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Migration Decisions of Rural Households in China: Do Household Demographics and Health Matter?

ULI KLEINWECHTER

University of Hohenheim, Department of Agricultural Policy and Agricultural Markets, Germany

Abstract

Given poverty, land scarcity and limited local off-farm opportunities, migration to coastal provinces plays an important role for the livelihood of rural households in South Western China. In this context, there is a likely interplay between household demographics and health which influence household's migration decisions. While people in the economically active age without dependents in principle can freely decide whether to migrate or not, those with children or parents in need of support are constrained in their choice. Migration of economically active household members, however, is facilitated by a division of labour within the household, with elder people taking care for children in order to allow young couples to migrate. In this regard, the health status of the grandparents' may affect their ability to participate in this kind of division of labour and determine whether they require support themselves, thus again being of crucial importance for the decisions on migration taken by the household. In order to explore the relationship between migration, household demographics and health a series of logistic regression models is applied to a household level dataset from Guizhou province, South Western China. Starting with a set of explanatory variables which capture, among others, numbers of children and elderly in the household as well as grandparents' health status, subsequent likelihood ratio tests are used to stepwise consolidate the model. It is shown that differentiating among children and elderly and taking into account the health status does not contribute to explaining the migration decisions. Rather, it is sufficient to capture the effect of household demographics on migration by the inclusion of the household dependency ratio as a single explanatory variable. It is suggested to check for robustness of the results reverting to the use of a panel dataset.

Keywords: China, Guizhou, health, household demographics, logit model, migration