



## International Labour Out-Migration in Mzimba District, Malawi: Why Persistent?

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**Abstract:** This article delves to provide an analysis of the consequences of international labour migration on households in Mzimba district in Malawi. Mzimba district in the Republic of Malawi is one of the persistent senders of labour migrants to Republic of South Africa. This article is based on the study that sought to examine the socio-economic impacts of labour migration on families in Mzimba district in terms of education, health, labour supply, intra family roles, norms, decision making and others. 8 villages with highest number of out migrants out of 27 villages in Mzimba district were studied. 50 respondents of households with a migrant member were randomly selected as a sample for the study. Another random sample of 20 respondents from households without migrants was selected to serve as a control group. The field data were obtained through the use of in-depth interviews, observation and focus group discussions. Secondary data were obtained mainly through library research.

The study reveals that overall, households that have migrant relatives in South Africa have experienced a change in their welfare ranging from positive change in socio-economic household conditions and or positive change in their social relations and family relations. Negative consequences of labour migration on the remaining households included loneliness especially for the spouse left at home, psycho-social problems especially children due to the absence of the fathers and low esteem that females feel when their husbands are absent to the extent of not being involved fully in familial matters. On the part of the migrant themselves, they live in untenable working conditions, often illegally and in most circumstances very unwelcome in the host country.

**Keywords:** International labour migration, migrants, remittances, household dynamics

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration of both skilled and unskilled labour has been one of the survival strategies of many youths in Africa. The types of migrations have been both intra national as well as international.

In Malawi, large scale migrations to South Africa are still common to-date, more than 50 years after independence. The districts in Malawi that produce many out migrants especially to the Republic of South Africa are Mzimba, Nkhata Bay and Mangochi. Many of the out migrants from these districts are those who are uneducated and unskilled seeking to find any kind of employment apart from the agricultural sector. It has been established that most migration that involves people with low skills is highly connected to poverty reduction. Much of the remittances derived from migrants with low skills are normally sent to their families compared to highly skilled migrants whose remittances back home are minimal. This is because migration of unskilled migrants is short term and temporary and basically involving leaving behind close families (Chirwa, 1996).

Labour migration from Malawi to the Republic of South Africa has been exacerbated by many things such as lack of employment opportunities, low income, poor working conditions coupled with big differences in wages between the South Africa and Malawi (Coleman, 1972). Historically, the out-migration was sanctioned by the Government of Malawi through a memorandum called a Treaty of International Mine Labour that was signed in 1967 between Malawi and South African governments. This treaty initially increased the number of people travelling to South Africa by 300%. Ten years later, in 1977, the out-migration from Malawi to South Africa was halted by the Malawian government following the crash of plane carrying Malawians to work in South African mines

(Chandoka, 2007). Despite the curtailing of government sanctioned labour migration, unsanctioned migration is still going on apparently because many Malawians have networks that were created by those who went earlier to South Africa and are still living there.

Labour migration can be grouped into three types depending on what motivates the out migrants to move. Thus we have voluntary migration, enforced migration and distress migration (Damon, 2010). Forced migration in most circumstances is decided by external forces, for instance politics or war, while distress migration is basically caused by either deprivation, deficiency or livelihood shocks for instance crop failure, famine and drought among other reasons. On the other hand, voluntary migration is a result of a migrant's or family's decision making for purposes of marriage, business, employment or education (Damon, 2010). Labour migration in Mzimba falls under voluntary migration as most people struggle to reconcile deficiencies in wealth, social status, personal security, and poverty. Due to the high rate of unemployment, low education levels, income inequalities, globalisation, differentiation, time-space compression just to mention a few, a good number of male Malawians migrate to South Africa often times illegally in search of jobs. Research has shown that, when migrants get employed, they stay abroad for many years, without going back home. This physical separation often makes the remaining family; especially wives to experience hardships as they struggle to care for households and their children. The absence from home of those who migrated impacts the remaining family economically, socially and emotionally. This paper, utilising data obtained from Mzimba District in Malawi, reveals the impacts that international labour migrations has on the households producing the migrants.

### 1.1. Contesting Empirical Arguments on Labour Migration

Many scholars attest that labour migration in the long run can reduce unemployment in the migrant producing countries either directly through the departure of workers or through various indirect mechanisms such as migrants leaving open spots for the unemployed or those employees in lower jobs to fill in (Cornelius et al., 2006; Gaude, 2010). It is further stated that the living circumstances of the family left behind usually improves and many gain better access to better goods, services, improved health and education (Gaude, 2010).

