:
employment, high wages, the possibility of saving and sending remittances to their place of origin
(Massey 1999).

Migration has been seen in a negative context, occurring as a last resort of the poor in response to
economic, demographic and environmental shocks, and leading to their exploitation and further
impoverishment (de Haan 1999). In recent years there has been an expansion of interest in a more
balanced approach to migration in the context of the sustainable livelihoods framework (de Haan and Rogaly, 2002). This emphasises that: 1) whilst migration does occur in response to crisis for some, it is also a central livelihood strategy for many people in the face of physical, economic, social and political adversity; and 2) the impact of poverty and vulnerability on migration and implications of migration for well-being are highly context specific.

Households in developing countries often undertake multiple livelihood strategies in order to diversify livelihood sources in the context of social, economic, political, environmental and historical circumstances. The sustainable livelihoods framework analyses how households and communities are enabled to pursue, or disabled from following, different livelihood strategies, including migration, in response to prevailing conditions and how this impacts on their well-being and vulnerability to adverse circumstances. Of particular importance to this process is access to different forms of 'livelihood resources' (human, physical, social and environmental capital) and the role 'formal and informal institutions and organisations' play in facilitating or impeding access to alternative livelihood strategies (Scoones 1998: 3). In contrast to economic theories, which tend to view migration as a response to disequilibria such as inter-sectoral wage disparity, a livelihoods approach views migration as one of a set of strategies that households and communities use to diversify and support well-being (de Haan, 2002). The livelihoods framework refers to a broad spectrum of migration causation, encompassing monetary and non-monetary factors, and voluntary and forced migration, where decision-making occurs within a broad context of factors at the micro-level (individual and household circumstances and decision making), meso-level (socio-economic conditions at source and destination areas) and macro level (speed and unevenness of the development process and national and international policy environment) (Kothari 2002: 9).

2.1 Women, Migration and development

Gayle et al (2008), put forward that it is generally assumed that long-distance ‘family migrations’ are mainly for employment related reasons and traditionally, this has been related to the man’s career, rather than the woman’s. However, in the contemporary labour market, with an increasing proportion of women working and more dual-earner couples, Gayle et al express the view that it is increasingly plausible that families will move for reasons related to the female partner’s career.

Morrison et al. (2007) note that, although the present share of women in the world’s international migrant population is close to one half, there has until recently been a striking lack of gender analysis in
the economic literature on migration. They suggest that men and women exhibit important differences in the determinants of their decision to migrate, the amount of remittances they send back home and the allocation of these remittances across various expenditure categories. United Nations’ (2006) 2004 World survey on the role of women in development also reveals that a gender perspective is essential for understanding both the causes and consequences of international migration. Gender inequality can be an important factor in determining women migration when they have expectations that are not fulfilled at home. Migrant women play a role in the economic development of both their countries of destination and origin through remittances they send back home and the improvement of their own skills or those of the next generation.

However, the migration experience inevitably has a darker side. From a more critical approach, Gu¨ven-Lisaniler, UgÇural and Rodríguez (2008) studied the case of migrant women workers in North Cyprus, and one of the striking features of their study is the parallel between women who are victims of human trafficking and are compelled to migrate through coercion and deceit, and those who are not immediately assumed to be victims of trafficking, being voluntary migrants engaged in domestic work and cleaning services. Their study shows how the latter are potentially just as vulnerable to human right abuses as those who have been forced to migrate.

Nevertheless, it is clear that migration can play a key role in improving the condition of women in society, and in the fight against the feminisation of poverty. Almost 63% of the world population is found in rural areas (Khan, 2000) and, in addition, about two-thirds of the extremely poor are either small farmers or low-paid farm workers living on subsistence agriculture, and some of the rest engage in non-farm activities such as petty services or self-employment (Todaro and Smith, 2003). Out of those living below the poverty line in rural areas, Todaro and Smith noted a growing number of women living in very poor conditions mainly because they lack proper access to resources required for the generation of stable incomes. As such, if women are provided with the necessary opportunities, the tools and support, they can play an active role in the alleviation of rural poverty. In Africa, for instance, women carry out almost all tasks associated with subsistence food. Back in 1983, Sachs referred to women in agriculture as the ‘invisible farmers’, providing for a high proportion of agricultural labour in the developing world.
This paper aims at evaluating the movement of Rodriguan women to the mainland in their quest towards better living and working conditions for themselves and their loved ones. A brief overview of the Island of Rodrigues is presented in the next section.

