



Social Mobility in Developing Countries: Directions for Research Practice, Knowledge Gaps and Policy Support

Kunal Sen, UNU-WIDER



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
UNU-WIDER

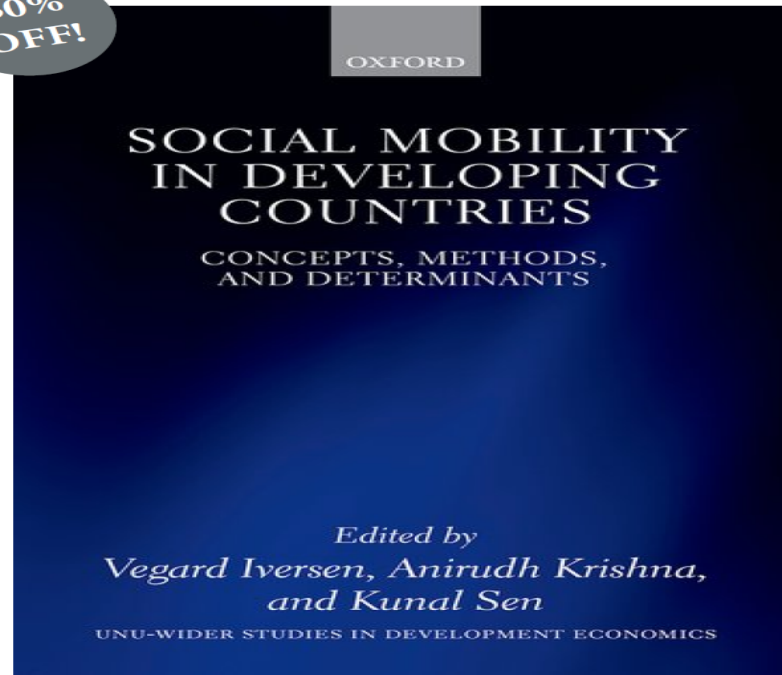
NEW FROM OXFORD

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Concepts, Methods, and Determinants

Edited by Vegard Iversen, Anirudh Krishna, and Kunal Sen

30%
OFF!



December 2021

£90.00 ~~£63.00~~ | \$115.00 ~~\$80.50~~

Hardcover | 9780192896858 | 512 pages

Social mobility is the hope of economic development and the mantra of a good society. There is broad agreement that people should have roughly equal chances of success regardless of their economic status at birth. Concerns about rising inequality have engendered a renewed interest in social mobility, especially in the developing world. If forms of mobility have slowed in the West, then we might be entering an age of rigid stratification with defined boundaries between the always-haves and the never-haves. A key contribution of this book is the pulling together of the emerging streams of knowledge from different disciplines.

FEATURES

- Brings together leading scholars from different disciplines working on social mobility
- Presents an overview of the state-of-the art in the subject
- Covers all important dimensions of social mobility in developing countries
- An open access title available under the terms of a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence

Vegard Iversen, Professor of Development Economics and Head of the Livelihoods and Institutions Department, Natural Resources Institute (NRI), University of Greenwich
Anirudh Krishna, Edgar T. Thompson Professor of Public Policy and Political Science, Duke University
Kunal Sen, Director, UNU-WIDER

 **OXFORD**
UNIVERSITY PRESS



What the book contains

An opening review plus 16 substantive chapters by top scholars in sociology, history, political science, economics and anthropology from across the Globe.

Contents -1

PART I. INTRODUCTION

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. The State of Knowledge about Social Mobility in the Developing World | 3 |
| <i>Vegard Iversen, Anirudh Krishna, and Kunal Sen</i> | |

PART II. THEORY AND CONCEPTS

- | | |
|--|----|
| 2. Drivers of Mobility in the Global South | 35 |
| <i>Patrizio Piraino</i> | |
| 3. Exploring Concepts of Social Mobility | 54 |
| <i>Gary S. Fields</i> | |
| 4. Social Mobility in Developing Countries: Measurement and Downward Mobility Pitfalls | 75 |
| <i>Vegard Iversen</i> | |
| 5. In Praise of Snapshots | 97 |
| <i>Ravi Kanbur</i> | |

