



Language, Informal Networks and Social Protection

Evidence from a Sample of Migrants in Cape Town, South Africa

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ABSTRACT Rural–urban migration is a major phenomenon in the developing world. This article is concerned with understanding the ways in which rural–urban migrants have their social protection needs met following their move to the city. We report results from a survey of rural–urban migrants in four low-income areas in Cape Town, South Africa. We look at the experiences of migrants in terms of finding employment in the urban environment, and the impact of language background and proficiency on migrants’ ability to integrate in the labour market, and their access to formal and informal protection and government support. Language proficiency and social networks emerge as important variables in the analysis and will need to be considered in the design of social policies. Specifically, inadequate knowledge of dominant urban languages (English and Afrikaans) limits opportunities for employment and access to public services. Furthermore, reliance on informal, strong-tie social networks facilitates initial migration and settlement, but can delay long-term integration into the urban economy and labour market.

KEYWORDS *informal networks, language and labour, rural–urban migration, social protection, South Africa*

Introduction

Rural–urban migration is a major phenomenon in the developing world, and it is estimated that urban populations will surpass rural populations in these areas in the next 10 to 15 years (Garau et al., 2005: 11). The rapid urbanization currently observed in Africa, Asia and Latin America (with urban

growth rates of around 4% annually), poses serious challenges for social policies at the local and the global level (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2000). The rural sector in developing countries is characterized by marginal subsistence agriculture, surplus labour, poverty and few opportunities to engage in the modern economy. As rural dwellers become aware of the possibility of contributing to household survival and greater material wealth and independence through employment in urban areas, many take the option to migrate in pursuit of these opportunities. The result is rapid urbanization, and the emergence of urban slums with all their associated problems, including lack of formal employment opportunities, the growth of highly localized and generally unregulated informal economies, poor quality housing, limited access to services, and lack of personal safety (see Falola and Salm, 2004).

This article examines the ways in which rural–urban migrants integrate into the urban environment, in particular into the urban labour market, and the informal and formal means by which they obtain social protection. Migrants are among the most vulnerable members of society, particularly in developing countries. They have been dislocated from emotional support structures and traditional safety nets provided by family and community networks in the area of origin, and have been placed in an urban environment where the social and economic systems operate quite differently to those they are more familiar with.¹ They often have little experience of how or where to go about finding employment or accessing services, and they typically live in societies where there are very few government services or formal social protection structures (such as unemployment insurance or workers' compensation).

Systems of social protection assist people in addressing economic and social risks, and can help them in developing their opportunities and capabilities in society. They can be characterized by different degrees of formality, ranging from informal systems based on membership in social communities (family, kinship, neighbourhood, etc.) to private-sector insurance services and government social security (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). In developed countries, the vulnerable in society tend to be more dependent on formal social support and protection mechanisms. In developing countries, where government budgets are not as large and the vulnerable are great in number and in magnitude of need, the poor are often not reached by government social security. In consequence, the poor in the developing world rely much more strongly on informal support structures, including both kinship-based systems and non-kinship based systems, such as community-based credit and savings schemes. Sen (1980: 31), for example identified 'enhanced dependence on the [informal] exchange system for one's survival' as a typical phenomenon of developing economies (see also Benda-Beckmann et al., 1997; Olivier and Mpedi, 2003; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Although the South African government has instituted various types of social grants and public transfers since 1994 to ensure that the basic needs of its

citizens are met,² delivery of these grants is complicated by institutional failures at local government level and the system does not provide support to all potentially vulnerable groups (Parnell, 2004). The Taylor committee on social security reform in South Africa reported, for example, in 2002 that 75% of children did not receive the child support grant and that child-headed households (which are on the increase in South Africa as a consequence of the HIV-AIDS pandemic) are not eligible for the grant (Transforming the Present – Protecting the Future, 2002; see also State of the Cities Report, 2004: 49, re. access to non-government insurance among South Africa's urban population).

An important aim of this article is to obtain a better understanding of self-organized, informal support networks in the developing world, and to seek to examine just how effective they are in providing for the needs of rural–urban migrants. Analyses of this kind could provide a key to more effective and cost-efficient delivery of formal assistance as the government's capacity to deliver such assistance grows. For example, formal development assistance and social protection provisions could be much more effective if they were designed to build on existing informal networks rather than replacing them (Olivier and Mpedi, 2003).

This article reports the results from a survey (Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4) undertaken with rural–urban migrants in the Western Cape. Before turning to the survey data, we will discuss the history of rural–urban migration in South Africa and the survey methodology. The analysis of the survey data will be followed by a discussion of policy implications and a conclusion outlining implications for further research.

The South African Context

South Africa is a particularly important country to examine the issue of the social protection needs of rural–urban migrants. Throughout the 19th and 20th century black households in rural South Africa have been dependent on income transfers from members of the household living away,³ mostly working in the mines and in the white-owned agricultural sector (Wilson, 1972). As early as the 1860s black South African males were hired to work in diamond and gold mines. These workers were forced to live in closely guarded compounds, their families were not allowed to live with them, and they were given permission to leave the mines only once a year to visit their family. The rural households of these workers were heavily dependent on remittances sent by the migrant. With industrialization in the early 1900s, factories also adopted this so-called 'closed-compound system'. Over time the system of migratory labour was extended and codified by laws that restructured the legal and residential rights of black South Africans. The Homeland Citizenship Act of 1970 created designated residential regions for

black South Africans (so-called 'homelands'), which were granted autonomous state rights within South Africa. Black South Africans were denied residence in 'non-homeland' regions of the country except for work purposes. This policy was accompanied by the forced relocation of black South Africans to the 'homelands' and approximately 1.7m South Africans were consequently removed from their homes during apartheid. The 'homelands' provided only limited land-based earning opportunities for their residents as the land was of low quality and heavily overpopulated. As a result, black South Africans became even more dependent on the system of migratory labour. With the repeal of apartheid in 1994, restrictions on residency and movement of black South Africans were removed. One consequence of granting freedom of movement to all South Africans was increased migration of women to the cities in search of jobs (often leaving their children behind with their parents or grandparents). Maluccio et al. (2003) provide evidence of a significant increase in the number of children residing away from their mothers in 1998 compared to 1993. On the other hand, they found no significant change in the proportion of children living away from their fathers in 1998 compared to 1993. Bekker (2002) shows that migration rates to Cape Town have been consistently high since the late 1980s, including a period of even more rapid migration after the first democratic elections in 1994. With unemployment rates around 30%,⁴ many of these migrants have not been able to find jobs on arrival. This has significantly increased the requirements for formal social protection programmes that might enable these migrants to tide over the initial period of uncertainty following their arrival in a city.