Labour migration empowers women in the sense that women left behind are more likely to be employed in unpaid family work and subsistence work for the sake of supporting the family members (Lokshin and Glinkaya, 2009). Furthermore, they might engage in activities such as agriculture both for consumption and commercial purposes. This was observed in China, where labour migration leads to a decrease in wage and family work but significantly increase in agricultural work by women (Mu and Van de Walle, 2011). Labour migration does not only contribute to the empowerment of women in terms of production, but also contributes to an improvement in power relations at family level. Since migration usually involves the temporary departure of an adult male who is in most cases the head of the household, labour migration bestows upon the women the responsibility as the head of the house and hence start making important decisions so as to maintain their households (Lopez et al., 2010) although this empowerment has been questioned by others if it is sustainable (Castles and Miller, 2003) that is does the empowerment continue even when the migrant comes back or the responsibility goes back to the men once they return back. This empowerment has been found in some cases, to be temporal as it is reduced or even reversed when the male migrant comes back to the extent that some of the decisions that were taken by the temporary female head of household may be reversed (Emilo, 2007).

Another contending argument is that there are negative aspects that are associated with labour migration to the household of the migrant as separation of family members in most times affects not only individuals alone but the family unit overall (Orrozo, 1992). The reality of labour migration is that those who are left behind are often impacted negatively by the absence of the migrant member of the family. When it comes to child protection, labour migrants often are forced to leave their children behind owing to either restrictive policies regarding dependants coming along in a host country, or sometimes the employment they get does not provide possibilities of bringing their family. Such scenarios force the parents to leave their children to be cared for by their relatives. The separation of children from their parents takes a hard toll on them as they start manifesting some psycho-social problems such as sadness, rejection, anger, abandonment, significant behavioural change and feelings of loss (Damon, 2010).

On the other hand, labour migration also has serious consequences on production (Boyle, 1998) especially since most of the developing countries depend on agricultural production both in absolute and relative terms as men leave the rural areas. Labour migration takes away the young males who could develop their communities by investing their labour in farms. Furthermore, families are often robbed of heads of households who have full responsibilities of social and economic welfares of their families hence disrupting family cohesiveness. These consequences have enhanced poverty at the household and community levels indirectly resulting in under development at national level (Campbell, 2001). This trend invokes the classical economic reality that as labour becomes scarce, there is a high possibility that wages may rise. This scenario happened in Mozambique and Malawi, where wages for labour estates rose when many men from these countries migrated to South African to work in mines (Robin, 1999).

Labour migration may adversely affect those who migrate to foreign countries. Many migrant workers, especially those with low skills, face working conditions that are exploitative and do not enjoy many human or labour rights (Damon, 2010). When it comes to women migrating without their spouses or companions, they often face problems when it comes to protection (Florida, 2005).

### **1.2. An Overview of Labour Migration in Southern Africa**

Southern Africa countries have a long history of structured and informal labour migration. Since 19<sup>th</sup> century, South Africa and has always been the key country receiving migrants from other Southern African countries like Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho and Mozambique. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, labour migration was one of the most imperative factor that brought together the various colonies and countries of southern Africa into a single regional labour market (Stampini, 2009). The major production sectors that contributed to drawing a lot of migrants from these key countries were commercial agriculture and more importantly mining in South Africa. As such, migrants from the said Southern African countries have played a major important role in improving the production of the host countries particularly the Republic of South Africa (Stampini, 2009).

Labour migration in Southern Africa can be explained from two different perspectives (Murdock, 2009). First, from the micro-level where the migrants make rational choices to find employment outside their countries of origin, and secondly at a macro level where people are involuntarily forced to find work and receive cash wage due to rampant unemployment in their own countries. A thorough analysis of labour migration in Southern Africa can be traced to the British colonial rule. Imposition of head taxes in its colonies forced many people to look for employment elsewhere so as to meet this obligation (Ricca, 2011). For example, in Mozambique, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century unemployment levels were so high such that the only option that most people had was to migrate to neighbouring countries in order to escape the harsh life realities and poor working conditions (Arthur, 1991).

