



# Decentering the 'Global': A South Asian Migration Research Agenda

LIDC Migration Leadership Team Global Migration Conversation  
Delhi, 22-23 May 2018

## Executive Summary

The Delhi event was the first of a series of Global Migration Conversations organised by the London International Development Centre Migration Leadership Team (LIDC-MLT). This team has been formed to develop a shared strategy for supporting migration and displacement related research by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The Delhi Migration Conversation brought together 30 researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, migrant and refugee associations and arts organisations working in the South Asian region to identify priority areas for migration research; pathways to impact that have been, or are likely to be, promising; and platforms for communication and collaboration that could help to bridge research, policy, practice and public engagement in the future. The key findings of the Delhi Conversation are summarised below. A full report is also available.

## Research Strengths in the South Asian Region

Rather than working in the context of a global migration agenda that is imposed from above, participants were keen to see the emergence of a new plurality in migration policy and research that accounts for differences while also seeking to share capacity and resources. We cannot synthesise all phenomena into global frameworks: there is a need to reflect plurality and think about migration as a multi-scalar phenomenon. Participants felt that moving forwards, international migration research should aim, wherever possible, to 'decentre the locus of knowledge production towards the margins'. In a context dominated by the Western imaginary of migration, arts-based research collaborations from South Asia have the power to disrupt established narratives and destabilise norms about migration. Strengths of migration research in the South Asian region that were highlighted during the event included:

- Sophisticated theoretical postcolonial perspectives and historical knowledge and experience
- New theories of forced versus voluntary displacement including in relation to IDPs
- Participatory methods and action learning
- Experience in building successful and sustainable partnerships in response to the needs of affected communities and with NGOs and the private sector
- Teaching and research networks with scholars in the region and with scholars in Africa and Latin America
- Rapid response research in the context of disasters
- Rich artistic heritage and resources and a popular memory and culture of migration





### Thematic Research Priorities in the South Asian Region

Decentering the global migration agenda requires identifying and addressing a range of new thematic priorities for the South Asian region. Some of the those identified were:

- South-to-South migration
- Understanding the relationship between development and displacement
- Statistical data gaps on immigration, emigration and displacement
- Demography and mapping internal, regional and international labour migration
- Technology, participation and new creative research methods
- Public attitudes to migration e.g. race and 'othering' and understanding how Global South discourses around migration and displacement differ from those in the North
- Minorities, gender and generation (young and elderly)
- Psycho-social impacts and mental health impacts on communities of origin and return migration

### Research Funding, Collaboration and Partnerships in the South Asian Region

Participants were of the view that research should be mindful of policy, and speak to, it but it is also imperative to create funding spaces for independent and theoretical research. Strict funding criteria often prevent researchers from embarking on their primary goal of thinking and 'disrupting' what we think we know. Researchers must also remember the importance of disseminating their findings to the community through education. This is especially necessary as migration becomes more of a political issue, globally and in the region. Participants stressed the need to address the politics of funding. Funders of migration research and policy makers should move beyond the idea of capacity building as a North-to-South phenomenon and recognise the myriad ways in which Northern scholarship and Southern migration scholarship can learn from South Asia's rich history of migration and its related documentation. It is, said one participant, about 'capacity mapping, not capacity building'. A postcolonial, historical lens is key to developing new conceptual tools which can do justice to the principle of simultaneity without reducing the complexity of global and regional migration flows to a Western-centric, monolithic idea. Participants' priorities to enhance migration research in the South Asian region included the following:

- Addressing power imbalances in collaborative research
- More investment in archiving and access to data/data sharing across regions
- More egalitarian and more-long term resources collaboration between institutions (both among institutions in the Global South and in relation to those in the Global North).
- More resources to assist in the translation of work from regional languages into English to help it reach an international audience
- Opportunities for academic mobility
- New career opportunities for scholars in the Southern region
- More funding for high quality interregional work
- Building multi-sited research and teams involving different disciplines across source and destination countries