Survey Methodology

The survey was undertaken between November 2003 and January 2004 in four low-income areas around Cape Town, South Africa (Langa, Gugulethu, Imizamo Yethu and Llitha Park, see Figure 1). The survey was funded by Monash University's Institute for the Study of Global Movements.

The Western Cape, with Cape Town as its main metropolitan centre, is currently a net receiving province with approximately 50,000 new arrivals per year (i.e. more than 1% of the total population of the province, see Bekker 2002).⁵ The vast majority of migrants come from the villages of the Eastern Cape where opportunities for employment are limited, and 80% of the population are either unemployed or economically inactive (Table 1).

Fieldwork was undertaken over a two-month period, concluding in January 2004, and involved interviews with the heads of 215 households. Socio-economic information on 754 individuals was elicited through a household questionnaire, which collected information on demographic composition of the household, education and language proficiency, income and employment

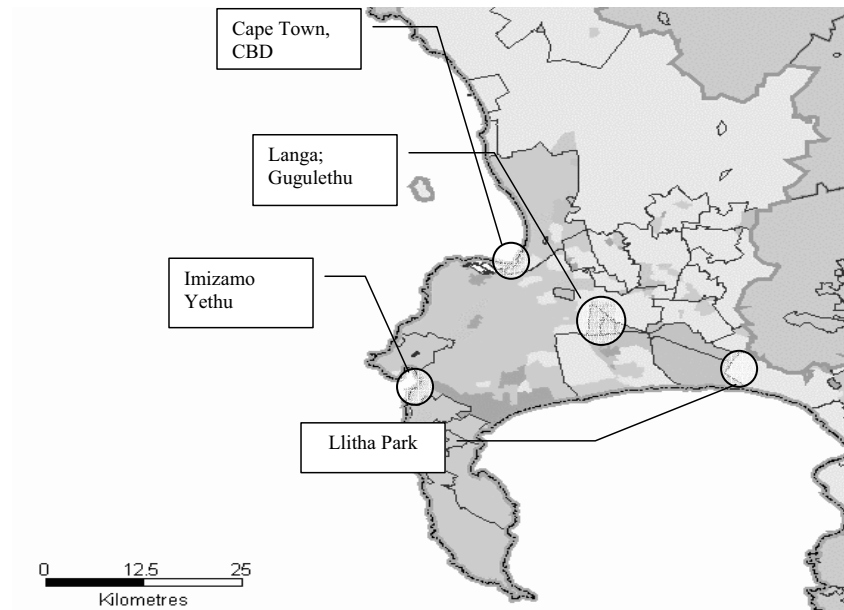


FIGURE 1 *The Cape Town CBD and location of the four field sites: Langa, Gugulethu, Imizamo Yethu and Llitsha Park*

TABLE 1 *Economically active population in the Eastern Cape and Cape Town*

	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	<i>Cape Town</i>	<i>National</i>
Employed (%)	20.4	47.2	33.7
Unemployed (%)	24.6	19.4	24.0
Not economically active (%)	55.1	33.4	42.3

Note: Included in the table are individuals aged 15–65 and the total population is divided into three categories: employed, unemployed and not economically active. The latter comprises students, homemakers, the disabled, those too ill to work and anyone not seeking work.

Source: Census South Africa, 2001.

status, remittance behaviour and contacts with the sending area. The household questionnaire was followed by a second interview focusing on support networks and the settlement experience with one member of the household who had migrated in the past 10 years. The approach used was that of an ethno-survey as developed by Massey et al. (1987; also Massey and Zentano, 2000) for the study of Mexico–US migration. The ethno-survey is a multi-method data-gathering technique that allows researchers to obtain qualitative and quantitative information in a controlled interview setting, thus blending ethnographic and more traditional survey research methods. Data reliability was ensured through follow-up visits to households and cross-checking with household members.

Initial attempts to use standard probability sampling were unsuccessful in the social context of the project where issues of trust were central to establish an open and positive interview context. Selection of participants thus ultimately followed a broad non-probability sampling approach, combining snowball sampling (which facilitated access to participants in these marginalized and vulnerable communities and is often used to approach hard-to-reach populations), and expert sampling techniques (i.e. selecting further participants on the basis of earlier observations in order to obtain a broad spread of cases). The resulting sample constitutes a relatively homogenous group of mainly Xhosa-speaking urban dwellers (92.4% of respondents gave Xhosa as their mother tongue,⁶ followed by 3.3% Zulu and 1.9% Sotho) with a high degree of social and economic deprivation.

This article discusses three main aspects of the survey. First, the role played by language in the successful transition of rural–urban migrants into the urban environment and in their success in the labour market. Proficiency in English (and also Afrikaans) will be shown as being critical in gaining access to formal employment in particular, but it is also important for the individual's capacity to exploit informal employment opportunities and to access government and health services. Second, the importance of informal support networks as a means to gaining access to basic social protection. There is often a well-established social network in the city and migrants are initially quite dependent on people from their own family or village who have previously migrated to the city. Rarely do migrants arrive in an urban settlement with no pre-existing connections. Third, the migrant's need to develop extra-community networks in order to overcome long-term socio-economic exclusion and/or marginalization, and to integrate successfully into the urban economy and social life. The implications of these observations for social policy will be discussed in the last two sections.

