

GFRAS Issues Paper 2

Migration and rural advisory services

David Suttie



GFRAS Issues Papers

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Abstract

The role of mobility among rural people requires much more attention than it has received thus far, including in the design and provision of extension and rural advisory services (RAS). Mobility has often been a neglected element of rural livelihoods, but it is becoming more significant because of factors such as increasingly dynamic rural–urban connectivity, youth population demographics, and the impacts of climate change and the spread of conflict.

A range of entry points are available to address the issue, with a potentially very important role for information and communications technology (ICT) and digital tools being in enabling migrating rural people to access important information, knowledge, and materials for skills development. There is a need to improve the relevance of RAS content by integrating specific traditional and emerging opportunities and challenges in the context of how these are shaped by mobility. However, many emerging employment and entrepreneurship opportunities are likely to still be located within food systems in the years ahead. Consequently, issues such as ‘agripreneurship’, financial literacy, use of mobile and digital devices to access financial services and other information, and opportunities within non-farm industrial and service sectors (often still linked to the agri-food sector) deserve further integration into RAS curricula. Subgroups of migrants, such as poor smallholders, women, and youth, each have specific and distinct needs and prospects, which need to be reflected in the design, delivery, and outreach of RAS.

The ambition of such an expansion in the scope of extension and RAS provider capacities brings many challenges, not least the risk of losing focus by spreading the responsibilities of extension and RAS too widely. However, increasingly complicated and dynamic environments confronting both rural and urban people, in which mobility and migration are playing ever greater roles, makes it imperative to integrate strategies and partnerships in extension and RAS. To a large extent, stronger brokerage roles and partnerships are emerging as ever more important for the RAS community, including in influencing the overarching enabling environment facing migrants. For example, the more systematic formation of organisations of rural migrant groups and efforts to enhance their voice, in conjunction with dialogue with political authorities, across both origin and receiving areas of migrants, could potentially ease mobile populations’ access to important services and support networks, as well as enable constructive exchanges between migrants and other actors in destination and origin communities.

The scope of the ambition and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, combined with the increased complexity, unpredictability, and dynamism within rural areas and their surroundings, underscores the need for the RAS community to reflect on how to adapt services to serve the needs of mobile rural populations and draw lessons from good practices in countries where successful approaches have been tried and tested.

Introduction

In many traditions and socio-cultural contexts, mobility has long been a key rural livelihood strategy. For instance, this has historically been the case in nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralist communities of the Sahel (Hussein 1998; Swift 2007; Jallo *et al.* 2014; Krätli and Swift 2014; Catley *et al.* 2013), but also more broadly among rural and farming populations as a response to the seasonality and uncertainty associated with agriculture-based livelihoods. Today, mobility is becoming an even more important livelihood strategy for still greater numbers of rural households as a range of factors are leading to heterogeneous patterns of migration among rural inhabitants. Despite this, the design and delivery of interventions and service provision for the benefit of rural people has very often assumed sedentary livelihood patterns as the norm (McDowell and de Haan 1997).

The number of international migrants¹ continues to grow rapidly, having reached an estimated 244 million in 2015 – with approximately 20 million refugees² within this figure (UN-DESA Population Division 2016). Although systematic statistical reporting is not available, the number of internal migrants moving within state borders³ is known to be significantly higher than the international figure – estimates by UN-DESA Population Division (2013) of 763 million seem to under-represent the scale of internal population movements. The factors driving these movements are complex, heterogeneous, and interact with one another, making it challenging to categorise and define different types of movement (Hugo 2008).

With this in mind, at a conceptual level even practical distinctions are not always clear-cut. Displacement resulting from fragile situations, such as conflict, and natural and climate-related disasters, can be distinguished from people's choices to move to support household incomes and livelihood strategies, with the latter generally accepted as inherently normal processes of social and economic development (Timmer 2017; Stark 1991); even here, however, care is needed to avoid simplification. For instance, sudden-onset events often produce relatively short-distance and temporary patterns of migration (Drabo and Mbaye 2011), though these may be the precursor to subsequent longer-term movements that may be considered more voluntary. On the other hand, slower-onset events, such as environmental degradation or long-standing social and political unrest, may encourage rural households to diversify out of agriculture (Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009). It should also be borne in mind that, while security and economic reasons are among the most cited motivations for migration, access to services, and educational and cultural opportunities also influence decisions related to mobility. Thus, migration and mobility are frequently the result of the intersections of multiple factors, with complexities at play that often make definitions, classification, and generalisation challenging.



