

## **Consequences of Male International Migration for Women's Position in Senegal: Reinforcement or Weakening of Traditional Social Relationships?**

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Although most debates surrounding the link between migration and development have focused on the economic dimensions of migration, the need to study the consequences of migration for the well being and social transformation of those left behind is widely acknowledged (Nyberg-Sorensen et al, 2002; UNPD 2009). In order to really understand the processes of socioeconomic change in developing countries, especially Africa, it is critical to consider gender and intergenerational relationships (Pilon, 1997; Locoh, 2007) and thus we here adopt a gendered approach to show how migration affects social relationships, specifically at the family and couple levels. We use individual in-depth interviews conducted among 84 men and women of different age groups in 2007 in a small town in North-West Senegal. This region has experienced intensive male emigration to Europe, especially Italy, for several decades. The study community epitomises the fundamental social and cultural norms of *wolof* society. The *wolof* are the dominant ethnic group in Senegal and *wolof* society is characterised by patriarchy and patrilocality where men and women's respective roles are clearly circumscribed, the latter mainly in the domestic and reproductive spheres, the former as bread winners and providers of family support. We focus on three issues : 1) To what extent do migrant men's long lasting absences lead to reformulations of the roles of women who stay, whether as migrants' wives, sisters or mothers? 2) How has longstanding male emigration transformed women's aspirations? Do they now dream of or intend to migrate? Is male emigration related to the development of new aspirations in their daily lives moving beyond the domestic and reproductive spheres? 3) Has male emigration led to the emergence of new behavioural models for couples and the wider family and how do such models interact with actual gender relationships? Our data suggest two countervailing tendencies. First, successful migration tends to reinforce men's status by consolidating male roles as the basis of family economic support. As successful migrants become socially lauded models of social and economic success they inspire younger men to imitate them. Second, male emigration leads women to position themselves through observing or experiencing the inequalities faced by migrant wives, who, despite the economic benefits brought by migration to the household, do not experience improvements in their positions as wives or daughters-in-law. Simultaneously, women's educational and employment aspirations are changing as a result of general social change of which male emigration is one dimension.