Language, Access and Citizenship

In South Africa, with many diverse cultures and 11 official languages (Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, North Sotho, South Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu),⁷ the links between language, employment and social justice are important issues on which the results of this survey can shed some light. As in other developing countries one finds a situation in which not all citizens have adequate knowledge of the language(s) that dominate(s) in the modern or formal sector of the urban economy (see Chiswick et al. [2000] for a similar situation in Bolivia). The survey included a range of questions about language, including languages spoken and understood by participants, their language use in various domains (e.g. reading and media, work, with family members of different generations), and also participants' experiences of linguistic difficulty in the urban environment (e.g. in conversations with

prospective employers, in government offices, at police stations). Most importantly the survey transcended the traditional focus on the ‘home language’ of respondents (Donnelly, 2003) and elicited information on second, third and *n*-th language knowledge (spoken and understood).

As noted, the vast majority of migrants to Cape Town come from the villages of the Eastern Cape, which is a predominately Xhosa-speaking area. According to the 2001 Census, 83% of residents in the Eastern Cape use Xhosa as their home language. Cape Town, on the other hand, is a historically multilingual city with two dominant languages: English and Afrikaans. According to the 2001 Census, Afrikaans is spoken by 41% of Cape Town’s residents; English is spoken by 28%. As a consequence of the intense and ongoing rural–urban migration from the Eastern Cape – which ‘may well represent the largest and most rapid demographic flow in South Africa at the moment’ (Bekker, 2002: iv) – the proportion of Xhosa-speakers in the city is growing rapidly, and Xhosa has overtaken English as the second most frequently spoken home language in the city. According to the 2001 Census, Xhosa is spoken by 29% of the city’s residents.

However, this overall demographic growth in language distribution and the recognition of Xhosa as one of the three official languages of the Western Cape (Western Cape Language Policy, 2001; Western Cape Provincial Languages Act, 1999) has had little effect on the role Xhosa plays in the formal urban economy and public life: the majority of Xhosa speakers are socio-economically marginalized and live in the urban slums which are located mainly in the eastern part of the city.

Language policy refers to government actions (legislation or executive decisions) which determine how languages are used in public contexts, and thus creates spaces in which individuals can exercise their rights of citizenship by means of language, and participate in political, social and economic life. A language policy which remains ignorant of, or chooses to ignore, the languages of its citizens can contribute to socio-political marginalization and disadvantage of large sections of the population as individuals will not be able fully to access social, political and educational services and institutions (Desai, 2001). In the South African context the need for multilingual service provision is clearly recognized in the Language Policy and Language Plan for South Africa (2000) and in the Western Cape Language Policy (2001):

We can develop a language policy for South Africa only if we take into account the broad acceptance of linguistic diversity, social justice, the principle of equal access to public services and programmes, and respect for language rights. (Language Policy and Plan for South Africa, 2000)

[Goal] . . . impartial service delivery by promoting equal access to public services and programmes by removing communication or language barriers. (Western Cape Language Policy, 2001)

However, the political implementation of these principles has proved difficult

since 'public and private institutions are taking *ad hoc* language decisions that tend to negate the constitutional provisions and requirements relating to language' (Language Policy and Plan for South Africa, 2000). Over the last 10 years South Africa has moved gradually towards a covert language policy that privileges English as an emerging lingua franca. English is generally seen as a prestige language and symbol of social and educational mobility, while relatively little attitudinal support exists for the African languages despite their official status. Afrikaans is still in a strong position, although it has lost much of its former power and influence (see Webb [2002b] for a discussion).

The Western Cape Language Audit (2002) was conducted in 2001 to 'describe and evaluate the quantitative patterns of language use and competence among the personnel of the Administration and the needs and problems that arise in the day-to-day language based interaction' (Western Cape Language Audit 2001, 2002: 2) with the wider public. The results of the audit show extensive language problems with regard to intra-departmental communication as well as service delivery to the public. Although Afrikaans still maintains a strong position in the public service, the overall tendency is towards a strengthening of English, which is frequently employed as a bridging language in interethnic communication (both internal and external communication). In the Western Cape, proficiency in English thus facilitates political and social participation. English provides the linguistic means for socio-economic advancement and facilitates access to government services. Xhosa speakers were found to be highly disadvantaged: 'The usage of isiXhosa in interface situations is so low that it would not be inappropriate to speak of the *marginalisation of a language*' (Western Cape Language Audit 2001, 2002: 24, emphasis in the original).

Rural-urban migrants to Cape Town appear to be linguistically ill-prepared for life at their destination, and 43.8% of post-1994 migrants interviewed in our survey indicated that they experienced language difficulties following their arrival in Cape Town. Of the survey respondents, 26.7% confirmed that these difficulties still exist today. These results are in line with those from the *Survey on Internal Migration in South Africa* (University of Pretoria, 1999), which found that migrants to the Western Cape experience considerable language problems, particularly with regard to labour market integration.

Although South Africa projects itself at times as an English-speaking country ([http:// www.safrika.info/plan_trip/travel_tips/questions/language.htm](http://www.safrika.info/plan_trip/travel_tips/questions/language.htm)), and English has monopolized many areas of public communication, serious concerns have been raised regarding levels of English language proficiency. In 2000, the PanSALB (2000: 13) sociolinguistic survey found that 'more than 40 percent of the people in South Africa often do not, or seldom, understand what is being communicated in English' (cf. DeKlerk and Gough, 2003: 356, 358; Webb, 1995: 17-18; for Africa in general cf. Heine, 1992). The Western Cape Language Audit 2001 (2002), using a multi-stage stratified probability sample of the general public ($n = 862$), found that only

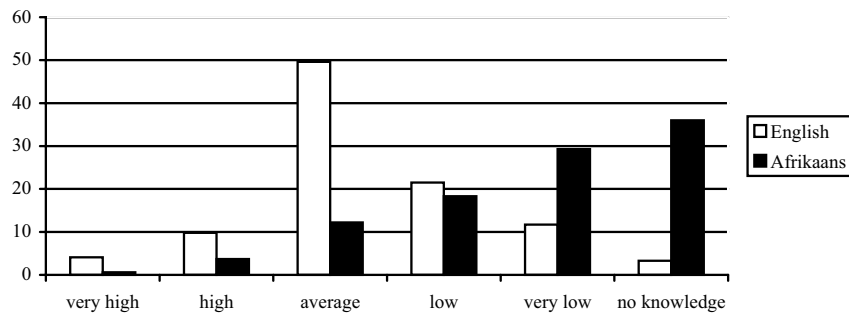


FIGURE 2 *How would you describe your proficiency in English? In Afrikaans?*
 Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

about 50% of Xhosa-speakers in the Western Cape have a level of English proficiency that allows them to explain a simple problem in English. Passive knowledge of English is considerably higher. Proficiency in Afrikaans, the dominant language in Cape Town, was low.