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What is clear is that increased mobility influences the types of services required by rural populations, as well as their capacities to access existing modes of service provision. Diverse forms of mobility – of those working in agriculture in addition to those diversifying their livelihoods or exiting the sector – have implications for extension and rural advisory services (RAS) in terms of skills, capacities, approaches, and resources. Given the close links between rural mobility and agriculture and food production, as well as with the way mobile people afford and access food, this issue is closely linked to food security and nutrition, as well as to other key elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – for instance, related to how rural–urban connectivity, employment, and migration influence prospects for sustainable urbanisation.

It is important to reflect upon these issues, as well as on what mobility means for service delivery, inclusion, content, and access for the users of RAS. At a minimum, the implication is that increasingly mobile modes of service provision will need to be considered to foster inclusive access to services for all – for both settled and more mobile rural people (including internal and international migrants, people whose livelihoods are based on mobility, refugees, and internally displaced groups). With this in mind, this Issues Paper outlines the broad rural–urban mobility context and discusses practical implications for RAS, before outlining some general conclusions. These highlight (among other things) the need for

greater integration of considerations related to mobility in the design, delivery, and outreach of RAS; the role of modern information and communications technology (ICT) and digital tools to improve the reach and relevance of RAS for migrants; the diversity of the situations and needs of different RAS clients according to gender, age, and sectoral occupation; and the important brokerage role the RAS community can play in facilitating arrangements that contribute to improving the overarching enabling environment facing migrants and their families.

Context

As noted, migration is complex and heterogeneous – as is its relationship with development more broadly (de Haan 2008) – with different patterns including local seasonal movements, longer-term movements, permanent or temporary movement to larger towns and cities, and permanent (or temporary) international movement (Laws and Avis 2017). Globally, it is generally accepted that migration pressures have been rising for some time (Black *et al.* 2011), while the escalating incidence of conflict (FAO *et al.* 2017) is increasing the numbers of those forcibly displaced and of refugees (FAO 2016). Distinguishing between different types of migration can be problematic, as motivations, and temporal and spatial scales differ markedly among those migrating.

Recognising that migrants are not a homogeneous group (Tacoli *et al.* 2015: p. 22), we can say with some confidence that, in rural contexts, mobility is frequently and increasingly contributing to livelihood strategies (Suttie and Vargas-Lundius 2016; IFAD and FAO 2008; Ratha 2013). Greater rural–urban connectivity; more dynamic linkages, interdependencies, and communication between different types of human settlements (Hussein and Suttie 2016); the expansion of market towns in proximity to rural areas (UN-DESA Population Division 2014); environmental and climate-induced stresses⁴ (Stern 2007; IIED 2010); and the spread of conflict situations (FAO *et al.* 2017) are among the factors driving rural migration. Notably, while some of these factors represent ‘pull’ factors that potentially enable rural people to, for example, take advantage of emerging livelihood and market opportunities, benefit from education and training programmes, or access activities associated with modern lifestyles, others are more identifiable as ‘push’ factors, driving migration. These ‘push’ factors are a result of the lack of viability of remaining in certain areas and settlements (e.g. due to the spread of conflict situations or lack of remunerative economic opportunities). Consequently, some governments are considering rural-to-rural resettlement programmes, where migrants are allocated new farmland and housing in more favourable agro-climatic conditions (Rothenberg *et al.* 2016). Overall, these different ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors often interact to influence rural people’s decisions on moving or staying in the same place.

While noting that the incidence of out-migration from rural communities is on the rise, particularly in regions with traditionally large rural population shares where urbanisation is progressing rapidly (de Weerd 2010; Mulumba and Olema 2009; Deshingkar *et al.* 2012), it would be inaccurate to regard rural migration as a new phenomenon. This observation is important because policy-makers and those working to provide services to people in rural areas frequently tend to presume sedentary livelihoods to be the norm, even though mobility is inherent to many traditional and historic rural livelihood strategies, especially nomadic pastoralism groups (e.g. Hussein 1998; Swift 2007). Further, the seasonal and risk-prone nature of agricultural work and income, stemming from factors inherent to the natural and economic environment surrounding agriculture,⁵ dictate the need to diversify activities in order to reduce risk, which has resulted in mobility long being seen as a common livelihood strategy among many rural communities. In some contexts, farmers migrate to access quality land, remaining in agricultural work after migrating but often being inadequately integrated into RAS programmes (Iwuchukwu *et al.* 2008). In general, realities facing mobile groups have not been recognised and have not been adequately integrated into rural development initiatives broadly, including those related to the provision of services to people in rural areas.