2.2 The island of Rodrigues

Background information

Rodrigues island is of volcanic origin, 18 Km by 8 Km, 104 km² in size, and is 560 Km north-east of Mauritius with regular air-links. It is the tenth administrative District of Mauritius and has a population that is scattered over the island, with Port Mathurin being the dominant town and the administrative centre. Rodrigues had a population of 37,774 persons in year 2009 (18,690 males and 19,084 females) with a net migration of some 400-500 persons to Mauritius every year. The population has remained almost stable over the last 10 years as the natural increase in the population (approx 1.5%) has been matched by a regular -1% migration each year.

Socio economic development

Given the small internal market, shortage of water and its location, Rodrigues has not witnessed any impressive economic growth despite many incentives to encourage the development of private sector initiated productive activities. The Rodriguan economy is mainly based on agriculture, livestock, fishing and handicraft. The fishing sector is dominated by traditional fishing in small boats within the inner lagoon. As the lagoon has been silted and overexploited, catches are decreasing. There has been a constant drop of yields in the agricultural sector due to water scarcity, erratic climatic conditions and lack of good marketing policy. The manufacturing sector is limited to a few enterprises, like stone crushing, baking, metal work, wood work, garment making, shoe-making and small agro-industries. Production of handicraft provides a source of supplementary income to many families. Local materials such as vetiver, aloes, coral and coconut shells are used to manufacture handicraft products such as hats, bags, doormats, dolls and toys, fancy jewellery and coral structures for sale to tourists. However, given the poor level of development, there is little inter-linkage effect between tourism and the local Rodriguans. Tourism is a fast growing and a promising sector both in terms of value added and employment generation.
The Rodriguan society is characterised by the high prevalence of matri-focal families. There are two main factors primarily responsible for this situation: the high rate of alcohol-consumption amongst men in Rodrigues, and the high rates of desertion/separation/divorces. In spite of the fact that Rodriguan women are known to be hard-working, taking care of the family is not an easy task in the Rodriguan context, given the scarcity of job opportunities, and the worsening poverty situation. Indeed, out of a total of 10000 households, 17.9% were living below the poverty line established at Rs2716 in 2006/2007. The lack of job opportunities coupled with the poor living conditions are pushing women to migrate to the main island in search of employment leaving behind a breakdown of the family system. What is paradoxal is that, whereas there is massive unemployment and poverty on one side, there is some 1823 vacancies out of an establishment of about 4, 400 posts (RRA, 2010).

**The employment structure**

The employment structure shows that Rodrigues is still an economy based on primary production with little manufacturing. The figures below show the employment structure in Rodrigues in year 2009:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: Employment Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and fishing :</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Administration:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade, Restaurants and hotels:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other social and community services:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, warehousing and communication:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity and construction:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing, Insurance and Business services:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CSO, 2009)

The labour force of the island is mainly constituted of manual agricultural workers and government employees and is characterised by a strong bias against women in the primary labour market. Indeed, 3714 males and only 1104 female are reported to be employed in establishments employing more than 10 persons, whereas in small
establishments there were 3725 men and 2289 women. The latter are still very much concentrated in the secondary and informal labour market which is characterised by long working hours, exploitation and poor salaries.

Whilst both Mauritius and Rodrigues reported similar labour force participation rates (76% and 34% for men and women respectively) (Census year 2000) the female unemployment rate for Rodrigues is much higher (34%) as compared to 9.5% for Mauritius. The unemployment figures stood as follow in 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>YEAR 2000</th>
<th>YEAR 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(KPMG, 2009)

3.0 Methodology

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the success of Rodriguan women in upgrading the living standards of their family by migrating to Mauritius for work. The constraints faced at the different stages of this movement and the contribution of migrant Rodriguan women to the Mauritian economy, and to that of Rodrigues are also analysed. For the purpose of this research, a mixed-methods approach has been applied (Puxty et al., 1987). This method helps to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004a). Proponents of mixed-methods research adhere to the compatibility thesis, sharing the view that both quantitative and qualitative research can be used in a single research only. They also share the philosophy of pragmatism, putting forward that researchers should use the approach or mixture of approach that works best in a real world situation (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The combination of methods also provide for complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses (Brewer and Hunter, 1989).