Onder isiXhosa-sprekers kan 80 percent Engels verstaan en 20 percent kan Afrikaans verstaan. By hulle kan amper twee-derdes 'n koerant artikel in Engels lees hoewel slegs 8 percent in Afrikaans kan lees. Ruim oor die 50 percent onder isiXhosa-sprekers kann 'n probleem in Engels verduidelik maar slegs 14 percent kan dit in Afrikaans doen. (Western Cape Language Audit 2001, 2002: 19)

[Among Xhosa speakers 80 percent understand English and 20 percent understand Afrikaans. Of these about two-thirds can read a newspaper article in English, but only 8 percent can read Afrikaans. About 50 percent of the Xhosa speakers can explain a problem in English, but only 14 percent can do this in Afrikaans.]
 (Translation by Anna Deumert)

Interestingly, self-assessment of English language proficiency in the survey was surprisingly positive: 89.1% of adult household members (minimum age 16) indicated that they can 'speak' English,⁸ and in the individual questionnaire self-assessment of proficiency was higher than would be expected in view of the PanSALB data. Self-assessments with regard to Afrikaans, the demographically dominant language in Cape Town, were very low (Figure 2).

However, although many participants in our survey described their knowledge of English as falling into the broad category of 'average', their actual proficiency was often severely restricted. In the case of one interviewed household, for example, the head of the household described his proficiency in the survey interview as average. At a follow-up visit to the household it emerged during the conversation that he was being taught English by his wife who described her own proficiency as 'high'. However, a subsequent question about the context in which she had acquired English (shifting the interview language from Xhosa to English) revealed the limited nature of her proficiency (I = Interviewer, P = Participant).

TABLE 2 *Contexts of language acquisition*

	<i>School</i>	<i>Relatives</i>	<i>Friends</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Other</i>
English (%)	94.2	3.4	5.3	17.0	8.7
Afrikaans (%)	53.8	3.8	9.4	32.0	16.0

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

- I: Where did you learn English?
 P: Butterworth. [A town in the Eastern Cape]
 I: Where – at school?
 P: (slightly irritated) Butterworth.
 I: I mean did you learn English at school?
 P: (increasingly irritated) Butterworth.
 I: (now also somewhat exasperated) At school? Did you learn it at school?

At this stage the question was repeated in Xhosa. The respondent immediately confirmed that she had indeed learned English at school.

Behind self-selected labels such as average or high we thus find a range of proficiencies, many of which are clearly located at the lower end of the proficiency spectrum. Information that would allow us better to understand the degree and intensity of English dispersion among South Africans, and also the more general processes of language acquisition and shift, is urgently needed. The recorded interviews of the Monash survey provide a first qualitative glimpse at the linguistic meanings which self-assigned labels such as average or high carry within the context of migrant neighbourhoods where English is only used as a second or foreign language, and the respondent's knowledge of English might well be considered high within their community.

The main locus of the acquisition of English – unlike Afrikaans which is mostly learned informally within the work context – is the classroom where English is often chosen as the medium of instruction (MoI), even in cases where students and teachers use a language other than English at home (Table 2).

However, learning conditions are extremely poor in the majority of schools and opportunities for effective second language acquisition are minimal. Even though English is used as MoI in many South African schools, spoken interaction in the classroom (student–student as well as teacher–student) usually takes place in the native language since English competency is low among students as well as among teachers. The following exchange about classroom practices in Eastern Cape schools was recorded during a survey interview in Llitha Park (January 2004).

- I1: In which hm language did you hm learn, like your subjects, did you do your subjects?
 R: At school?
 I1: At school, yes.

- I2: Did they teach you in English or in Xhosa?
 R1: In English, they teach us English.
 R2: In Eastern Cape they used to explain everything in Xhosa.
 R1: OK, they teach in English, but explain in Xhosa.
 R2: And then you get naughts in English.
 ...
 I3: So how does it work?
 I2: The textbook is in English? But the teacher explains it in Xhosa?
 R2: Explains it in Xhosa. And our notes is in English.
 I2: And you get your exams in English?
 R2: In English. Yes.
 I3: So when the teacher comes in the class, the first thing is in Xhosa or in English?
 R2: In Xhosa. Everything is in Xhosa.⁹

As noted by Desai (2001: 331): ‘English remains an unattainable goal for most learners, not only as a subject, but also as a language through which learners can access knowledge.’ Desai’s research in particular has illustrated the extremely low English proficiency of South African secondary school students (cf. Webb [2002a] for a discussion of English language proficiency among tertiary students). Webb (1995: 33) summarized the overall state of affairs in South Africa’s schools under the heading of ‘ineffective language teaching’: ‘[d]espite the fact that English has been a school subject for more than a hundred years in South Africa the level of English competency is still very low indeed’ (see also Brock-Utne et al., 2003). The low levels of English language proficiency have far-reaching social and economic consequences for individuals.

That knowledge of English plays a significant role in the workplace is clearly indicated in Table 3. There are, however, differences between recent

TABLE 3 *What language(s) does this person speak at work? With co-workers?*

	<i>English</i> (%)	<i>Afrikaans</i> (%)	<i>Xhosa</i> (%)	<i>Sotho</i> (%)	<i>Zulu</i> (%)
With co-workers?					
ALL	75.0	29.1	68.2	3.4	7.5
Recent migrants (post-1994)	72.5	24.2	70.5	3.9	7.7
Settled migrants (pre-1994)	81.2	41.2	62.4	2.4	7.1
With his/her boss?					
ALL	82.6	16.3	14.2	–	–
Recent migrants (post-1994)	82.9	13.2	15.1	–	–
Settled migrants (pre-1994)	82.1	23.8	11.9	–	–

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

TABLE 4 *What language(s) do you usually speak . . . ?*

	<i>English</i> (%)	<i>Afrikaans</i> (%)	<i>Xhosa</i> (%)	<i>Other</i> (%)
Rural home visit	2.8	1.4	92.5	9.8
Urban neighbourhood	9.3	0.9	99.1	7.0
Religious group	18.7	1.1	94.6	1.6
Spaza shop (in neighbourhood)	8.9	0.9	97.7	0.5
Pick 'n Pay (in the city)	79.0	8.4	57.9	0.5
Hospital/clinic	64.4	4.7	63.1	0.0
Government office	69.4	4.8	48.3	0.0
Schools	65.3	5.6	67.4	0.5
Police	48.8	7.0	86.3	1.0

Note: The information presented in this table raises another issue: the exclusion of African languages other than Xhosa from formal contexts. In our sample about 3% of migrants were of non-Xhosa language backgrounds (mostly southern Sotho and Zulu). The issue of minority languages (with the exception of South African Sign Language) is not addressed in the Western Cape Language Policy.

