

# Taking Culture Seriously: Unexplored Aspects of the Migration- Development Nexus

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# Taking Culture Seriously: Unexplored Aspects of the Migration Development Nexus

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Most discussions about the relationship between migration and development suffer from two misguided assumptions. First, they focus too much on the economic at the expense of the socio-cultural. It's as if we just get the money right, and all else will follow. Second, they assume that redressing poverty in immigrant communities and alleviating underdevelopment in the communities migrants come from are two separate goals when, in fact, they are often inextricably linked. Migration takes place in a transnational social field such that immigrant incorporation and migrant activism vis a vis the homeland are two sides of the same coin.

My comments try to redress these weaknesses. First, I suggest a way of "bringing culture back in" to debates about the migration-development equation. Second, I show how thinking culturally elucidates aspects of development normally obscured. I focus on the social aspects of development or on how migration potentially alters the homeland landscape, in both positive and negative ways. I draw on my own fieldwork on Latin American and South Asian migrants in the United States and on selective research by other scholars also working on these questions. My comments are offered in the spirit of defining a research program rather than reporting on one that has already been completed.

Understanding migration as a transnational process brings to light several of its important features. From this perspective, migrants and non-migrants, although separated by physical distance continue to occupy the same socio-political space. Because goods, people, money, and social remittances (ideas, practices, values, and identities that migrants introduce to their homelands) circulate regularly, individuals do not have to move to be affected by the dynamics within this social space. People who have barely visited their national capital, let alone traveled abroad, also learn about and adopt ideas and values from far away. The religious, civic, and political organizations in which they participate also assume new forms and functions in response to their changing constituencies. As a result, rather than seeing immigrant incorporation and enduring homeland involvements as separate processes, they occur simultaneously and mutually reinforce each other.

Looking at migrants and non-migrants transnationally also drives home that

this is a multi-layered as well as a multi-sited field. The horizontal ties between a particular sending community and the urban neighborhood where migrants settle are important. But these must be understood within the context of the broader, vertical ties in which these relationships emerge. For example, if we want to grasp the lives of Salvadorans living in Los Angeles, we must factor in the role of the Salvadoran state and the U.S. government as well as the Salvadoran and U.S. Catholic churches. Similarly, understanding the religious lives of Brazilians in Massachusetts requires looking beyond the connections between specific congregations in Boston and Brazil and placing them in the context of the thick, multi-layered web of regional and national denominational connections that also link these countries.

Finally, seeing migrants and nonmigrants as occupying the same social space also drives home dramatic changes in the meaning of incorporation. The immigrant experience is not a linear, irreversible journey from one membership to another. Rather, migrants pivot back and forth between sending, receiving and other orientations at different stages of their lives. The more their lives are grounded in legal, health care and pension systems on both sides of the border, the more likely it is that their transnational lives will endure (Caglar 2003). Increasing numbers of newcomers will not fully assimilate or remain entirely focused on their homelands but continue to craft some combination of the two (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, Morawska 2003).

### **Images of Culture**

Scholars and policymakers increasingly acknowledge that culture strongly influences development. They tend to treat it, however, as contextual (a dependent variable, i.e. “America’s culture of individualism”) or as a characteristic (a sub-unit of some other independent variable, e.g. a belief system *within* an organization that values collective decision-making). What is actually meant by culture merits further attention.

The notion of culture (or ethnicity) implicit in much early migration scholarship, as a set of unitary shared values, parallels earlier understandings of culture in sociology in general. “Culture” generally referred to either a realm of human activity and set of artifacts that were distinct from the mundane, practical world or to the way of life of a group or a people (Spillman 2002). Culture was shared, discrete, and coherent – we could identify and agree upon the cultural package associated with a particular group. Swidler (1986) critiqued this view, using the culture of poverty argument as an example. Culture, she argued, could not be understood as an underlying set of values that explained behavior, since

surveys found that lower and middle-class respondents espoused the same kinds of values despite their different socioeconomic positions. Instead, she suggested that it was how a group's culture organized its overall patterns of behavior that made the difference. Culture, from this perspective, was a style or set of skills and habits rather than a set of preferences or desires, a toolkit. Because we have a certain set of skills, styles, and know-how that are the tools with which we live, "action is not determined by one's values. Rather action *and* values are organized to take advantage of cultural competences" (Swider 1986:275).