Indeed, the wider processes of development and structural transformation have historically been associated with the emergence and growth of non-agriculture sectors (HLPE 2013: p. 55; Losch *et al.* 2012: pp. 54–60) – in part as a consequence of the multiplier farm to non-farm growth impacts of agricultural development (Haggblade 2005; Mellor 1995; Start 2001: pp. 491–505) – leading to a degree of exodus from rural areas and the agricultural sector. Increasing rural–urban dynamism and linkages associated with rural and structural transformation also expand the opportunities for rural households to ‘step out’⁶ into a range of new activities outside the traditional domain of agriculture, many of which are associated with commuting, or seasonal, circular, or longer-term migration. Importantly, in many countries, much of this migration is rural–rural⁷ (Lucas 2014), the reality being a much wider one than a simple narrative of urbanisation driven by rural exodus.

Overall, while migration has always been a key facet of rural livelihoods – albeit an often under-recognised one – as the phenomenon increases, so do the complexities and heterogeneities associated with different types of movement within and between countries and regions. The growth of small and intermediate towns in proximity to areas traditionally considered to be rural, improving connectivity – both ‘hard’ forms of rural–urban connectivity (e.g. as a result of transport infrastructure) and ‘soft’ forms of connectivity (e.g. as a result of

the proliferation of mobile technologies) (Saravanan and Suchiradipta 2015) – accompanied by commercialisation, and the increasing integration of agricultural value chains, are all creating incentives for people based in rural areas to adopt mobile livelihood strategies.

These trends are widely predicted to become norms, with seasonal and circular migration becoming even more significant for agricultural transformation in the decades ahead (Anh 2003; Srivastava 2005; Tacoli and Agergaard 2017). It is therefore not surprising that the role of migrant remittances is increasing, representing a significant source of finance for rural investment. Indeed, approximately 40 per cent of the estimated US\$445 billion from international remittances in 2016 was sent to rural areas (IFAD 2017: p. 7), with remittances from internal migration – for which reliable estimates are not available – thought to flow to an even larger number of rural households (McKay and Deshingkar 2014). Remittances provide an important source of rural income diversification, serving as insurance against adverse shocks (Ratha 2013). Remittances are especially important given the lack of access to, and limited range of, insurance products in rural areas. They also facilitate investments in rural businesses, in physical and human capital, and in ICT in rural areas (Ratha 2013; World Bank 2011; IFAD and FAO 2008). Given the important gender dimensions of migration and remittances, which in some contexts see women taking more responsibility over agricultural activities while receiving support in the form of remittances from



Photo: SaraTz

migrating male family members, addressing the new realities and opportunities facing women working in agriculture is becoming increasingly important.

At the same time, some have expressed legitimate concern that, under certain conditions, the need to migrate can be imposed on rural people (FAO 2016; IFAD 2016). Evaluative interpretations of development involving unstated value assumptions of what constitutes positive change are generally focused on enhancing economic efficiency (Gasper 2004), in particular involving industrialisation and urbanisation, leading to under-valuing and under-investing in historic and context-specific forms of rural livelihoods. As such, the appropriation of rural people's land for large-scale investment projects by private firms seeking profits and governments seeking revenue, and even, in some cases, initiatives to conserve natural and environmental resources (Wapner and Matthew 2009), has frequently resulted in the loss of rural people's traditional livelihoods, leaving them little option but to migrate. These realities represent threats to ethical principles that value participation, freedom, and human rights. Further, environmental degradation, climate change, and increasing incidence of conflict – often a result of pressures over scarce natural resources (Bouzar 2016) – often compel rural people to migrate (FAO 2016). Where non-voluntary migration has been part of government rural-to-rural resettlement programmes, many documented cases have shown an absence of coupling with agricultural extension programmes, resulting in productivity gaps in migrant destinations, especially where the destination has a significantly different agro-ecological–climatic context from the area of origin (Rothenberg *et al.* 2016).

Exodus from rural communities – particularly in contexts where this is perceived to be driven by push factors – is accompanied by other concerns. The exodus of (especially young) people from rural areas raises questions about the implications of the loss of potentially the most dynamic and energetic people in rural communities and the consequent ageing of the rural and agricultural demographic (Oucho *et al.* 2014; Chander n.d.a). Worryingly, the pull factor of (generally larger) destination towns and cities is not always justified by the availability of decent jobs, housing, and access to resources and services. This is particularly the case in countries that are undergoing urbanisation without economic structural transformation – which can be observed, for instance, in much of sub-Saharan Africa (Proctor 2014). While it cannot automatically be assumed that rural poverty is a major driver of rural out-migration,⁸ many would agree that it is desirable that youth living in rural areas have the freedom to choose between viable economic and livelihood opportunities to realise their capabilities in their rural homes as well as, potentially, further afield. Hence, while there is a need to accept and support migration in many contexts, there is also a justified need to ensure that livelihood

opportunities exist and an attractive quality of life can be achieved in rural communities experiencing out-migration.