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

(post-1994) and settled (pre-1994) migrants with regard to language use at work: it appears that only settled migrants are in a position to exploit the job opportunities provided by Afrikaans employers. Knowledge of Afrikaans clearly increases with length of residency (31.1% of pre-1994 migrants and 46.9% of post-1994 migrants indicated knowledge of Afrikaans).

The importance of English as the default bridging language is visible in the domains of commerce, health care, government support, schools and police (Table 4). Afrikaans is used only marginally in these domains. Xhosa also has a relatively strong position in these contexts, but is mostly used for communication at the lower levels of the respective institutional hierarchies (e.g. with nurses, but not with doctors in hospitals). Table 4 furthermore shows that the neighbourhoods in which migrants live appear to be largely monolingual Xhosa-speaking enclaves. The situation in Cape Town is markedly different from urban communities in the Gauteng area (Johannesburg, Pretoria), which are ethnically and linguistically highly diverse, and residents usually speak several African languages as well as mixed urban varieties such as Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho within their communities (see Slabbert and Finlayson, 2003).

Communication problems are most salient in government offices: 20.1% of respondents indicated that they had problems communicating with government officials, as opposed to 8.4% who had problems at police stations, and 12.6% who had problems in hospitals and clinics. The workplace was also a domain characterized by considerable communicative breakdown: 20.7% indicated that they had problems communicating with employers. Lack of proficiency in English (44.1%) and Afrikaans (27.4%) were seen as the main reasons. The communicative problems individuals experience in these

contexts, and which can restrict access to social services and employment opportunities, were summarized aptly by one respondent in Imizamo Yethu. Like others, he indicated in the main survey that he ‘speaks’ and ‘understands’ English, but when asked (in Xhosa) about his experience at clinics he responded (switching into English to illustrate his dilemma to the interviewer): ‘Me understand doctors, doctors not understand me.’

A similar observation, reflecting how restricted language proficiency can limit the respondents’ verbal expressiveness – making these migrants essentially ‘voiceless’ within the wider English- and Afrikaans-dominant community – was made by Deumert and Dowling (2004):

[W]e found it difficult to use any English in interviews [for the Monash survey]. We asked a hostel dweller how she felt about her life. ‘Are you happy?’ She stared miserably out of the broken window: ‘Yes’. We repeated the question in isiXhosa. In her own language she told us she was angry with her father who had squandered his money by sleeping with so many different women. ‘Look, these girls are my sisters, but we all have different mothers. *Nxx! Ngoku singamablwempu!* And now we are paupers!’ That is not happy in any language. (Deumert and Dowling, 2004: 45)

To summarize, the survey results highlight significant language-related difficulties in the following two areas: (a) low quality of language education and lack of exposure to English (and also Afrikaans) within the almost exclusively Xhosa-speaking migrant neighbourhoods, and (b) the continuing dominance of English and Afrikaans as the languages of commerce, government, education and public services. As a consequence, many rural–urban migrants experience difficulties with access to formal social protection services and to the labour market. These problems are accentuated for, but certainly not limited to, recent migrants.

Migration and Informal Networks as Instruments of Social Protection

It has been argued by Stark and Bloom (1985) that migration decisions are not necessarily taken at the micro-economic level by individuals themselves (as argued by neoclassical economics), weighing up the costs and benefits of a particular move and assessing wage differentials between rural and urban economies (cf. Stark and Bloom’s [1985: 174] comment, ‘a migrant is not necessarily the decision-making entity accountable for his or her migration’; see also Stark, 1991). Instead, the so-called ‘new economics of migration’ argues that the decision to migrate is made at the household level to achieve an overall ‘risk minimization/diversification’ for all household members: ‘placing some family members in town, and pooling village and town incomes, offers insurance both for the urban migrants and for those who stay in the village’ (Lucas, 2003: 10; cf. Ghatak et al., 1996; Taylor, 1999). Labour

TABLE 5 *When you first arrived here – from whom did you receive help? And what was the main help you received?*

From whom did you receive help?	
Spouse/partner	9.8%
Parent	19.6%
Brother/sister	28.0%
Other relative	37.9%
Friend	14.0%
What was the main help you received?	
Housing only	7.9%
Meals only	4.2%
Housing and meals	85.5%
Economic help	73.4%
Help to find a job	45.8%
Entrance into the community	55.6%

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

migration thus constitutes an informal coping mechanism which helps households to manage risk and to achieve some degree of social protection. In societies where migration is primarily motivated by household considerations (rather than the desires and intentions of the individuals), migration behaviour can stabilize inter-generationally and achieve the status of a community tradition (giving rise to migration norms and stable systems of migration; see Kok et al., 2003: 19, 22, 26).

Social networks – i.e. sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants to the urban destination area and the area of origin – play an important role in the institutionalization and maintenance of existing (or emerging) migration systems. They lower the costs and risks of movement, and provide a form of social capital on which migrants can draw: ‘Over time, migration tends to become self-perpetuating because each act of migration creates additional social capital that promotes and sustains more migration, which creates more social capital, which produces more movement’ (Massey and Espinosa, 1997: 952; see also Massey et al., 1993). In the context of this article social capital is understood as a function of the extent and intensity of an individual’s network (following Bourdieu, 1985; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

The evidence from the Monash survey suggests that kinship ties are strong within the destination area and provide newly arrived migrants with access to housing, food, financial means, work and community support (Table 5). Extended family networks provide important informal support and social protection to new urban residents: nobody will be left completely homeless or left to starve while they have sufficiently strong kinship ties. Likewise, these informal networks are valuable in providing basic information about employment opportunities.