Nevertheless, in the last two decades, labour migration in Southern Africa has undergone major reformation. These changes have been brought about by better inter regional mobility within the region. The major factor contributing to this was the end of the apartheid system in South Africa that used to constrain the movement of many black people, specifically excluding those who are non South Africans. Now people are able travel more freely to South Africa and back (Coleman, 1996). Furthermore, the inclusion of South Africa in regional blocs such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) improved and increased the migration of people (Coleman, 1996).

The other major driver of migration to South Africa is the prestigious connection the country has with the global economy. This has opened up various opportunities that migrants expect to tap on. On another note, the growing unemployment and increasing trends in rural and urban poverty in most of southern African countries have been a pushing factor for many people to move out of their countries in search of better livelihoods (IOM, 2002).

### **1.3. Migration Patterns in Malawi**

Most of Malawi's labour migration trends could be easily explained and understood in the context of the underlying socio-economic rationalities prevailing in the country. High levels of rural-urban migration within the country and labour migration to Southern Africa countries have in the long run defined migration patterns in Malawi. According to the current Development Index, Malawi is a Least Developed Country (LDC), the economy is heavily dependent on primary commodities thus agriculture is paramount in the country's economy. Skilled people in Malawi have internally migrated

to the urban areas and few have migrated to other Southern African countries especially South Africa in search of better economic opportunities. As such, labour migration seem to offer a pathway for people to escape poverty as migrants try and find better job opportunities elsewhere.

According 2008 Malawian Population Census, the country has had by then an approximately over 13 million people, with the population almost equally divided into 6.7 million female and 6.3 million male. Most recent statistics indicates that Malawian population is 17, 474,544 million people by January 2016 (MDGs Report, 2016). With large population being youths at 52.2% and other young ages at 45.1%, this age structure gives an indication that the country will continue to experience high population growth for many years to come. In this scenario, if this young age group does not find any appropriate employment or livelihood opportunities within the country, then trends in migration to urban areas and to other more attractive international destinations will continue to increase as is the case for the three major labour exporting districts in Malawi: Mzimba, Mangochi and Nkhata Bay.

Generally, Malawi's Northern region and Mzimba district specifically, have for a long time been perceived as conventional labour reserve areas. Out migration from Mzimba dates back to 1990s when the two dominant migrating ethnic groups, the Tonga and the Tumbuka, started out migrating in search of employment. Migration of these two ethnic groups was by a great extent enhanced by the British colonial government that allowed people's movements to South African gold mines to work so as to pay for the imposed head taxes. Thus taxation and the process of labour recruitment instigated the prevalent movement of people from Mzimba district to South Africa (McCracken, 2008).

Labour migration has been a continuous process due to its perceived benefits for both the sending and the receiving countries (Jansen, 2010). For Mzimba district, out migration has somehow positively contributed to offset the effects of unemployment but it has also to a great extent provided some form of economic emancipation through the creation of small businesses, monetary remittances and also the transfer of knowledge from the recipient countries (Davies, 2010), on the other side of the spectrum, for the receiving country, the in migration has their labour scarcity problem propped up and on a positive note, reducing labour shortages. This article delved to establish if the benefits accruing from out migration have trickled down to migrants' households.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This article utilized data obtained from Mzimba district, in Northern Malawi. In determining the sample, it was important to include the administrative units at community level that have high number of out migrants. Systematic sampling was used to obtain two sets of household respondents from each village of the eight villages that fit the categorization above. One set was from households that have had or have a migrant family member and another set was for households that have no migrant family member. A detailed list of out migrants was obtained from the district offices based on the 2008 Malawian population and household census. Respondents were randomly selected from the list obtained from the district offices as well as the list obtained from health centres that keep records of families of out migrants.

A total of 8 villages with highest number of out migrants out of 27 villages in Mzimba district were chosen and migrant families identified. A sample size of 50 respondents representing 15% of the out migrant population were randomly selected from the list obtained from the district council's office and the health centres. Another sample of 20 respondents from households without migrants was randomly selected from the study villages to serve as a control. Since this study was essentially qualitative in nature, primary data were obtained through the use participatory rural appraisals such as in-depth interviews, observation and focus group discussions. Supporting secondary information was obtained mainly through library research,

## 3. FINDINGS

The findings based on the data obtained from Mzimba district are presented along the following thematic areas: the socio-demographics of the migrants' households, the reasons propelling the migrants to move, remittances and investments patterns of the out migrants' households as well as occupations of the other households members. Where necessary, these were compared with control households that had no migrants.