As noted by Knoll *et al.* (2017: i), “Adopting a development approach means increasing options available to individuals to allow them to pursue better agricultural, rural or urban livelihood opportunities, with safe and regular migration as one of those options. Complex migration dynamics should be mainstreamed into food and nutrition security strategies and initiatives”.

While there is significant diversity in situations and contexts, given recent trends, it has become increasingly important for agricultural and rural service providers to integrate user mobility into their programmes. The next section sets out some of the implications of this for the design, delivery, and content of extension and RAS programmes.

Implications of migration for rural advisory services

Prioritisation of smallholders still relevant within broader food systems focus

Even in a context of more dynamic rural–urban connectivity and the proliferation of ICTs, (increasingly mobile) smallholder farmers too often continue to be limited in their access to sufficient and relevant information. Acknowledging that in an increasingly diverse and dynamic context, agriculture remains the bedrock of rural economies and that rural populations are projected to continue to expand in the sub-Saharan African and South Asian regions in the years ahead (World Bank and IFAD 2017), the focus of RAS on smallholders is appropriate. Indeed, as Knoll *et al.* (2017) have recently argued, priority should be given to policies and actions that acknowledge human mobility as a pillar of sustainable food systems and inclusive territorial development, where special attention is given to smallholder farmers and small service providers, providing support for the mobility of all food system players along better integrated urban–rural areas and (regional) food economies. Within this, how to serve traditionally mobile groups, such as nomadic pastoralists, whose mobility-based livelihood strategies have not always been adequately served by RAS or by rural development programmes generally, deserves renewed attention.

Against a background of an increasing pluralism of RAS providers (GFRAS 2013) – in particular with private actors playing greater roles as service providers – more systematic efforts will be needed to ensure coordinated responses from the community of RAS service providers to opportunities emerging for smallholder actors across agri-food value chains. In this context, it is worth noting that the locus for an increased share of these opportunities is small and intermediate towns in the vicinity of more traditionally rural areas (Tacoli and Agergaard 2017).

Consequently, there is a need to ensure access to training and services in a range of subsectors across agri-food value chains – from input provision, storage, and processing through to marketing – brokering linkages with relevant actors across spatially diverse areas. Building smallholders' adaptive capacities to manage risks associated with climate change emerges as a priority, particularly considering country-level evidence linking climate-based risks to push factors driving migration (Jha *et al.* 2018), and will be central to enabling this group to seize emerging market opportunities across rural and urban areas. In broad terms, advocating for, and facilitating where feasible, more effective territorial coordination and cooperation within food systems for the benefit of smallholders and other small-scale rural agri-food actors (Suttie and Hussein 2016) may therefore be seen as a key ambition of RAS in response to emerging mobility dynamics.

The increasing mobility of rural people does not imply that the focus on the needs of smallholders (farmers and other rural producers) is less important, rather there is a need to expand the scope of RAS to encompass a wider range and diversity of topics. At a minimum, RAS need to find ways to adapt to a wider food systems approach, rather than focus narrowly on farm production and agricultural productivity. It is clearly problematic to relate migration simply to on-farm dynamics, and a wider food systems approach is more helpful to identify ways to influence the complexities at play (Laborde *et al.* 2017).

As already noted, enhanced mobility between different types of settlement is already leading to more and better market opportunities downstream and upstream of agricultural production. As such, if RAS were to focus on entire agri-food value chains – responding to opportunities for rural people to engage in 'agripreneurship' (Chander n.d.b) – this approach would encompass the entire spectrum of food system activities and better reflect the range of opportunities open to rural people. Some of these opportunities involve different kinds of mobility, while others may promote socio-economic development in what are traditionally considered as rural areas, thereby potentially limiting push factors that may be perceived to contribute to rural out-migration.

In general, migration – along with associated (but neither predictable, homogeneous, nor inevitable) processes of urbanisation and structural transformation – may well expand the availability of non-farm opportunities for rural people in many contexts. While increasing shares of manufacturing and service sector jobs would be in line with expectations from traditional development pathways (Mellor 1995), it is important to keep in mind the key role that (especially smallholder) agriculture is likely to play within this process (HLPE 2013; Losch *et al.* 2012; Timmer 1988). In addition, the extent of future employment generation in

non-agriculture sectors cannot be assumed to be as great as that observed in the pathways of today's developed and emerging economies (IFAD 2016). Overall, the picture is therefore a mixed one. So, RAS providers require strengthened capacities to support skills development of increasingly mobile rural people who may be required to compete for jobs both within and outside food systems. Such key skills might include, for example, computer literacy, communication and entrepreneurial skills, financial management, business development, and building linkages with service industries (including agro-industry) and markets. Nonetheless, it is still relevant for RAS to focus on these skills within agri-food systems.