For data-collection purpose, a questionnaire-based semi-structured interview schedule, worked out through the application of the mixed-methods approach, was devised and applied to a sample of 150 Rodriguan women working in the different sectors of activity in Mauritius. The snowballing method was applied so as to ease access to the Rodriguan women living in Mauritius. Their views, with regards to
this movement from the agriculture-based Rodriguan economy, to the industry-based Mauritius, and the difficulties faced, have been collected for analysis purposes. Information about their participation and contribution to the Mauritian economy as a whole, and to the Rodriguan society has also been compiled for analysis purposes.

Questions set in the structured interview schedule were therefore composed of a mix of qualitative and quantitative nature, so as to complement each other. This work contributes to the literature as it brings in an ethnocentric approach that provides a grounded understanding of the women migration movement in the context of the Mauritian society. The overall response rate for the data-collection exercise, therefore, stood 87%. Based on the analysis of information collected, recommendations with regards to the changes to be made in order to remedy to the flaws of the present migration situation so as to make the most of the business sector contributions in the fight against poverty, are worked-out.

Apart from the survey, secondary sources have also been used for analysis purposes. This mainly took the form of documents published by the RRA and the Central Statistical Office publications, as well as previous studies done in the area.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

At the very outset, it is essential to point out that a consistent net negative trend has been noted over the years, and even the recent decades with regards to the migration movement from Rodrigues. This is clear depicted in table 1 below:
Table 3: Growth of the Resident population and vital statistics: Island of Rodrigues 1998-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population at the beginning of year</th>
<th>Natural movement</th>
<th>Net migration</th>
<th>Total increase</th>
<th>% change during the year due to:</th>
<th>Population at end of year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live births</td>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>Natural increase</td>
<td>Natural increase</td>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>35,260</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>-351</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>35,411</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>-386</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35,640</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>-385</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35,885</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>-390</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>36,085</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>-367</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>36,305</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>-415</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>36,503</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>-460</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>36,772</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>-450</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>36,994</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>-400</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>37,250</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>-400</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37,499</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>-375</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>37,700</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>-410</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO, 2009

Even if, in absolute figures, an average of 400 emigrants per year can be considered as marginal, it is not the case when viewed in terms of percentage of population. Indeed, given that Rodrigues has a population of 37,774 only, 400 emigrants mean that on average, more than 1% of the active population is moving out each year. When queried about the reason/behind their decision to move from Rodrigues, respondents consistently point towards the following factors:

**TABLE 4: Push factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Job opportunities</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult living and working conditions</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family situation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regards to the main factors having attracted them to Mauritius, Rodriguan women point toward the availability of jobs and better salaries.
TABLE 5: Pull factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Jobs</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better salaries</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Shopping</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secured a job before coming</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So as to save money for a specific project</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, when queried with regards to their actual experience in Mauritius as a female migrant, there is a clearly negative picture that emerges. This cuts across all the different age-groups, the family situation and the number of children. Indeed, as a general comparison with regards to their life in Rodrigues, the following trend emerges:

![Figure 1: General comparison](image)

However, the negative feeling with regards to working in Mauritius is inversely proportional with time, as those who have been here for a year or less express more negative feelings, but this tone down over time. On a 0-1 scale, the negative experience of working in Mauritius can be expressed as follows:

TABLE 6: change in perception over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>&lt; 1 year</th>
<th>1-2 years</th>
<th>2-3 years</th>
<th>3-4 years</th>
<th>4-5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 0 negative opinion 1 Positive opinion
What are the main factors leading to this present situation where Rodriguan women working in Mauritius are generally unhappy? A deeper insight reveals that Rodriguan women working in Mauritius are primarily dissatisfied with regards to the working conditions in Mauritius.