### 3.1. Social Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The majority of the migrant households in all eight villages surveyed consisted of 80% women while 20% were male. Thus the main labour out-migrants from Mzimba district are males. Even the few

males that were found at the households were either elders or those from the control group. Men are the most mobile and leave their spouses behind and only under few circumstances would the women migrate and normally when requested by their husbands to join them in the receiving country. On another note, sisters could be requested by their brothers to join them in the receiving country so as to optimise the wage money to be remitted home. This was confirmed during one female focus group discussion that:

*“Usually we allow men to go and provide for us women and we have to look after the children back home. If we both go, who is going to look after the children? And in some cases we have to take care of the husbands’ parents who also need to enjoy the benefits of their children’s toil when they remit some money home”*

On why a household can have both a male and female children out migrating, one elderly respondent intimated that:

*“when my son migrated, he found it hard to look after my big family, he managed to secure a job for his sister and thus sent transport money for her to join him. This is however very rare to happen. As we are talking, they are both in that country”*

### 3.2. Age of Respondents

Most respondents were within the age range of 21-30 (28.6%) and 31-40 (24%) (Table 1). Thus almost half of the respondents were in their most productive age group. Furthermore, it was noted that most of the female respondents were either newly married or have been in marriage for a year or two before the husband travelled to South Africa. Most young men find it easy to leave the country in search of employment or business opportunities in South Africa and many other Southern African countries because culturally it is expected that the man has to fend for his family.

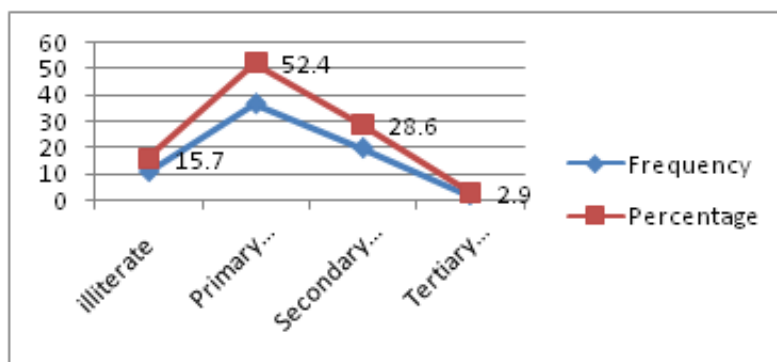
**Table1.** Age of Respondents

N= 70

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 20	12	17.1%
21-30	20	28.6%
31-40	17	24.3%
41-50	7	10.0%
51-60	6	8.6%
61 and above	8	11.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Educationally, the majority of the respondents (52.4%) had attended primary education (nevertheless, almost all of them indicated they had not completed all levels of primary education), and even those who indicated that they had secondary level education (28.6%), most of them had only attained junior high school (Form 1 and Form 2). Only two individuals were found to have attained some tertiary education representing 2.9% of the sample, where one had a bachelor degree in education and another one with a certificate in teaching (Figure 1).



**Figure1.** Education level

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Despite the fact that the majority of the respondents had attained some education, a reasonable percentage of (15.7%) were illiterate. What can be deduced from the education attainment of the respondents is that most people in the sampled areas do not consider education a priority. This fact is collaborated with the apathy that the respondents have towards education as they don't even bother to follow up on what their children learn at school. Upon inquiring about the performance of their children in school, most respondents were indifferent. One of the female respondents had this to say:

*“Most of the times our children do not tell us how they are fairing in school. When we inquire on what they learn at school, some of them tell us that what they learn nowadays and the style of pedagogy being used is different from what we the elders went through so even if they tell us what transpire at school , we the elders cannot comprehend!*

**3.3. Main occupation of the respondents from the surveyed households**

Majority members of the surveyed households (54%) were unemployed and don't engage in any substantial work for gain. As such they rely on remittances that are sent home from time to time by the emigrants (Table 2). The second largest population of the respondents were those involved in domestic farming to support the households.