Expanding the accessibility of RAS among increasingly mobile rural communities

Given the nature of RAS and the emerging realities around mobility (outlined above), capability approaches may be helpful to understanding the implications for RAS of rural people's mobility. That is, rather than focusing on a particular set of activities to be undertaken in specific contexts, RAS could focus on expanding the capabilities of rural people to choose between a range of viable livelihood or innovation options, some of which will inevitably encompass mobility, while others will allow them to pursue valuable and viable livelihoods in their 'home' rural contexts. The overriding objective, in line with Sen (1999), would be to provide rural people with the freedom to choose to live lives they value. This means facilitating rural people's access to relevant advisory services that can enhance the range of options open to them and increase the likelihood of success of their choices. It will, therefore, be imperative to ensure that rural people are not excluded from accessing RAS – in particular as a result of an incorrect assumption that rural people are generally sedentary (Oxfam International 2010) – and by adapting agricultural and extension services to mobility. As well as expanding the reach and relevance of RAS in rural communities themselves, this also means reflecting on how RAS can better support migrants in their destination areas. Skills such as computer literacy, communication, marketing, and local languages will be important in this respect, including for displaced persons and refugees, as in many cases opportunities are available for them to work in agriculture and related sectors (processing, marketing, storage, etc.) in their destinations should they have opportunities to acquire relevant skills.

The improved availability of, and access to, ICTs provides opportunities for wider sharing of knowledge and information (Saravanan *et al.* 2015a), in terms of both providing technical, market, and service-related information to rural people where mobility is a fundamental characteristic of their livelihoods, and developing relevant capacities to respond to the dynamic needs of advisory services and agricultural extension workers.



Photo: Neil Palmer/CIAT

Some related applications and tools – including mobile phones, social media, e-learning platforms, web portals, and community radios – have the potential to make a wide range of services available to increasingly mobile rural people. Using these applications and tools with diverse RAS stakeholders and providers (e.g. public, private, farmer, and rural-based organisations) can create more comprehensive and accessible services that respond to the heterogeneous livelihood and mobility circumstances of rural people. At an organisational level, this requires the development of ICT literacy among RAS staff, providing guidelines for ICT use, and investing in the development of appropriate infrastructure (*ibid.*). Enabling collaboration among diverse actors involved in agricultural extension and providers of knowledge and services in domains such as access to public services, housing, finance, and marketing, can facilitate greater support and location-specific capacity development among mobile populations. In this way, information and knowledge provided can cut across diverse aspects of life for migrants in their areas of origin and destination.

Mobile-based services have the potential to provide responses to the needs of mobile rural populations and migrants, with mobile technology having developed rapidly in recent years, and subscription rates in developing countries increasing from 22 per 100 inhabitants in 2005 to 91.8 per 100 inhabitants in 2015 (Saravanan and Suchiradiptha 2015). Crucially, mobile technology enables users

to overcome access barriers and offers a compelling opportunity for expanding RAS for increasingly mobile rural populations at a relatively low cost. As a starting point, awareness-raising programmes are needed to further expand both the reach and interactivity of services to ensure they are adapted to the diverse needs of different groups of rural people (*ibid.*). In this respect, increased dialogue among increasingly mobile community-level stakeholders across farm and non-farm related value chains and activities may be regarded as important in the provision of advice. Partnerships will also need to be developed between RAS providers, rural organisations, public sector stakeholders, and firms involved in providing telecommunications – bringing both public and private actors on board. Training of trainers to extend capacities in using mobile technologies to rural stakeholders should prioritise the involvement of youth, who are particularly adaptable to the adoption of mobile technologies (World Bank and IFAD 2017: p. 15).

This approach has already proven useful in enabling smallholder farmers to access financial services (Kakooza 2014), while the use of mobile money transfer tools has proven effective in increasing efficiency and reducing costs associated with remittance transfers (IFAD 2017: p. 37). In the context of migration, these technologies can be important tools to ensure easy and affordable transfer of remittances and associated facilitation of rural investment, as well as in overcoming financial constraints associated with the seasonality of on-farm incomes. However, despite encouraging evidence of the benefits of these technologies, uptake has often been slow among rural communities. Consequently, there is a need for capacity development at organisational and individual levels to familiarise and build confidence of rural people with mobile financial systems, especially in using online- and application-based solutions to reduce costs (*ibid.*). With remittances now constituting a significant source of private capital for rural communities – supporting basic needs as well as investment in human capital and income-generating activities – financial literacy training to enable rural communities to make the best use of these funds merits inclusion in RAS curricula. Further, to the extent that remittances represent an opportunity for investments in rural enterprise development, in particular in the context of more dynamic rural–urban contexts and migration flows, general entrepreneurship-related training becomes ever more relevant, covering, for example, marketing, accounting, financial management, and negotiation skills.