TABLE 6 *Who would you ask for support in case of . . . ?*

	<i>Spouse/ partner (%)</i>	<i>Son/ daughter (%)</i>	<i>Parent (%)</i>	<i>Brother/ sister (%)</i>	<i>Other relative (%)</i>	<i>Friend (%)</i>	<i>Religious group (%)</i>	<i>Government agency (%)</i>
Illness	20.2	2.5	23.3	45.3	32.0	22.2	17.2	9.4
Financial trouble	21.2	2.5	22.2	38.9	35.4	26.3	11.1	6.6
Job loss	18.5	1.2	16.1	40.1	34.6	29.6	11.1	4.9

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

About two-thirds of the sample indicated that they had asked for help or support in the last six months (health 11.8%; financial problems 77.1%; job loss 6.3%; funeral/wedding 9.0%). This shows the continuing importance and functions of these networks after initial migration. The data summarized in Table 6 further illustrates the strong kinship and friendship/association networks on which recently arrived migrants can draw during their urban residency. Formal forms of social protection are clearly marginal to the participants of the survey.

Migrants not only draw on informal social support mechanisms during their relocation, but their networks also provide informal social support to the area of origin. Remittances link the rural and urban areas economically and there seems to be a strong community expectation for support across urban–rural households in African societies (Lucas and Stark, 1985). Mayer (1961) noted in his anthropological study of Xhosa migrants in East London that not sending money to the home area is often seen as a first sign of ‘absconding’, i.e. of cutting one’s ties with the home area and showing disrespect for tradition and filial obligations. Remittances from migrant workers continue to be an important source of income for rural African households: in 1999, 85% of households with migrant workers received remittances, and 35.8% of rural African households had absent migrant household members (compared to 32.6% in 1993).

In the survey employment status was, not surprisingly, an important factor which influenced whether remittances were sent: 80.5% of those in regular wage employment sent money and/or goods back to the rural area, as opposed to 53.3% of those self-employed, 64.7% of those in casual employment, and only 25.2% of those who were unemployed at the time of the survey. The recipients were mostly parents (66.0%), followed by spouse/partner (8.0%), children (7.3%), brothers/sisters (9.3%), and uncles/aunts (4.7%). Remittances were also sent from the rural areas to the city: 37.8% of unemployed migrants received money and/or goods from family members. It is possible that the introduction of the pension system in 1992 supported this rural-to-urban economic flow and thus indirectly helped to mitigate the risks associated with migration. Migrants also return home regularly (only 7.6% do

not return to their home area for holidays and visits), thus maintaining strong links and regular interaction with the household of origin.

The survey results confirm the hypothesis that informal networks are important to a successful migration experience, and that these networks are most often intentionally formed. Migrants choose to move to a particular urban area mainly because of the networks they have in this area, and many are in turn very reliant on the support of relatives and friends for basic needs. In the absence of access to adequate government support, social networks are constructed and maintained as collective survival mechanisms – as an alternative, informal ‘welfare system’.

The Strength of Weak Ties: Migration and Labour Market Integration

Although the majority of respondents migrated for the explicit purpose of finding work (63.7%), rates of unemployment and underemployment are high among migrants to Cape Town with unemployment at 38.1% in the sample, and underemployment (of those employed) at 58.3%. However, a low probability of finding employment does not deter individuals from moving into the city. Many migrants seem to operate under what Stark and Bloom (1985: 175) have called the ‘image of worker success’: ‘As long as a large number of workers have the belief that high-paying employment can be obtained, or that it is worth waiting for, a migratory response will be produced.’

There were surprising (and statistically significant) differences in labour market integration between the four field sites (Table 7; the hypothesis of independence between labour market outcome and location was clearly rejected, with a p -value less than 0.001); both Gugulethu and Langa show a high percentage of unemployment, followed by Llitha Park. Imizamo Yethu has the lowest unemployment rate of the four field sites.

Of the four sites, Llitha Park is somewhat unusual and indicative of upward social mobility. It is a lower-middle-class area: houses are generally built out of brick and have running water, a bathroom and electricity. Most residents are in skilled employment, working for the army, the police or local hospitals. Llitha Park thus differs significantly from the other three field sites, which are best described as urban slums. In Gugulethu (established 1958) and Langa (established 1923) so-called shacks have sprung up next to the old hostels which were built during apartheid to accommodate male migrant workers and now provide rudimentary and overcrowded housing for migrant families. (Often two or three households were found to share a room, and room occupancy rates were in some cases above 20 people, including adults and children.)

Imizamo Yethu is a relatively new informal settlement that emerged in the

TABLE 7 *Labour market integration in the different survey areas (recent migrants, post-1994)*

	<i>Regular wage employment (%)</i>	<i>Self-employed (%)</i>	<i>Casual wage employment (%)</i>	<i>Unemployed (%)</i>
Gugulethu	17.9	9.5	21.1	51.6
Langa	21.2	8.0	20.4	50.4
Llitha Park	44.6	5.4	13.5	36.5
Imizamo Yethu	38.2	5.6	30.3	25.8

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

early 1990s. There are now some brick houses in the area; however, many residents continue to live in makeshift dwellings. Imizamo Yethu differs significantly from the other two low-income areas in one important respect: it is situated within walking distance from the affluent neighbourhood of Hout Bay. Langa and Gugulethu, on the other hand, were created in the context of apartheid town planning which forced black South Africans to live in areas located at considerable distance from the city and white residential areas (about 20 km both for Langa and Gugulethu).

In the qualitative part of the survey interviews with residents of Imizamo Yethu repeatedly commented on the fact that the vicinity to town enabled them to look for job opportunities, and that there was considerable interaction between township residents and the affluent white neighbours as well as the coloured fishermen in the Hout Bay harbour. In other words, the very location of the township allowed residents to build valuable contacts outside of the close-knit local migrant community. This facilitated their access to new information about work opportunities and training schemes, which would not have been available from within the cohesive social networks of Imizamo Yethu.