Jeffrey Alexander takes this several steps further. From this perspective, "culture is not a thing but a dimension, not an object to be studied as a dependent variable but a thread that runs throughout, one that can be teased out of, every conceivable social form" (2003:7). He urges us to acknowledge the structural autonomy and causal power of cultural *meanings*. Borrowing from the sociology of science, which sees scientific ideas as "cultural and linguistic conventions as much as results of other, more 'objective' actions and procedures, Alexander urges researchers to recognize the autonomy of culture and to uncouple it analytically from social structure" (2003: 7).

Finally, in a recent paper using cultural approaches to advance the study of poverty and inequality in the U.S., Lamont and Small (2007) argue that using cultural sociological concepts such as "frames," "cultural repertoires," "narratives," "symbolic boundaries," "cultural capital," and "institutions" allows us to get beyond the unproductive culture/structure dichotomy that has so often characterized these debates.

They call our attention to meaning-making or how individuals actually make sense of their everyday lives and the world around them. Individuals and small groups construct their identities and practices from the cultural resources available to them which are, in turn, shaped by the social organization of meaning production and the discursive frameworks which structure these meanings. Again, rather than expecting these to be shared, internally coherent, or transparent, different cultural repertoires are used, and different meanings applied, depending upon the context (Spillman 2002).

Cultural sociology asks migration scholars to take culture seriously and to pay more explicit attention to the dynamics of meaning-making and the construction of boundaries between different groups. It asks us to look not only at the process of adaptation from one culture to another but at what is inside that cultural "black box" and how it changes over time. On the other hand, transnational migration studies complicate cultural sociology by encouraging researchers to move beyond the expectation that the nation is the natural container for social life. Instead, transnational migration

scholarship foregrounds how boundary creation and meaning-making can involve multiple cultural repertoires that transcend national contexts and are available at multiple levels. Transnational migrants combine local, regional, and national cultural elements from both their sending and receiving countries and they do so within the context of global cultural norms and institutions.

Once we recognize that culture plays an integral role in development, where should we look for it and what forms does it take? How can it be used effectively as an integral piece of the development puzzle and what are the costs and benefits implicit in such an approach?

Most development programs treat **culture as a product** -- a material and concrete object, like a dance, a piece of music, folk art, or the tradition of storytelling that is transformed, reinvented, or threatened by migration. Culture is either seen as something to be revived and preserved, resuscitated and reinforced – an unconditional good to be protected at all costs. Or it is seen as impeding development. Particular groups have negative cultural traits that prevent them from learning to work hard, trust strangers, or govern effectively --- the alleged prerequisites of modernity and progress (Harrison and Huntington 2000, Banfield 1958).

This view is problematic for several reasons. First, cultural products are not set in stone. They are not preserved in tact or completely transformed when people move but generally undergo some combination of the two. The power relations surrounding the expression and representation of particular cultural artifacts also change. Even more important, though, is the mistaken understanding of culture as a discrete, packageable whole that can be lifted out and analyzed apart from social relations.

Let me try to suggest a more fruitful approach which treats culture as a dimension of all social relations and forms and, therefore, affects all aspects of development. Patron Saints Day celebrations are one example of a cultural performance profoundly shaped by cultural influences. Many migrants throughout Latin America return to their sending communities for the annual celebration of their Patron Saint. Even if they cannot travel, they often contribute significant time, money, and resources to honor the past, present, and future of their communities on these occasions. In fact, migrants who cannot go home often organize simultaneous celebrations wherever they are. For example, in her research on Mexicans in New York, Liliana Rivera Sanchez (2004) described how a representative of the village saint (its priest) traveled to New York to “attend” migrants’ festivities. By extending the feast of Santiago de Apóstol from Chila de Paz to New York in the early 1990s, the community created new spaces of local belonging which

reached far beyond its boundaries at the same time that it claimed space for itself in New York. By looking at how meaning, narratives, and boundaries are managed during these celebrations, we can see culture at work and the opportunities and challenges it poses for social change.

I am not arguing that these celebrations, in-and-of-themselves, have far-reaching political consequences (although they are deeply political acts). They do serve as a microcosm, though, for understanding how power and resources are negotiated and distributed in transnational social fields. Similar types of negotiations are also enacted at other layers of these fields. In other words, we see comparable negotiations and distributional dynamics taking place at its regional and national levels.