The context of mobility makes it important to utilise and integrate a wide range of modern ICTs in agricultural extension and RAS. The use of web portals to resolve issues around the sheer volume, relevance, and accuracy of information available via the internet by acting as single access points for information from a diverse range of sources is potentially crucial (Saravanan *et al.* 2015b), given the diverse needs of rural migrants – whether they move on a seasonal, circular,

or longer-term basis to nearby villages and towns or further afield. Social media offers a particularly compelling opportunity to facilitate interactive exchanges between rural migrants (especially young migrants) and a range of stakeholders, with the potential to provide relevant information and advice in a relatively cost-effective manner. Key considerations for RAS here include the development of an organisational policy on social media, especially enabling users to differentiate between professional and personal opinions, and the training and engagement of RAS organisations as facilitators to bring key stakeholders to the same platform (Saravanan *et al.* 2015c).

Equally, more traditional ICT tools such as radio can play a complementary role in reaching and interacting with rural migrants, particularly in combination with innovative participatory approaches in which extension professionals may play a brokering role, working in collaboration with broadcasters, rural people, representatives from local and national government, and businesses. As such, RAS programmes adapted to the needs of mobile populations might cover a range of relevant topics, integrating technical information with consideration of and advice on different community contexts (Rao 2015).

ICT and digital tools also play key roles in maintaining links between migrants and their communities of origin. This is a key consideration given the potential value of information and knowledge gleaned by migrants, including in areas such as markets, availability of and access to services and technologies, and business know-how. RAS can play constructive roles in brokering the creation of mechanisms, tools, and networks to facilitate information and knowledge sharing between rural communities and out-migrants. Training in ICTs and integrating ICTs into RAS programmes, linking with public and private providers to improve necessary infrastructure in rural areas, and facilitating networking and organisational linkages between migrant worker groups and rural institutions, all potentially have a role to play in this respect. Increased and equitable access to ICTs and the capacity to use technologies and tools, such as mobile phones, social media, web platforms, and radio, are therefore important areas for RAS to integrate into their work, through direct provision (e.g. in developing capacity) and by acting as a broker (e.g. in facilitating access) as appropriate.

Responding to the needs of specific groups of rural people

Within an overall paradigm informed by emerging mobility dynamics, retaining recognition of the key role of smallholders and small-scale agri-food actors, it will be important that approaches to expand access to, and the relevance of, RAS among rural people should be informed by an understanding of mobility patterns among heterogeneous subgroups of rural people.

With this in mind, it is relevant to note that youth are more likely to migrate than older adults (UN-Habitat 2010; World Bank 2006) – a trend that is particularly significant considering the expanding shares of young people under the age of 25 in some regions, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa⁹ and, to a lesser extent, South Asia (Filmer and Fox 2014). With factors such as lack of access to agricultural extension services and low levels of technology use in agriculture contributing to youth out-migration from rural communities (Khatir and Rezaei-Moghaddam 2014), there is a clear need for RAS to engage more closely with youth. It should not be forgotten that unemployment in states with large youth cohorts is generally held to be a driver of violence, conflict, and instability (United Nations Office for West Africa 2005; UNDP 2012), all of which exacerbates pressures leading to forced displacement – though it must be acknowledged that the empirical evidence base on this relationship is not as strong as sometimes assumed (ODI 2013). In post-conflict situations, training and employment of young people is a key strategy for promoting sustainable peace. Generally, it may be surmised that multiple factors suggest the importance of efforts to adapt RAS presentation, delivery, and content to appeal to youth. For instance, this may be done through engaging with entrepreneurship-related fora, secondary and higher education events, offering mentorship programmes, and linking with the aspirations of modern youth, in particular through facilitating wider participation of young people in the design and delivery of RAS programmes (Suttie 2018). At the same time, in some contexts, the incidence of return urban–rural migration among retirement-aged people has been observed, with many of these retirees expressing an interest in engaging in agricultural activities (Ofuoko 2012). Where this is the case, it would be sensible for RAS providers to tailor and target programmes to build relevant skills among this demographic.