**Table2. Main occupation of the respondents from left behind households**

N=50

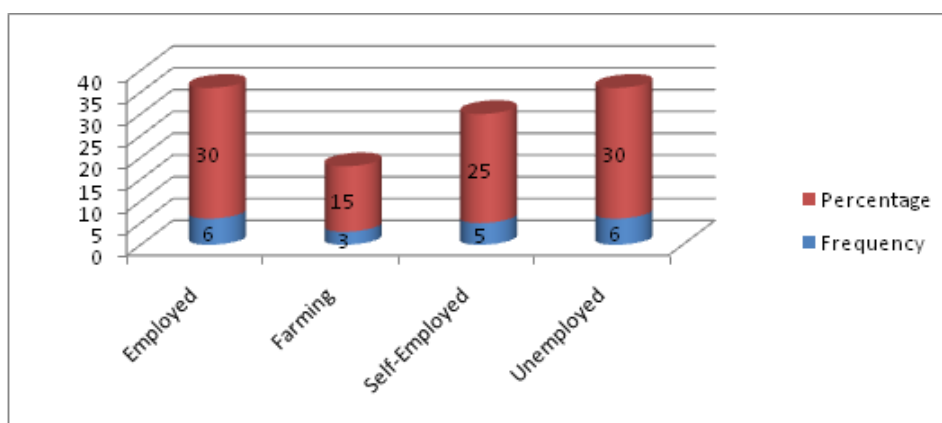
Main Occupation	Frequency	Percentage ( %)
Employed	4	8
Farming	15	30
Self-employed/business	4	8
Unemployed	27	54

Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2016

This finding was collaborated with data from Mzimba district profile that most families are involved in subsistence farming (ILO/Ministry of Labour, 2011). A small number of people (8%) were employed as casual labourers and as house maids for well to do households especially those that that have educated children that are employed in the cities or conducting businesses in the city. And for those that were self employed, most of them were basically low skilled labourers like carpenters or bricklayers.

**3.4. Main occupation of the respondents from the control group**

This group of respondents produced very interesting results contrary to the authors' expectations. Many people in this group (30%) were employed although the jobs were not blue collar as most of the respondents were working either as house girls, messengers or in timber companies. Almost equal percentage was unemployed (30%) and just staying at their homes. Very few (8%) were self employed. What can be deduced from these data of control group is that people from the households that don't have a migrant member seem to be more entrepreneurial as quite a substantial number of people (25%) were self employed and were conducting businesses.



**Figure2. Main occupation of the control group**

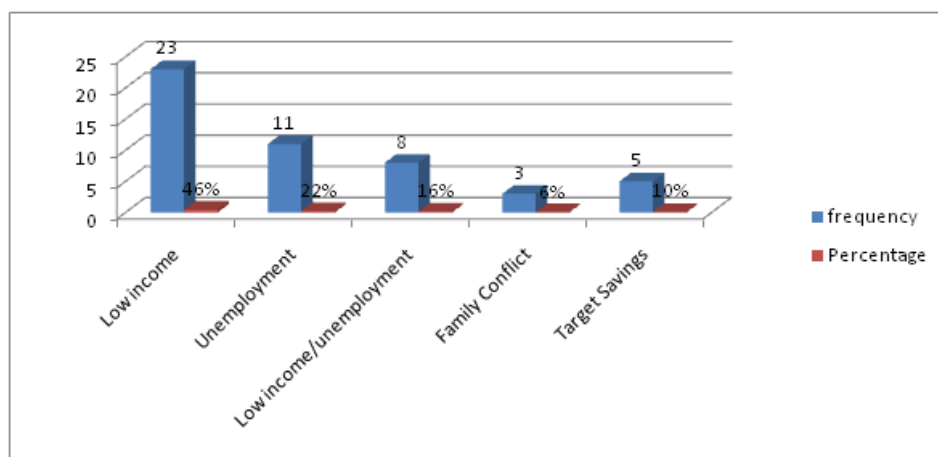
Source: Compiled by the researcher, 2016

### 3.5. Factors influencing out migration

The responses regarding the factors that influence people to migrate were varied. Many people cited low income (46%) as the major reason that instigates people to migrate to South Africa (fig. 3). Another major factor was unemployment (22%) where this was purported to mean work other than agriculture) and poor socio-economic status of the family. Others moved to South Africa so as to work and attain a certain level of savings (10%) for establishing businesses when they return back home. On the other side of the continuum, very few people were forced to migrate due to family conflicts (6%).

It can be argued that it is due to economic insecurities that people were compelled to migrate. This is a classical evidence ascertaining that poor economic conditions in many countries is a big trigger for labour migration from economically poor countries to relatively richer countries. The following excerpt from female respondents in a focus group discussion support the above:

*“With the type of farming that we have, it is very difficult to harvest enough to feed the entire family and as such my husband decided to go to South Africa to look for employment so that the little he shall be sending from there can support us here. So far it is working.”*



**Figure3.** Factors influencing migration to South Africa

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

Majority of the labour migrants leave their spouses and children at home. It was established that many of those who migrated to South Africa were married (78%) as opposed to only 22% who were not married (Table 3 below).