Rather than seeing culture as a product, we should see it as a **process**. When people participate in and perform cultural representations, they also create and reinvent them. Cultural events are sites of boundary work during which communities affirm who they are and enact the boundaries of belonging for their members and for the outside world.

Patron Saints Day celebrations in Latin America are generally sponsored and organized by a *patron* or benefactor, a role associated with great respect and great financial and organizational responsibility. In fact, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in many indigenous communities throughout Mexico were predicated on fulfilling certain collective obligations. In the past, this role generally went to older male residents.

But migration changed all that. For one thing, many senior members have migrated. There are too few men still living at home to sponsor the celebration. As a result, many communities have rewritten their rules so that someone living abroad can be a *patron*, who then delegates the day-to-day responsibilities to a non-migrant relative or friend. Or the community allows younger men to be *patrons* and women to assume ancillary roles with significant responsibility. By so doing, the community signals that its territory extends to include people living in the United States. Membership without residence is not only a possibility, it is a necessity.

The *fiesta patronal* is a performance for outsiders as well as insiders -- the community's representation to itself and to the outside world. New kinds of communities are created through cultural performances (Gil et al. 2005). *La Hora Mixteca*, a program on *Radio Bilingue*, a station serving indigenous people in Mexico and in the southwestern United States, helped create a pan-indigenous community. When listeners heard programming in their own language for the first time, it made them feel that they belonged to Mexico in a way that had not experienced before. By hearing their shared indigeneity

broadcast back to them, they also felt a sense of belonging to a pan-ethnic community that included members in Mexico and the United States. Listening also reinforced generational ties because family members, in Mexico or California, listened ‘together’ (NATC Report 2005).

The *Fiesta Patronal* is also a site where gender norms are redefined. Women are allowed and, in some cases, required to assume roles they were previously excluded from because there are not enough men to go around. This earns them access to power and decision-making circles that had always been off limits. Furthermore, when migrants return to live or visit, they bring different ways of managing gender and family relations with them, shaped by their experiences living abroad. Smith (2005) writes of the tensions around gender that arise between young second generation Mexican American men and women when they visit their ancestral homes. What is considered acceptable behavior in New York is considered inappropriate in Mexico. The brother who never thought twice about his sister going out alone in Manhattan feels he is responsible for regulating her behavior back in Mexico. At least two sets of norms are competing with each other and individuals and communities must find ways to balance between them.

In fact, migrants and non-migrants increasingly manage multiple cultural repertoires, not only around gender but around race, ethnicity, faith, and generation as well. Migration inverts the generational hierarchy imbuing middle-aged men with more power than their elders. When parents become economically dependent on their children, they are under pressure to abide by their children’s wishes and to follow their advice in ways that would have been considered inconceivable before. Not only do migrant children influence how money gets spent, they also influence how nonmigrant family members vote, the religious communities they join or who their children should marry – all things that it was previously up to the older generation to decide.

Moreover, migration forces communities to revisit their narratives about progress and success --- about what the goals of development should be. Since migrants generally make more money than non-migrants, they tend to influence agenda setting more. Their motives for contributing to the community and what they hope to achieve through their participation grow increasingly different from people who stay behind. Migrants see their community as a place to vacation, retire, and eventually die, while non-migrants see it as a place where they still need jobs and health care. Migrant members want to build funeral homes while non-migrant members want to build schools. Migrant members only want young men from the community to play on the village baseball team, regardless of how good they are, because that is how things have always been done. Non-migrants want to hire young men from other communities to play on the team because they are only

interested in winning (Levitt 2001).

Some migrants want to be the benefactor of the Patron Saint Day celebration because they want to give back to their community. Others seek the position as a platform from which to display their enhanced status. They spend so much money trying to make that point that sponsoring the festival grows beyond the means of most non-migrants. As each new *patron* hosts an even more luxurious celebration, villagers' already inflated consumption aspirations grow even more. What native sons and daughters must do to signal their loyalty is beyond what most residents (migrant or not) feel they can or should do. Their worth is measured by their financial contributions rather than by their moral authority or leadership skills. Yet no one seems willing or able to stop this vicious cycle. Toning down the celebration would suggest that the community prospered less than it has led itself to believe or that the benefits of migration do not always outweigh the sacrifices it entails. It can also weaken the community's ability to compete with neighboring villages with which it is often engaged in an ever-escalating battle of "can you top this?"