In many contexts there are ever more women among those migrating (Tacoli and Mabala 2010), yet access to agricultural extension and RAS is generally skewed towards men as a result of, for example, the frequent failure to fully recognise women as RAS clients (Colverson 2015; Petrics *et al.* 2015; Ragasa *et al.* 2013). Participatory facilitation in RAS has a role to play here, emphasising key considerations around gendered responsibilities and reasons for participation and non-participation (Colverson 2015), as does the need to emphasise more flexible ICT-based modalities of RAS delivery, which are sensitive to the economic and non-economic workloads of household members, including the extent to which some of these are bound up in different forms of mobility. Equally, rural women whose male partners and family members migrate may require particular consideration, for example in managing additional workloads (FAO *et al.* 2010) and how this may interfere with their abilities both to participate in RAS sessions and to balance their economic and non-economic duties overall. Further, the

new responsibilities that many women undertake on family farms because of the absence of migrating male family members bring the need for new skills, so the need to reach women with RAS is growing. (World Bank 2015). It is also worth considering that women are recognised as playing key roles in reducing and resolving conflicts over natural resources (UNEP 2017), thus brokering rural women's involvement in relevant local organisations, and enhancing women's negotiating and management skills, can potentially play a role in controlling some of the drivers of conflict which result in displacement, from which women and children disproportionately suffer.

In general, it must be highlighted that developing tailored and context-specific approaches to providing access to RAS for young people and women in the context of transforming agri-food value chains is a key issue for the promotion of the 2030 Agenda, particularly with reference to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work), and 11 (sustainable cities and communities). Developing the capabilities of, and creating opportunities for, youth in agriculture, as well as through mobility to find decent jobs across more rural and more urban areas, emerges as a matter of the utmost importance globally, especially in countries experiencing youthful population bulges (Suttie 2018).

Influencing the development of an enabling environment for migrants

Generally low levels of understanding of the needs, realities, and challenges faced by migrant workers – both international and those migrating within their own countries – combined with often poorly informed and polarised political debates on the topic of migration, frequently inhibit the opportunities available to, and also the general living conditions of, mobile workers. In many contexts, this translates into actual barriers to mobility which, for instance, discriminate against migrants with respect to regulations and rules related to access to services, employment, housing, and social protection (Suttie and Vargas-Lundius 2016). It is important to note that these barriers tend to have an especially stark impact on women migrants, not least as they tend to suffer disproportionately from lack of access to services and infrastructure due to their gendered household duties, as well as persistent gender discrimination in labour markets (Chant 2013). Addressing this situation means increasing understanding of the role of mobility in livelihoods and in processes of sustainable development generally, including by improving the ability of data and statistical systems to capture mobility and better reflect the complex reality of how migration contributes to rural household livelihood strategies, especially in relation to topics such as employment (especially seasonal transitions therein), market access, and remittances (internal as well as international). Wider documentation and dissemination of case studies illustrating

the lives and livelihoods of mobile rural people is also needed – with civil society potentially being an important partner in this area – contributing to generating political will towards more constructive, less populist approaches to addressing mobility and its role in promoting sustainable development.

To respond to this situation, RAS may play a constructive role in facilitating the organisation of migrants into groups of people with some commonalities to ease access to services and training, and to represent their interests in political fora. To achieve the latter objective, training is needed to develop the capacities of mobile rural workers (working both in and outside of agriculture) to articulate their needs and link with institutional structures that enable their political voice to be heard – for instance, civil society organisations including informal workers' groups, women's groups and feminist organisations. Further, the unique position and knowledge of the RAS community, in terms of links to a plurality of private and public organisations combined with its unique understanding of rural people's lives – and the (increasing) role mobility is playing therein – may enable it to exert influence in advocating for policies that enable rural migrants to access available opportunities and, at the very least, remove rules and regulations that discriminate against their interests.

Recognising that migration and displacement can, in some contexts, exacerbate pressures over land and natural resources – especially in rural and urban areas receiving migrants and refugees – it can be useful to train rural people in conflict-mediation skills, as well as to work with relevant stakeholders to facilitate the development of institutions to manage the use of natural resources. Developing context-specific enabling capacities to develop resilience in the face of climate change will also be a clear priority. These areas are vitally important to help mitigate the drivers of social tension and unrest which are often precursors to conflict.

It will also always be indispensable for RAS to be able to develop and provide context-specific advice on sustainable natural resource use and management techniques broadly to respond to a reality of increasing environmental degradation and pressures, and the ways in which these can exacerbate social tension, conflict, and distress migration.