**Table3.** Marital Status of Emigrants

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	39	78
Unmarried	11	22

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

As such, it was family responsibilities and the quest to meet familial obligations that were the major pushing factors for migration as they were looking for ways to fend for their families. One elderly lady said that:

*“I asked my son how he was going to look after his wife if he had no formal employment and without any income to buy farm inputs such as fertilizer. I told him that it would be embarrassing if he failed to look after his wife and kids when most of his friends were in South Africa and looking after their families.”*

It would then become evident that many of those migrating were peasant farmers (70%), or if not, then they were daily wage casual labourers (10%) whose incomes were meagre or were outright jobless. The lucky few (6%) had the chance to work in the private sector such as timber lumbering because Mzimba district has one of the biggest forest reserve called Chikangawa. A smaller population was self employed (4%) (Table 4).

**Table4.** *Migrants occupations before migration*

<b>Profession</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Farming	35	70
Self employed	2	4
Government service	0	0
Private Sector	3	6
Daily wage labour	5	10
Jobless	5	10
Student	0	0

*Source: Compiled from field data, 2016*

None of the migrants had any formal employment either nor were they students.

**3.6. Establishing Economy of Migrants’ Households**

It is normally difficult to establish the economy of a rural household especially an annual income though this may be one of the important indicators of family’s socio-economic status. An attempt was made however to deduce the annual income by establishing the household expenditure and adding to the household monthly consumption of maize (because this is major staple for most of the households) to come up with a rough estimate of the households monthly income. This was then rounded this up to reflect an annual income of the households. An overwhelming majority of the households (44%) were found to belong to the income category of up to MK. 50,000 followed by 32% households that were in the income bracket of MK 50,001 - MK100,000 and 24% households being in the bracket of MK 101,001 - MK150,000 (Table 5). These findings supported the earlier assertion that the economy of the households in Mzima is not good as stated in earlier observations thus concluding this to be a major factor that prompted many people to migrate from Mzimba to other countries especially to South Africa.

**Table5.** *Household income before migration of household member*

<b>Annual income MK</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Up to 50,000	12	24
50,001- 100,000	16	44
100,001- 150,000	22	32

*Source: Compiled from field data, 2016*

On the other hand, ownership of property in a society defines the social status of a household in a community. Possessing a residential house shows how a family is well off especially in rural settings. A significant percentage of the respondents (64%) did not own a residential house to such an extent that even those who were in matrimony were still living with their parents. As for other types of wealth, a small number (8%) of households had plots for farming whereas 6% of the households owned businesses.

**Table6.** *Ownership of property before migration*

<b>Ownership of property</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Residential property	11	22
Commercial Property	4	8
Business	3	6
Nothing	32	64

*Source: Compiled from field data, 2016*

To further exemplify the above, one of the respondents had this to say on the issue of owning property:

*“We usually admire most of our friends whose husbands have gone to South Africa and after a while we see that they have built either their personal houses or houses for rent in their villages and as such we also encourage our husbands to do the same. After all who would want to remain behind? If there is chance, let him use it. And if he is intelligent enough, well, we all see the results.”*

We delved to find out what kind of wage labour that the migrants were doing abroad by inquiring from their relatives at the households. Although this can be argued to be questionable in obtaining the



correct information, but we believe that the migrants would be open to their kin and kith, though in some instances the migrants would tell their families not to reveal what they are doing abroad for fear of drawing more migrants and hence jeopardising their jobs. One of the respondents has this to say:

*“My son told me that when people ask I should say he is doing the daily manual labour work but he assured me that he is doing well. At least I can see from what he sends and the support he gives to his brothers.”*

Nevertheless, information from many of the relatives reveals that most of the migrants (32%) are casual labourers, 18% were seasonal workers 24% were permanent workers while the rest of the respondents (26%) had no idea of what kind of job their kin were doing abroad (Table 7).