Technology plays a key role. E-mail, videos, and letters are cultural products and part of the cultural process. Although migrants and non-migrants can be in touch quickly and often, they are not guaranteed equal access or equal participation. In fact, inequality generally increases. As Besserrer (2005) notes, in the case of Radio Bilingue, which broadcasts messages from one family member to another, "The telephone messages aired by radio stations (that connect separated family members) reveal and to some degree, even augment the inequalities in the use of technology, the imperfections in Mixtepequenses' knowledge of their community, and the uncertainty in the way they live their everyday transnational lives." Because not everyone knows about this radio service or how to use it, the line between "the haves" and "have nots" becomes brighter.

Technological innovation can also be a double-edged sword for activists trying to mobilizing across borders. While it certainly aided some aspects of the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front's (FIOB – an NGO for indigenous Oaxacans in the U.S. and Mexico) efforts to organize transnationally, it also exacerbated the gulf between its members. Members in California were much better at using computers and e-mail than their Mexican counterparts. Mexican colleagues could not participate equally in the planning and mobilization process because they were technologically disadvantaged. Training programs to rectify these skill imbalances were put in place.

Understanding culture as process resonates with Appadurai's (2004) idea of **culture as a regime** of norms, power, and status that enables and



constrains behavior. He emphasizes the meanings, scripts, symbols and narratives that make cultural production possible but, at the same time, restrict it because cultural repertoires only contain certain things. The terms of recognition have to be altered for development to occur. Rituals and symbols that mirror those in place but challenge existing arrangements have to be deployed (Levitt and Merry 2008). Moreover, cultural doesn't emerge in a vacuum – the way things have always been done shape what follows.

Decisions about how remittances are distributed and managed brings some of the norms underlying these regimes to the fore. Some migrants send remittances as a form of social insurance. They keep up their relationships with people back home in case things go wrong in the countries where they settle and they have to return. Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (2002) use the term “relativizing” to describe how individuals establish, maintain, or curtail ties to specific family members or how they pursue or neglect blood ties and fictitious kinship. They choose strategically which connections to emphasize and which to let slide based on what they anticipate their needs will be in the future.

How acceptable it is for someone to make these kinds of choices, however, is shaped by the normative regimes in play. In many contexts, it's almost impossible for individuals to feel whole if they are not part of a family or group. Thus, the woman from Gujarat State in India who told me that her actions would still reflect positively or negatively on her family until the day she died. She could not make any decision without thinking first about how it would affect her family's reputation.

In contexts like these, social embeddedness is so thick and dense that individuals cannot make self interested choices without the risk of being ostracized by the group (i.e. Portes' (1993) notion of bounded solidarity). Take the example of Moreno, a middle-aged man who returned to his Dominican village to open a cement factory, one of the few employers in the town. When I asked him about his responsibility to his family members, he said that he would always support his mother but that he was really struggling with what to do about his brother. Although he knew it was difficult, he felt that his brother should “earn his own keep.” Although he knew he would be criticized, it was no longer his responsibility to keep his brother on “the dole.” A Pakistani hi-tech entrepreneur I talked with faced similar issues. He was chastised by his friends in Karachi for not hiring every distant acquaintance who came to him looking for a job.

Doris Sommer (2005) and her colleagues conceptualize **culture as agency**. Art, she argues, has the capacity to ‘interrupt’ or ‘to unblock procedures mired in habitual abuses or indifference in order to get those practices back

on track.’ Art unsettles habits and regimes through ‘defamiliarization’ or the surprise that is elicited by a new artistic technique or encounter. Cultural engagement nudges actors outside their comfort zones and habitual ways of doing and thinking in ways that can lead to positive, purposeful social change. According to Sommer (2005), we are all cultural agents, referring to the small shifts in perspective and practice that turn artists, teachers, and religious and community leaders into the catalysts of collective change. It’s not a question of whether we exercise agency but how self-consciously we do so, she writes, to what end and with what effect?