In fact, when probed further, there is a clear feeling that the employers in Mauritius at times exploit the workers coming from Rodrigues as they are fully aware that the latter need to work, and generally do not have any academic qualifications. As such, they are made to work for long hours, and are paid at the minimum salary scale. They are also a tool in the hands of the employers to put a downward pressure on wages, as local employees cannot ask for any salary increase, given that there is a readily available supply of labour that are willing to work. Rodriguan women are also known to be more docile and hardworking than their Mauritian colleagues. Employers can therefore use the available pool of Rodriguan women to curtail the bargaining power of the workers. This is highly prevalent in two specific sectors, namely cleaning services and factories in the Export processing sector.

In addition to their difficult working conditions, a high percentage of Rodriguan women working in Mauritius also report to be facing financial difficulties. This is quite paradoxal, given that they willingly disclose that they are earning an average 40-70% more than their salaries in Rodrigues. However, there was a general consensus amongst the respondents that they were not able to save much out of their pay packet, given that the cost of living is too high in Mauritius. They need to pay for all the bills and the
remaining amount has to be spent on foodstuffs. As such, consumption, rather than savings, is the order of the day in Mauritius.

![Figure 3: Ability to save in Mauritius, as compared to Rodrigues](image)

Indeed, the aggressive marketing campaigns from Mauritian retail outlets, coupled with the fact that many of the items on sale in Mauritius are not easily available in Rodrigues mean that all the respondents report to be spending more on shopping than what they were used to previously. It is not surprising that foodstuffs do take the lion-share of their budget. Indeed, whereas Rodrigues is a predominantly agricultural society where people are used to produce what they consume, this is not the case in Mauritius, where everything has to be bought, and where people eat out rather than cook for dinner. This inevitably has a negative impact on their monthly budget. However, the availability and the visibility of luxury products, as well as the ease of acquiring these through hire purchase, mean that some Rodriguan women even find themselves in a situation where they are worse-off in Mauritius given that they are spending every single cent of what they are earning either in purchases, or in financing previous acquisitions through monthly installments. These purchases, however, cannot be equated to the acquisition of assets, as the life-time of these products is generally short (e.g. mobile phones), and their running cost is generally high (e.g. domestic appliances). In addition, amongst those who have moved alone, or with part of the family only, only 23% do report to be regularly helping their dear one through remittances. This is not, therefore, a systematic occurrence. This can be understood, given that
the majority of respondents are striving to improve their living conditions, and some are even struggling to make both ends meet with what they are earning.

**TABLE 7: Remittances**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From time to time</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents queried also depicted a negative picture of their present living conditions in Mauritius. Even if this looks paradoxical, (given the constant inflow of migrants from Rodrigues to Mauritius), it is in line with the literature in the area, given that already saturated regions with high level of unemployment and declining living standards do continue to attract migrants. In the Mauritian context, some 81% of Rodriguan women coming to Mauritius reported that they transited through the suburbs of Port-Louis, or are still living in or around the capital. Two main factors explain these clusters of people of Rodriguan origin: a clan-like attitude where those who have already settled help the newcomers to do so, and the availability of jobs in the vicinity of Port-Louis (e.g. Tuna-fish processing plants). However, it is inevitable that this cluster of migrants give rise to dormitories rather than a residential zone. Basic services such as water, electricity, kitchen and bathrooms are shared by a constantly growing number of ‘residents’. In addition, respondents pointed out that they had to pay many items at a higher price as they are not eligible to these through the mainstream. They have to pay a premium for being in poverty.

It is important to point out at this stage that Rodrigues is a virtually crime-free, accident free and stress-free society where people are warm and friendly, where everybody feel safe, and where drug-trafficking is only marginal (63 drugs offences only in 2009). The situation in Mauritius is the exact opposite, given that the high number of homicides (105), sexual offences (442), drug offences (4144), thefts (16836), and road accidents registered each year. In the light of the dark picture depicted above, the question that needs to be asked is why is it that Rodriguan women still stay back and continue to strive in Mauritius.