**Table7.** *Types of migrants’ Job abroad*

<b>Migrants job abroad</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Daily labourer	16	32
Seasonal Worker	9	18
Permanent Worker	12	24
No idea	13	26

*Source: Compiled from field data, 2016*

### **3.7. Effects of Overseas Earnings**

For the impact of migration to be felt at household level, it is important to establish the extent of earnings that a household receive from their relatives who had migrated. This would be more informative if the earnings of the migrants abroad were known. Knowing the migrants earnings were somehow shrouded in secrecy as one of the male respondent said:

*“It is difficult for us to ask, it’s as if we are being strict or we want to find out how they spend the money where they work. That is hard because we are also mindful of the differences in currencies so we only understand and accept what they indicate to us.”*

In order to find out the impact of the migration on families that remain behind, one has to have some estimates of the earnings of the migrants. It is difficult to draw conclusions here but this would only give one an indication of the situation. Not all families were sure of the earnings of their family members and they indicated that this was based on what they told them.

Looking at Table 8, many respondents (56%) had no idea how much their relative migrant was getting, while 44% of the respondents revealed that they know how much their relative migrants were earning. Furthermore, almost equal households were receiving remittances monthly and bimonthly though the amount varied from time to time. A smaller number of households (18%) were receiving remittances only when the migrant visits home. The general finding here is that the level of migrants remitting money to households back home is low. The modalities used in the remittances is varied however many of the migrants (56%) were using courier services in form of drivers and other transporters that travel to and fro Malawi every day. None of the migrants were using bank wire transfer in remittances transaction while a small number of migrants (16%) would use post office in sending remittances and 28% of the migrants would use fellow returnee migrants to remit home their money.

**Table8.** *The modality used send remittances*

<b>Process of remitting</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Bank	0	0%
Returned Migrants	14	28%
Post Office	8	16%
Transporters	28	56%

*Source: Compiled from field data, 2016*

The modern ways of remitting money are not practised due to among others, low level of education of the family members that militate against them to take aboard modern technologies to the extent that they are not aware of how the banks and other service providers operate. Furthermore, many of the

households are in rural areas, far away from towns where they could easily access the banking services or access to any other money transacting institution.

For most households in the study area, the remittances received are used to modify their homes by buying household assets to replenish those that were sold when the migrant was raising transport money or by buying new assets that the households did not have before. Others used the remittances received to settle loans that the migrant took when going abroad, or any loan that the household may have taken to offset family obligations especially when the migrant had not sent the remittances in time. Nevertheless, as stated elsewhere, many households (40%) were using the received remittances for construction of houses and this was found to be true as most of the households that have a migrant in South Africa had houses made of cement bricks.

**Table9.** *Uses of remittances*

Uses of remittances	Frequency	Percentage
Home development	18	36%
Pay off loans	12	24%
Marriage rights	0	0%
Construction of a house	20	40%

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

### 3.8. Contribution of labour migration to development in Mzimba District

The migration of people from Mzimba district to South Africa seems to have had a positive effect on the general welfare of the people in the study area. Many respondents (44%) were of the opinion that the change was not only in improved housing but also a much better lifestyle. Other respondents claim that due to their relatively better living standards compared to others, the society has started recognising their position in the society and accorded them leadership roles as one lady intimated:

*“Before my husband travelled to South Africa, I would not be invited for village development meetings and sometimes during meetings they could not ask me to say anything. But after my husband went and started sending me household items and after we built a new house, many people come to me for advice and I am involved in many development meetings in the village. In fact, I am a committee member of two project committees.”*

Since primary school education is offered freely by the central government, only those who had children in secondary school could indicate if migration of people has had any effect on education. The families that had secondary school children showed improvements in education levels. 20% of the respondents indicated improved housing and this was duly visible to the researcher (improvement in this case was taken to mean a brick house and or roofed with iron sheets) (Figure 4).



**Figure4.** *Labour migration contribution to development*

Source: Compiled from the field data, 2016

Furthermore, more probing revealed that some of the households were receiving remittances were able to establish some businesses and others were able to join village savings and loans societies, a thing which they were not be able do before.