Throughout the world, creative culture has long been a vehicle for agency. In the United States, as in Brazil, theater improvisations foster collaboration and find dramatic outlets for frustrations that might otherwise fester or explode into violence. Without the “*Teatro Campesino*,” many labor organizers who worked for César Chávez argue, there would be no United Farm Workers’ Union. On the flat backs of pick-up trucks parked just beyond the limit of a landholder’s property, loudspeakers would call pickers to come watch and join the plays that poked fun at bosses and celebrated workers’ solidarity. My colleague Sally Merry and I (2008) also observed NGOs in rural Gujarat in India which used the age-old tradition of street plays to introduce the idea of sexuality rights.

The example of the village *banda* in Mexico is also useful. The *Banda* is not just important during the *fiesta patronal*; it is also an integral part of collective mourning when someone passes away. When listeners grasp that the type of music being played and the kinds of instruments used to play has changed, they also experience their community differently. Incorporating these new elements signals to them that something has shifted on the margins – that who they are has expanded in some small way to include something new. Moreover, when communities need to ask musicians from neighboring villages to fill in for the migrants who are absent, neighbors cooperate where they may have competed in the past.

In some cases, these activities plant the seeds of collective action around other kinds of issues. The Tamejavi festival, a multicultural celebration held in Fresno each year, has created bridges between immigrant groups and between immigrants and Anglos. Founders created the festival to foment culturally diverse networks of immigrants and refugees living in the San Joaquin Valley. Leaders claim that working together to organize these public events helps immigrants realize that they have a lot despite their differences. Although many have had few prior contacts with people outside their communities, crosscutting alliances sometimes emerge based on gender, age, and religious commonalities (NATC 2005).

But culture is also about **profit**. We should not forget the underlying economic interests that shape cultural enactments nor the economic benefits that flow from them. The markets engendered by transnational migration build and expand upon already-well-developed ethnic and nostalgia markets in many immigrant communities. A successful *fiesta patronal* requires all the trappings, including costumes, instruments souvenirs, and food. Migrants from the village of San Juan de Bautista in Mexico, for example, organized celebrations in Arvin, California to honor their patron saint. The saint had to be blessed by a priest so it could be transformed from “merchandise” into a holy object. Now, the saint has acquired U.S. citizenship and requires papers to travel back and forth across the border (NATC 2005).

Even places get marketed. One of the fastest growing religious shrines in Mexico, for example, is Santa Ana de Guadalupe in Jalisco State, believed to be the birthplace of Mexico’s Patron Saint of Migrants, St. Toribio. It was not economic development that transformed this former backwater into a thriving community but the many tourists who make pilgrimages there each year (Levitt 2007).

The potential for profit is not lost on the State. Governments produce their own versions of tradition for public consumption and worldwide dissemination, which often differ significantly from the community’s account. For instance, the *Chilena*, originally considered a dance of the poor, became legitimate and marketable after it was appropriated by the Mexican state (Revilla López 2000). The state, for its part, pushed a commercial, tourist spectacle, displaying the splendor of Mexico to its urban residents and foreigners. *Grupos Chilenos* and *technobandas*, however, used the form to invoke a strong sense of membership among Mixtecos, whether they were born in the community or not. Because *Chilenas* do not consist of a fixed set of elements, musicians could incorporate new instruments and rhythms, producing an alternative national self-representation that was outside the reach of the state.

Finally, an important piece of understanding the relationship between culture and development is to unpack **cultural diffusion**. Cultural diffusion is key in transmitting and maintaining the collective experiences, values, and memories underlying transnational identities. Migration engenders several kinds of diffusion – the migration of ideas themselves; the migration of people and things between different geographies, cultural toolkits, and historical periods; and the migration of identities between nations and between secular and spiritual domains.

In *The Transnational Villagers* (2001), I coined the term *social remittances* to call attention to the ideas and behaviors migrants exported back to their sending communities. There are at least four types of social remittances -- normative structures, systems of practice, identities and social capital. Social remittance exchanges occur when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin; when non-migrants visit those in the receiving country; or through exchanges of letters, videos, cassettes, e-mails, and telephone calls. They are distinct from, but often reinforce and are reinforced by, other forms of global cultural diffusion.