PART III. TYPES OF MOBILITY

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 6. Income Mobility in the Developing World: Recent Approaches and Evidence | 115 |
| <i>Himanshu and Peter Lanjouw</i> | |
| 7. Educational Mobility in the Developing World | 139 |
| <i>Florencia Torche</i> | |
| 8. Rethinking Occupational Mobility in Developing Countries: Conceptual Issues and Empirical Findings | 172 |
| <i>Anthony Heath and Yizhang Zhao</i> | |



Contents - 2

PART IV. DIALOGUE ON MEASUREMENT AND METHODS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 9. Economic Approach to Intergenerational Mobility: Measures, Methods, and Challenges in Developing Countries
<i>M. Shahe Emran and Forhad Shilpi</i> | 197 |
| 10. Social Mobility in China: A Case Study of Social Mobility Research in the Global South
<i>Yaojun Li</i> | 221 |
| 11. Ethnography and Social Mobility: A Review
<i>Divya Vaid</i> | 247 |
| 12. Measuring Social Mobility in Historic and Less Developed Societies
<i>Gregory Clark</i> | 271 |

PART V. DRIVERS AND INHIBITORS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 13. Social Mobility and Human Capital in Low- and Middle-Income Countries
<i>Jere R. Behrman</i> | 301 |
| 14. Informalities, Volatility, and Precarious Social Mobility in Urban Slums
<i>Emily Rains and Anirudh Krishna</i> | 351 |
| 15. Gender and Social Mobility: Gender Attitudes and Women's Labour Force Participation
<i>Nancy Luke</i> | 374 |
| 16. Social Mobility and Horizontal Inequality
<i>Patricia Funjika and Rachel M. Gisselquist</i> | 398 |
| 17. Social Networks as Levers of Mobility
<i>Anandi Mani and Emma Riley</i> | 424 |

PART VI. CONCLUSIONS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 18. Social Mobility in Developing Countries: Directions for Research Practice, Knowledge Gaps, and Policy Support
<i>Vegard Iversen, Anirudh Krishna, and Kunal Sen</i> | 451 |
|--|-----|





The State of Knowledge about Social Mobility in the Developing World

- Social mobility typically understood as movement from a lower to a higher level of **education, occupational status, social class** or **income** (or group).
- Most research (and the discussion in our book) focuses on **intergenerational mobility** (comparing parents with offspring, usually fathers & sons): can also study within generation **or intragenerational mobility** (individual career trajectories).
- Concepts: Mobility can be **absolute** or **relative** (many variants).



Close link to inequality of opportunities

- Broad agreement that in a just society “***an individual’s expected level of achievement should be a function only of his (her) effort and not of his (her) circumstances***” (Roemer 1998: 21).
- While a great ideal, the talents and potentials of citizens of African countries, of ‘*India’s 1 Billion*’ (Krishna 2017) and others remain underutilized with – cutting this short- ‘***enormous consequences for growth and equity***’ (ibid.)



Policy focus so far: moving people from below to above the poverty line

- Considerable pre-pandemic progress: 42.1 % of the world's population in extreme poverty in 1981; 21 % by 2005; below 10 % by 2015 (World Bank).
- Can more pronounced progress and upward mobility be achieved? What can we learn from the extensive literature on social mobility in industrial countries?
- What needs to be done differently with regards to research and policy when the focus is shifted to low-income settings?

What have we learned about knowledge gaps, research practice and policy options?

- The book volume, *Social Mobility in Developing Countries: Concepts, Methods and Determinants*, brought together leading scholars from a range of social science disciplines working on a variety of issues related to social mobility.
- Three sets of motivations have guided this joint effort:
 - identifying important knowledge gaps and examining the extent to which these have been (or can be) addressed
 - bringing together innovations and improvements in research practice
 - offering policy advice aimed at enhancing social mobility in developing country settings.