Though the families in Mzimba reported a relative socio-economic benefits from migration as manifested physically through the improvements in the household and lifestyle, on the other hand, negative aspects were reported as well. Since many of the migrants (30%) were married people and often with children, more often than not, the wives were unable to properly instil discipline to the young people hence the cropping up of inappropriate behaviours for the young members of the households simply because the disciplinarians who are mainly the men are absent from home. Other adverse effect of male migration was loneliness experienced by the remaining spouse and personal insecurities due to the absence of the male head of the family. One lady aptly put it that:

*Most of the times I am not invited to family or clan meetings since my husband is away. Sometimes family decisions are revealed to me through my husband over the phone. It makes me very sad as I am not consulted although I am very close to them than my husband who is far away."*

**Table10.** Problems caused by absence of migrants

Problems because of absence of migrant	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of parental control	14	28%
Misbehaviour	15	30%
School dropout	7	14%
Personal insecurities	8	16%
Loneliness	6	12%

Source: Compiled from field data, 2016

On the very extreme, an insignificant number of respondents saw reported neither advantages nor disadvantages of migration. These families were not bothered in any way by the absence of the migrant as it didn't affect the family set up. These people maintain that there was no change in their lifestyle or in the education of their children or in any area of socio-economic development. Further there was no change of cultural values due to the departure of the family member. A close scrutiny of these households would reveal that their relative migrant were not remitting monies back home.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Despite the availability of fertile soils and ample land for farming in Mzimba district, labour migration rates keep rising as many people continue to leave for South Africa seeking employment or better paying jobs. This article using data obtained from Mzimba district attempted to show the impacts of labour migration on the households in the district. This paper has revealed that to a great extent, labour migration has had significant impacts on the development of households in Mzimba district.

It has been established that remittances contribute to albeit in a small way, to the expansion of demand in the domestic economy. It is generally acknowledged that the use of remittances is dominated by expenditure on land, housing, basic staples and other consumables, but in Mzimba district, the remittances were used to buy household assets, agricultural inputs and machinery, paying for secondary education and other social or religious obligations. Furthermore, remittances are also commonly used to settle loans incurred especially for monies borrowed to finance the cost of migration.

What can be deduced from this article is that investment in Mzimba district can be seen in the form of their consumption expenditure. As earlier noted, most achievements that the migrant families have realised are at a basic level for instance, improved housing, improved diets and better clothing. These aspects put together have a higher probability of increasing the future productivity of the households. Furthermore, the propensity of families to build better housing due to remittances present an opportunity to rent the houses if things get tough hence a chance of establishing a regular cash flow for the family.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, recommendations at three levels are proposed. First, the Republic of Malawi government should integrate the issue of labour migration in its development policies instead of condemning the practice of labour migration by the young people. The government should seek to empower the young growing population in the country by opening up more economic opportunities

through establishment of medium and small enterprises that will provide employment to ever increasing job seekers. To go hand in hand with this, the government of Malawi should endeavour to hasten the provision of different vocational skills to its young people so that they can have a trade to employ themselves. This is a clarion call for the government of Malawi to establish many vocational training schools in order to train people in different skills. In doing this, the priority should be accorded to districts that had been traditional senders of labour migrants like Mzimba, Mangochi and Nkhata Bay. On another note, the government of Malawi should consider establishing short-term legal channels for people interested in temporary migration to destinations where there is high demand for labour. This would not only ensure that the government know the number of its people outside its borders, but it will likely enhance the benefits of labour migration.

Other stakeholders in the rural areas like Mzimba for example, the Non Governmental Organisations should seek to empower members of households that are left behind. This can be done by establishing and facilitating different development programs such as starting self-run businesses, establishing revolving funds that could offer some small loans to people to start businesses. For those families that are in dire need, the Non Governmental Organisations could start food for work programs to help them. Furthermore, the Non Governmental Organisations can also advocate to the government to develop a social protection policy to cater for both the migrants and the family members who are left behind. If this is done, it would increase the migrants' responsibilities towards the families left behind. NGOs can do this by hosting awareness campaigns so as to inform people of the benefits of a social security policy.

There is a need to change the mindset of the rural people especially those from traditionally migrant sending districts such as Mzimba district. The dynamics of labour migration have greatly changed now such that not only positive impacts can accrue from these dynamics but negative impacts as well. It on this note that, it is recommended that the families that are left behind should not solely depend on the remittances for their sustenance as anything can happen to the migrant that can jeopardise the wellbeing of the families hence the need for having social security policies as proposed above. Members of the families should organise themselves in like groups (same age, gender etc) and start revolving funds such as Village Saving Loans (VSL) groups where they can be helping one another financially (especially those that receive remittances frequently) to start up small businesses so as to be self sustaining.

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**Citation:** Elliott P. Niboye. *International Labour Out-Migration in Mzimba District, Malawi: Why Persistent?*. *International Journal of Research in Geography*. vol 4, no. 2, 2018, pp. 9-21. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2454-8685.0402002>.

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