

THE ROLE OF MOBILITY IN CHANGING LIVELIHOOD TRAJECTORIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR VULNERABILITY AND ADAPTATION IN SEMI-ARID REGIONS

Exploring the role of mobility as an adaptive response to environmental, economic, and social conditions, and considering the relationships between risk and response within socially-differentiated populations over time.

WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

The paper makes three substantive contributions to knowledge:

1. The adaptation option space heuristic contributes theoretically to thinking on risks, responses and their relationship with each other and adaptation.
2. The research specifically addresses everyday mobility, a neglected area of research within the field of migration and environmental change research, especially within developing countries.
3. The Life History approach foregrounds temporality through which we show how the adaptation option space changes over time, and the implications of this on wellbeing.

From a temporal perspective, we argue that knowledge about where people have come from helps to understand not only their current situation but also their ability to respond to future, as yet unknown, livelihood stresses.

KEY FINDINGS

The intersectional nature of risks and response set within dynamic conditions is well established yet has been poorly articulated in global environmental change literature. Drawing on empirically-rich data, we highlighted how people and household approaches to managing risks are individualised, and how mobility is central to these strategies. We found that mobility facilitates changes to people's risk portfolios in one of three ways: modification (risks are accentuated or attenuated); novelty (risks gained or lost); and no change.

Changes to people's risk portfolios are critically shaped by a person's agency, set within a web of broader structural constraints. Over time we saw how the risks that people experience, and their responses to these, lead to changes in their wellbeing trajectories. Through a novel theoretical concept of the adaptation option space, our evidence pointed to some instances where it becomes increasingly difficult to shift downward trajectories leading to decreases in wellbeing over time, with the chances of recovery increasingly unlikely.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Understanding people's use of mobility within a web of interacting dynamic processes is important. The research shows that individuals are active agents in the face of change but remain constrained by broader social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural structures around them.

These dynamics affect the choices that people make when responding to risks, and the effectiveness of those choices. For example, some households were able to respond and maintain a positive wellbeing trajectory while others were impacted by compounding livelihood shocks – suggesting the presence of social tipping points. If social tipping points exist then we can think through what interventions can create positive change.

This research highlighted the need for more refined and sensitive approaches that privilege heterogeneity, intersectionality, and situatedness, especially in resource-scarce and highly dynamic climate hotspots such as semi-arid regions.



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