These observations agree with Granovetter's (1973, 1982, 1995) work on the cross-cutting 'strength of weak ties'. Weak ties between actors are believed to play a central role in the diffusion of new information: weak ties connect individuals to a wide range of diverse groups – transcending local, social and also ethnic boundaries – which provide a range of information for the individual (see also Burt, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Within strong-tie networks, on the other hand, information circulates among the same people who are all connected to each other and share most of their knowledge (i.e. information from various network contacts is usually redundant). There is considerable evidence that opportunities for employment and social mobility are shaped by the structures of an individual's social network (social capital), and cannot be explained solely in terms of education or skills base (human capital of job seekers). Granovetter (1973) showed in an empirical study of the labour market in the USA (Boston) that the majority of people found their jobs through personal contacts (rather than adverts or job

TABLE 8 *Labour market integration: post- and pre-1994 migrants*

	<i>Regular wage employment (%)</i>	<i>Self-employed (%)</i>	<i>Casual wage employment (%)</i>	<i>Unemployed, seeking work (%)</i>
Recent migrants (post-1994)	27.4	7	20.4	39.7
Settled migrants (pre-1994)	54.6	10.1	8.4	13.5

Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003–4.

agencies), and mostly through weak ties, which covered extensive inter-personal paths/distances (cf. Montgomery, 1992). Lack of information about economic opportunities (through weak ties) can thus prolong an individual's economic inactivity in spite of an adequate skills set.

It is likely that length of residency interacts with opportunities to build up a range of weak ties in the new environment. These weak ties transcend the original strong-tie social network that facilitated initial settlement, and gradually offer access to new information and resources. Lucas (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of past research that shows that migrants initially earn less than residents, and are found predominantly in casual employment. However, their earnings usually rise as a function of length of residence (see also Vijverberg and Zeager, 1994). The concentration of post-1994 migrants in casual employment is evidenced in the survey data, and unemployment rates are significantly higher for recent migrants than for those who have resided in the city for more than 10 years (Table 8). The 1999 *Survey on Internal Migration in South Africa* shows a similar effect of duration of residence on employment category: whereas migrants with 10 to 20 years of residence are generally found in regular employment or self-employment, migrants with less than 10 years of residency show high rates of informal sector employment.

In sum, although the cohesive networks of migrants can function as an informal 'welfare system', and mitigate many of the problems individuals encounter as a result of their rural-to-urban movement, networks consisting solely of strong ties can isolate individuals from access to new information (including information about alternative support systems and in particular job opportunities), and thus impede in many cases economic advancement and prosperity. As argued by Woolcock and Narayan (2000): strong intra-community ties (which they call 'bonding social capital') allow individuals to 'get by', extra-community ties ('bridging social capital') allow them to 'get ahead'. A combination of the two is necessary for development to take place.

Implications for Social Policy

The survey reported in this article has allowed us to identify some of the problems faced by rural–urban migrants in South Africa with respect to access to social protection and labour market integration. Three important insights emerged from this study that are of interest to both national and global social policy regimes:

1. Inadequate knowledge of dominant urban languages (English and Afrikaans) by migrants can limit opportunities for employment and access to public services (governmental and non-governmental) in multilingual societies.
2. Reliance on informal strong-tie social networks facilitates initial migration and settlement (bonding social capital).
3. Access to employment requires broad weak-tie networks (bridging social capital) that are difficult to create in a city whose spatial organization is only slowly overcoming the strict segregation and isolation of apartheid urban planning.

With regard to policy recommendations the findings of this study can be interpreted as suggesting the need for a ‘linguistic turn’ in development studies (i.e. a firm recognition of language as a factor which can impede or facilitate development and which should be considered in social policy responses), emphasizes the importance of informal social protection mechanisms in developing countries, and indicates that diversity of network relations as a prerequisite for development might, at least in part, be created through urban planning. We can thus tentatively formulate the following policy recommendations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 1: LANGUAGE

With respect to language policy the long-term aim should be to equip all citizens with adequate access to the languages of wider communication (in particular English), which enable them to access services and employment opportunities. At the same time, however, language programmes should be implemented within the public service and other institutions (hospitals, schools) to meet the communication needs of the wider population effectively (cf. the results of the Western Cape Language Audit 2001, 2002). While knowledge of English is generally perceived to be necessary for socio-economic and educational advancement (see Kapp, 2000) and as such will always play a central role, all South Africans have the right to access government services (including education) in their own languages. The low prestige of the African languages relative to the social and political meaning they could expect to have – given their statistical dominance and their official status in the country – is cause for concern and will need to be addressed by policy makers to prevent the continuing marginalization of large sections of the population.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2: INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION

It has been well recognized in the literature that families and communities provide vital informal insurance against the risks associated with extreme poverty (see the discussion and references given above). The survey results demonstrate in some detail how these networks impact on the migration experience: invariably, strong ties are maintained with the rural sending household through regular visits, and support and integration into the new, urban community is strongly reliant kinship-based systems in the destination area. That social policy should build on such existing informal support mechanisms was emphasized by the Taylor commission (*Transforming the Present – Protecting the Future*, 2002: 74): ‘It is important not to impose a social security system that will be detrimental to traditional support mechanisms. Transformation of the present social security framework should, therefore, aim at supporting and strengthening existing informal social security with the view of enhancing solidarity.’