To this question, the predominant response obtained was that in the long-run, they feel that they will be better off in Mauritius, as compared to Rodrigues. There is a shared perception that Rodrigues’
economy is slowly drifting and that the prospects for the inhabitants are becoming darker. This explains partially this determination for Rodriguan women working in Mauritius to cling to their difficult situation in Mauritius. Amongst the main problems identified by the respondents is the persistent shortage of water, which limit agricultural activities, and which worsen the already serious poverty situation in case of droughts. There are presently some 2620 women presently depending on the agricultural sector to meet the needs of their family, living at the margin of poverty and can easily fall in its trap, given the dry climatic conditions, and the difficult, hilly and rocky relief prevalent in Rodrigues, that make render agriculture very challenging. In addition, some 440 women in the hotel and restaurant sector (CSO, 2009). However, the tourism sector is also stagnating, with the number of arrivals being down from 41 136 in 2008 to 40 350 in 2009 (-1.9%) (RRA, 2010) and cutting down on the number of people employed is inevitable, given the dark prospects. The other sectors that traditionally provide employment to women, namely manufacturing and trade, have been stagnating as well. In such a context, Rodriguan women are not very keen to look back. They prefer to concentrate their efforts in creating a better future in Mauritius for themselves and their family even if this is not an easy task, rather than taking the risk of going back and being at the mercy of the vulnerable Rodriguan economy.

Also, there is a general consensus amongst respondents with children that the educational prospects of their children is better in Mauritius, and generally look confident of being able to climb the social ladder through the academic success of their children. Inter-generational mobility, rather than immediately climbing the social ladder, seems to be favoured by Rodriguan migrants. Respondents also consider the health care facilities, the infrastructures and the living standard to be better in Mauritius.

**5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper evaluates the success of Rodriguan women in upgrading their living standards and that of their family by migrating to Mauritius. Based on the findings of this work, Rodriguan women and the family members living together in Mauritius generally do enjoy a better access to products and services available in Mauritius given that their income is higher when working in Mauritius. However, children and other parents who have been left behind in Rodrigues either for educational reason, or as a result of financial constraints, are presently not benefitting much from the work of their relative/s who has migrated to Mauritius. Remittances are generally sent only sparsely, given that the cost of living in
Mauritius is too high. This work also outlines the difficulties met by working women to be able to save some money for the future.

With regards to the constraints faced by Rodriguan women at the different stages of their movement to Mauritius, it is clear that it is a tedious task. Migration to Mauritius, even if seems heavenly at first, has to studied from micro-level orientation and on a longer time-frame in order to have an even better picture of its impact in Mauritius and Rodrigues. Still, the initial period of settling in a new environment is one of the most challenging periods in the life of the new migrant. Analysis made during the course of this work show that level of discontent is likely to go down gradually over time, but that Rodriguan women in Mauritius are still very unhappy of their living and working conditions.

In terms of the contributions that Migrant Rodriguan women make to the Mauritian economy, it is clear that the local entrepreneurs are presently using this readily available supply of workers so as to bring down the price of labour. The Rodriguan labour force is being used as a reserve army of labour, docile, submissive and willing to work, and, as such, even the factory owners/entrepreneurs maintain a higher bargaining power on the other employees.

If this trend is followed, Rodrigues will be depleted of its most valuable asset: its inhabitants. There is a need for urgent measures to be taken at the level of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, and even at the central government level, so as to promote the development of Rodrigues’ economy through its products, services and resources. It is not only possible, but also highly feasible. For instance, the decrease in tourism arrival was around 15% in the first eight months of the year 2009, but this has been curtailed to 1.9% over the year 2009 through the implementation of a simple special holiday package as from September 2009. However, even if job creation is positive, it is not enough; it is of crucial importance to increase the likelihood of women to be employed and to climb the social ladder. Women should also be encouraged to access to the decision-making levels so that they are better represented in the higher-paying and influential positions. There is a need to galvanise the energies of the Rodriguan and the Mauritian leaders to find a sustainable solution to this major Rodriguan problem.

With regards to Rodriguan women in Mauritius, there is a need to set up the proper infrastructures, logistics and facilities so as to provide them with the basic services and support. This will ease the transition process and will help them to start on firm grounds, rather than on ad-hoc basis, relying on family members or relatives who have settled before. The state need to intervene, as the fight against poverty, both in Mauritius and in Rodrigues, need to take into account the dramatic conditions under
which citizens of the state of Mauritius are presently living, whether in the suburbs of the Mauritian capital, close to the multi-storey building and the motorway, or in the remote, downtrodden, mountainous and dry regions of Rodrigues. The state of Mauritius has at its disposal the resources and the competences to do so.
REFERENCES


Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) Executive council press release, 15th of January, 2011