Conclusions

The reality of mobility among rural people requires more attention in rural development approaches, including in the design and provision of extension and RAS. This is a reality that is becoming more prevalent as a consequence of more dynamic rural–urban connectivity, critical demographic trends (e.g. youth

population bulges, ageing farmer populations, and urbanisation), as well as fragile situations brought about by factors such as climate change and conflict. Accordingly, the capacity of RAS to respond to these heterogeneous realities needs to be deepened and expanded.

In many contexts, patterns of mobility among rural households are increasingly more common than sedentary ones, implying a need for delivery to be adapted to this reality. In this respect, a range of ICT and digital tools are available to ensure that access to RAS is not contingent upon residence in a fixed location, enabling mobile rural people to access important information, knowledge, and materials for skills development. Specific attention is needed for groups among those that migrate, such as poor smallholders, women, and youth, whose particular needs and prospects merit attention and whose roles are increasingly important in shaping rural development in many emerging contexts. Further, the content and focus of RAS needs to integrate the range of opportunities and challenges faced by rural people, being aware that many of these are likely to still be located within food systems. Accordingly, issues such as agripreneurship, financial literacy, use of mobile and digital devices to access financial services and other information, and opportunities within non-farm industrial and service sectors – often still linked to the agri-food sector (e.g. machinery, transport, and customer services) – deserve further integration into RAS curricula.

The ambition of such an expansion in the scope of extension and RAS provider capacities brings many challenges, not least the risk of losing focus by spreading responsibilities of extension and RAS too widely. However, the increasingly complicated and dynamic environment we see in many countries across the world, in which sedentary livelihood patterns cannot be assumed and indeed movement in an increasing number of cases is the norm, dictates the imperative of integrating strategies and partnerships into extension and RAS. It will not be appropriate for RAS providers to directly take on all of these responsibilities, as the many challenges indicate the need for stronger brokerage roles and partnerships. For example, by facilitating the organisation of migrant groups to exert their influence with the plurality of public and private actors with whom they often collaborate, the RAS community might play a constructive role in enabling mobile rural populations to represent their interests in political dialogues. The more systematic formation of organisations of rural migrant groups and efforts to enhance their voice, in conjunction with dialogue with political authorities across both migrant sending and receiving areas, could potentially ease the access of mobile populations to important services and support networks, as well as enabling constructive exchanges between migrants and other actors in destination and origin communities.

The scope of the ambition and the 2030 Agenda, combined with the increased complexity, unpredictability, and dynamism within rural areas and their surroundings, underscores the need for the RAS community to reflect on how to adapt services to serve the needs of mobile rural populations and draw lessons from good practices in countries where successful approaches have been tried and tested. In particular, wider analysis and documentation of the interaction between past and existing RAS programmes and mobility patterns and outcomes would be of particular value and potentially aid in making the case for public and private investment in RAS.

As well as these overarching considerations, some issues requiring further study surround the potential role of RAS in addressing risks related to climate change and migration, preventing and responding to crises and fragile situations, strengthening food security and nutrition outcomes, and contributing to sustainable urbanisation. Understanding patterns of return migration, noting the possible tendency of international return migrants (from rural and urban origins) to settle in urban rather than rural areas is also of interest. Given the increasing incidence of and attention being afforded to mobility and migration-related topics, the impression therefore is of the need for further consideration of many important aspects of these issues and how they relate to the future of RAS, particularly in the context of the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

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Endnotes

- 1 An 'international migrant' is defined by UN-DESA Population Division (2016) as: "[A] person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth."
- 2 The United Nations definition of a 'refugee' is: "Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence." (UN-HCR 2017).
- 3 That is, migrants remaining within the border of their own country.
- 4 Estimates of the numbers of people likely to be displaced by environmental and climate-related shocks in the coming decades vary widely, but are commonly in the hundreds of millions.
- 5 With respect to the natural environment, uncertainties deriving from climate and biological processes make it difficult for farmers to predict quality and quantity of produce, while for the economic environment, low price elasticity of demand interacts with changes in supply to produce relatively high price volatility for agricultural goods.
- 6 In line with the framework of Dorward *et al.* (2009).
- 7 Especially in countries that are relatively less urbanised, such as the majority of sub-Saharan African countries, as well as those of South Asia.
- 8 The relationship between poverty and migration is complicated and not yet well understood (Mendola 2012; Wineman and Jayne 2016).
- 9 In sub-Saharan Africa, the median age is 19.5, with the youth population set to continue to increase beyond 2045. (UNDP Africa. 2017. *Africa's defining challenge*. [Online] Available from: http://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/blog/2017/8/7/africa_defining_challenge.html [Accessed 1 October, 2017].)



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