Knowledge Gaps - 1

- The contributions to this volume point to three knowledge gaps in the study of social mobility in developing countries.
- First, **we lack data and comparable measures of social mobility** that provide us with a clear understanding of which countries in the developing world are doing well (and which others are not) by way of achieving intergenerational mobility.
- A second important knowledge gap that needs to be addressed more effectively relates to **gender differences in social mobility** in developing countries.
 - As is pointed out by Luke, and reiterated by Torche and by Vaid in the volume, we know very little about mother–daughter mobility as compared to father–son mobility in low- and middle-income countries.
 - This is a deeply unsatisfactory state of affairs, both because it is one-sided and incomplete, and especially at this time, when an increasing number of women are progressing through secondary schooling and on to university, and female labour force participation has increased sharply in many developing countries.

Knowledge Gaps - 2

- A third critical knowledge gap is related to **our limited understanding of the drivers of social mobility** in developing countries.
- There is a multiplicity of environmental factors that help explain why advancing intergenerational mobility is more challenging in developing than in industrial countries.
- For a poor child born in a slum in Mumbai, Nairobi, or Rio de Janeiro, there can be multiple and simultaneously operating determinants of weak intergenerational mobility, including poor schooling, lack of well-paid jobs, a scarcity of role models in the neighbourhood, and various forms of group-based discrimination.
- Methods commonly used in economists' approach to studying the determinants of intergenerational mobility (such as experimental or quasi-experimental methods) attempt to identify the causal effect of *one* factor relative to others, and these methods are less useful in situations where complex and interactive causes inhibit social mobility

Research Practice-1

- With regard to research practice, three key lessons can be highlighted.
- Firstly, Fields in the volume in the speaks to the broader body of social mobility research and pleads for **greater precision in scholarly work.**
- Answers to whether one country has more social mobility than another, whether social mobility is increasing or falling over time and whether mobility is higher in rural than in urban areas, are often shrouded in ambiguity due to lack of conceptual precision.
- Second, **measures and methods** that have been developed and used to study intergenerational mobility in industrial countries have been applied for the study of often very different low-income countries and contexts without scrutiny of how well these measures could handle these contrasts.

Research Practice -2

- The third practice dividend are **the gains from interdisciplinary conversations.**
- While claims of such gains are regularly encountered and at risk of becoming a trope, the chapters in the volume provide important examples of such value added.
- Another practice dividend from interdisciplinary conversations is the exposure to new ideas and lines of inquiry.

Policy Options - 1

- We recommend six sets of policy supports are recommended that should help make individuals' journeys of social mobility more fulfilling.
- The first three sets of policies **will help raise absolute mobility**; the next three sets are more directly related to relative mobility.
- A first set of policies is needed for bringing about **broad-based human capital investments** — in education, health care, sanitation, etc. Behrman (in the volume) reviews the evidence.
- Second, policies are required that result in **an increase in good jobs and business opportunities**.
- Third, since precarious and volatile livelihoods are characteristic of many developing country contexts, **downward mobility needs to be contained before sustained upward mobility becomes a realistic possibility**.

Policy Options - 2

- A fourth set of policies is required that responds to the concerns arising from Mani and Riley's examination (in the volume) of social networks and role model effects.
- **Social networks** importantly influence mobility prospects, both in tangible ways — via access to opportunities, information about jobs, referrals, etc. — and in intangible ways, by influencing aspirations and cultural capital and by providing role models.
- Fifth, **discrimination will need to be countered directly**. Policies aimed at longer-term attitudinal changes are helpful in this regard.
- As Luke says (in the volume), policies that promote egalitarian views and less-restrictive gender norms among mothers can help bring about greater labour force participation by daughters and daughters-in-law.
- Sixth, and finally, it needs to be remembered that policies to promote social mobility have to be seen as part of a broader suite of **policies for social justice and social cohesion**.
- As Kanbur remarks (in the volume), the concern with social mobility should not result in a reduction of focus on income redistribution, partly because redistribution may be necessary for achieving social mobility objectives like equality of educational outcomes.



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
UNU-WIDER

www.wider.unu.edu

Helsinki, Finland