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 3: URBAN PLANNING

Although there is a clear need for governments to recognize and support informal and formal support structures that can improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations, social policies will need to create conditions under which migrants can forge broader and more autonomous networks which go beyond the immediate kin and friendship circle. It is through a combination of close-knit and loose-knit networks that individuals obtain both the benefits of informal social protection, which ensures that basic needs are met, and economic opportunity, which allows them to improve their well-being beyond basic needs and to realize their capabilities. The evidence from this study indicates that urban planning can play an important role in this context, and efforts should be made to avoid slum dweller ‘ghettoization’ at all costs. Overcoming spatial disadvantage means not only to ensure development and investment in areas which had been neglected for decades, but also to realize that urban residential structures can impede the flow of information across social groups by restricting network formation to the structurally and spatially isolated local area. This is of particular importance in the South African context where urban spaces still reflect many of the legacies of apartheid town planning and limit an individual’s opportunity for association across groups.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

The Millennium Project’s task force report on urbanization (Garau et al., 2005) reminds us that urban populations are growing throughout the developing world and that poverty is increasingly becoming an urban phenomenon. Identifying and analysing the social protection needs and strategies of rural migrants residing in Cape Town was the focus of the first

phase of the research project reported here. However, a complete analysis of people movement and informal social protection in the context of a developing economy requires us also to examine the protection effects of rural–urban mobility on the originating communities. This aspect of the process has not received adequate attention in the literature (cf. Collinson et al., 2003). The project team has developed a second stage of the research project which will take the research out of the city and into the villages of Eastern Cape in order achieve a better understanding of the importance of migration among the risk-minimization strategies of rural households, the effects of rural–urban mobility on the sending areas, and the various material and non-material interlinkages that have been created between the urban and the rural sector.

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NOTES

1. This is not to imply that South Africa's rural areas are socially intact. Decades of migrant labour have gradually destroyed many of the traditional structures and poverty rates remain high in the rural sector (see Meth and Dias, 2004). The HIV-AIDS pandemic has put further pressure on rural communities and the functioning of rural kinship networks (see Bekker and Swart, 2002).
2. Initially this took place in the context of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), which was adopted by the African National Congress in 1994 in consultation with COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), and the White Paper on Social Welfare (1995). In 1996 the government adopted the macro-economic programme Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), which focused on economic growth, contributions by the private sector, and reduced the role played by the state. In the 2004 election the government focused much on its campaign on the need to address poverty and unemployment, and a new social security agency will be instituted in 2005.
3. Terminologies for different cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups have always been a problem for studies in South African history and sociology. During the apartheid era, all South Africans were categorized into one of the following four categories: Black (or African), Coloured (or Mixed Race), Indian (or Asian) and White (or Caucasian). For the sake of consistency with the literature and the data we will stick to this categorization, but will neither use capitals nor scare-quotes (cf. Mesthrie [2003] for a similar approach).
4. The current South African official unemployment rate is 27.8% (Labour Force Survey, 2004). However, there are significant differences between population

- groups with the unemployment rate among black South Africans being the highest (33.7%), while whites had the lowest unemployment rate (5.1%).
5. The difference between migration in one direction (inflow) and the opposite direction (outflow) is called 'net migration'.
 6. As noted by Mesthrie (2003: 6), '[t]here is an ongoing debate about the use of prefixes for denoting African languages', i.e. isiXhosa vs. Xhosa. In the scholarly literature language names are usually cited without prefix.
 7. The South African Constitution (1996) grants official status to the listed languages, and details of implementation are specified in the South African Languages Bill (2003).
 8. It should, however, be noted that several respondents qualified their ability to 'speak' English with modifiers such as 'only a little', 'just some words', etc.
 9. See also Desai's (2001: 331) description of a local school in Khayelitsha: 'From classroom observations, it was apparent that, except for the English [subject] classes, teachers used mainly Xhosa to convey information to the learners, but referred them to the English in their textbooks where appropriate. Textbooks, incidentally, were all kept at the school as there were not sufficient copies available for each pupil. Despite this Xhosa rich environment learners were still expected to express themselves in writing in English.' Low English school performance statistics are a concern across Anglophone Africa (see Bamgbose, 2001; Bobda, 2004).

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RÉSUMÉ

Langue, Réseaux Informels et Protection Sociale: Évidence Fournie par un Échantillon de Migrants au Cap, Afrique du Sud

L'exode rural est un phénomène majeur dans les pays en voie de développement. Cet article cherche à comprendre par quels biais les migrants de l'exode rural parviennent à satisfaire leurs besoins de protection sociale à la suite de leur déplacement vers la ville. Nous avançons les résultats d'une enquête menée auprès de migrants de l'exode rural dans quatre zones défavorisées du Cap, en Afrique du Sud. Nous observons l'expérience des migrants en tant que chercheurs de travail dans le milieu urbain; nous analysons de même l'influence qu'exercent leur maîtrise de la langue et leur compétence, dans l'intégration du marché du travail et finalement leur accès à une protection formelle et informelle et au soutien du gouvernement. La compétence linguistique et les réseaux sociaux apparaissent comme des variables importantes dans l'analyse et devront être prises en considération lors de la conception des politiques sociales. Plus spécifiquement, une maîtrise insuffisante des langues urbaines dominantes (soit, l'anglais et l'afrikaans) limite les opportunités de travail et d'accès aux services publiques. En outre, la dépendance à des réseaux sociaux resserrés et informels rend plus facile la migration initiale et l'installation, mais elle peut en revanche retarder l'intégration à long terme dans l'économie urbaine et le marché du travail.

RESUMEN

El Idioma, las Redes Informales y la Protección Social: Evidencia Procedente de una Muestra de Migrantes de Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica

La migración del campo a la ciudad es un problema sustancial en el mundo en vías de desarrollo. Este artículo examina las diversas formas en que los migrantes del campo a

la ciudad logran satisfacer sus necesidades de protección social cuando se desplazan a las ciudades. Damos cuenta de los resultados de una investigación de migrantes rurales a cuatro áreas de bajos ingresos de Ciudad del Cabo, Sudáfrica. Examinamos las experiencias de los migrantes en términos de búsqueda de empleo en un entorno urbano, y el impacto del idioma y la fluidez en su uso, para integrarse al mercado de trabajo, así como su acceso a las redes de apoyo formal e informal así como del gobierno. El dominio del idioma y las redes sociales se constituyen en variables importantes de análisis y deberán tenerse en cuenta en el diseño de políticas sociales. Específicamente, el conocimiento insuficiente de las lenguas dominantes de las ciudades (inglés y afrikáans) limita las oportunidades de empleo y el acceso a los servicios públicos. Más aún, las redes sociales informales que permiten establecer lazos fuertes facilitan la migración inicial y la instalación pero pueden demorar la integración a largo plazo a la economía urbana y el mercado de trabajo.

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