In some ways, this conceptualization now seems to me to come up short. Remittance exchanges do not move along neat protected train tracks linking one station to another. Instead, they are like the elements in organic systems which bump up against each other within and between systems. These exchanges are not confined to flows between sending and receiving countries but occur between all sites and levels of transnational social spaces, moving in all directions.

A variety of carriers disseminate culture directly and indirectly in transnational social fields. Some cultural products are communicated during face-to-face interactions; others travel across several "degrees of separation," thus increasing the likelihood that they will be diluted or changed along the way. In some cases, information is purposefully transmitted; in others, receivers are randomly exposed to new ideas. Some carriers are merely **transporters**. They convey information without being transformed by it or transforming it, reporting rather than adapting. Such is the person who tells those at home that women and men pray side by side at the mosque in the United States but does not want to herself. Others are **transplanters**. They convey ideas and practices they themselves have adapted and encourage others to do so. This is the person who tells everyone that men and women pray together and tries to emulate this in a new context. Still others are **translators**. They convey and interpret information so that it is suited to a new context. They problematize or define the identities and interests of others as consist with their own, thereby convincing them to accept their definitions. This is the person who tells about men and women praying side by side but recommends that in Pakistan they pray on separate sides of the room. Often, what they impart is not an exact replica of the old or new but a hybrid.

### **Where to Go from Here**

Thus far, I've suggested ways to think about culture and how it shapes the relationship between migration and development. In this section, I suggest ways in which cultural factors could be integrated into development planning

and programs to heighten their effectiveness.

**Rethinking Space** - The socio-cultural and geographic spaces that migrants and non-migrants occupy are not nationally bounded. The catchment area for development programs and policy needs to reflect the transnational socio-cultural spaces in which people actually live or in which they imagine themselves. This means paying attention to how migrants themselves define the landscapes of their daily lives rather than superimposing a map onto them. Much research suggests that this terrain encompasses a multi-sited, ever expanding landscape of destinations between which migrants move.

This is also a multi-layered landscape. The trans-local connections linking migrants throughout Mexico and the United States are produced and reinforced by social and economic flows between regional, national, and supranational entities. Development within that space is not just a matter of getting the local connections right but of using the resources, scripts, norms, and organizational arrangements circulating at other layers of transnational social fields. Changing gender norms, for example, result from migration-driven changes and from the narratives and scripts produced by international aid agencies and the United Nations. The same women who push for new social roles do this because of what they learn from their migrant sisters and because there is an International Women's Day.

**Redefining Outcomes** – Those who live in transnational social fields manage at least two, often conflicting, cultural repertoires. They are also trying to make sense of multiple images of progress and success. For instance, the ways in which people think about race in Latin America and in the United States are almost opposites. You are a person of color in the United States when you have one drop of black blood while the slightest link to whiteness makes it possible to ascend the racial hierarchy in Latin America. How do we classify race, and its associated socioeconomic concomitants, when people move between two racial classificatory systems?

Similarly, those whose lives cross borders earn their living and measure their success with respect to two different socioeconomic ladders. They may move up with respect to both, move up with respect to the homeland and downward with respect to the host-land, or they may experience downward mobility in both settings. Where should class be measured? How do we make sense of the immigrant who receives government assistance toward their housing costs in the United States at the same time that they are building a house back home? What about people who can't pay their rent because they have to send so much money back each month? In such cases, both remaining poor and getting ahead and where one locates oneself in the class hierarchy are

influenced by home and host-country factors. Poverty is a transnational problem that must be measured and remediated transnationally.

**Getting the Institutions Right** - More and more, governments and the nonprofit sector recognize that class, education and health are produced by factors at work in and outside national borders. But policy still fails to reflect that reality. New institutional arrangements are needed that more accurately reflect how migrants and nonmigrants actually live their lives. Some examples already in place include:

- **Extending Sovereignty** – Some states formally or informally allow other states to act within their territory. Such is the case of the *matricula consular*, an identity card issued by the Mexican government to help migrants without social security cards to get a driver's license or open bank accounts. In 2004, more than 100 cities, 900 police departments, 100 financial institutions and 13 states accept the cards as proof of identity.
- **Fostering Partnerships** - Cooperative arrangements have emerged between sending and receiving-country education and health care providers to encourage record sharing, reciprocal credentialing, and joint training programs. The French Aid agency, for instance, established a program allowing immigrants to set up special bank accounts in France that their relatives could draw upon to pay for health care costs in Mali.
- **Taking Advantage of Non-Resident Skills** – Governments recognize that many migrants who study abroad will not return home but that they are never-the-less willing to contribute to some of the talents and skills they acquired abroad. The government of Taiwan, for example, invites emigrants who have completed their PhDs in the United States to participate in meetings, compete for fellowships, and use research facilities in Taiwan in the hope that they will train Taiwanese researchers and engineers in the process.
- **Professional Associations** – Some governments actively support emigrant professional organizations abroad. The Thai government, for example, maintains active consular contacts with associations of expatriate Thai health care providers and professionals.
- **Education Programs** - Cooperative arrangements between sending and receiving country educational institutions are also emerging. Some of these work informally, like the Dominican Ministry of Education, which sends materials to curriculum specialists in New York City or

the teacher exchange and cultural orientation programs that take place each summer. Some are more complex, like the agreement between Cambridge College in Massachusetts and the Brazilian government that the BA degree the College awards will be valid in both countries.

- Hometown Associations – Hometown associations have been at the forefront of transnational community development. They emerged in response to changing community needs. Some initiatives aim to strengthen migrants' capacity to represent their interests on both sides of the border. While the Citizen's Councils established by the Brazilian Consulate were created as forums for airing community problems, they also gave rise to a more organized community that could negotiate more effectively with officials in Brazil and in the United States

**The Target Population** - Transnational migration creates at least three distinct categories of experience – those who migrate, those who stay behind but receive support from migrants, and people who don't move and receive no outside support.

Clearly, this third group is the most at risk. Not only do they not reap the benefits of migration, they live in a cultural context where the standard of living that has become the norm is beyond their reach. Sending states' motivation to address the causes of migration diminishes with each remittance transfer. The unequal distribution of migration's rewards also creates a disjuncture between the needs of the individual and the group. Individuals may have more money to go to school or to get health care but this doesn't necessarily translate into parallel collective improvements in education and health care provision. This disconnect, between the better-off individual and the perpetually needy group, also poses dilemmas for resource distribution.

**Taking Faith Seriously** – Religion is clearly a significant force in the lives of many migrants, and religious institutions are potential sites of enormous power and resources. Religious social movements, writes Christian Smith (1996), bring unique assets to the table, including the sacred legitimation of activism; moral imperatives for love, justice, and freedom; powerful motivating icons, rituals, songs, testimonies, and oratory; and ideologies demanding self-discipline, sacrifice, and altruism. Religious groups come with built-in organizational resources, including trained and experienced leadership; funds; congregated participants and solidarity incentives; and pre-existing communication channels, authority structures and deviance-monitoring mechanisms. Although religious groups generally remain on the

margins of the development process, they represent powerful, though admittedly sometimes problematic, potential partners.

**Development, But at Whose Expense?** - Migrants make major contributions to national development. This fact is not lost on sending-country governments, multilateral institutions, or the foundation community; in fact, they all seem to be turning to remittances as the answer to their development prayers. But designing development strategies based on the promise of future remittances is dangerous. For one thing, it lets states off the hook, allowing them to ignore migration's root economic and social causes. For another, it disproportionately burdens migrants, saddling them with social and financial responsibilities they may not always want or be able to fulfil.

Moreover, as argued above, migrants and nonmigrants' interests diverge over time. Migrants want their homelands to remain as they were before they left. They want a place where they can vacation and retire. Who should speak for the village or the nation? Governments walk a difficult line between responding to migrant demands so that they will remain active in their homeland but not at non-migrants' expense.

**The Second Generation** - Transnational activism is primarily a first generation phenomenon. The children of immigrants will not be involved in their ancestral homes in the same ways and with the same intensity as their parents. But whether or not individuals forge or maintain some kind of transnational connection often depends on the extent to which they were brought up in a transnational space. Children raised in households permeated each day by ideas, practices, and people from afar have been socialized into a set of relationships and skills they can activate at any time, if they so chose. The desire and ability to engage in transnational practices naturally ebbs and flows at different phases of the lifecycle and in different contexts. At the point of marriage or childrearing, the same individual who was uninterested in her ancestral home becomes interested when she wants to find a spouse or values to teach her children. The children of Gujaratis who go back to India to find marriage partners, the second generation Pakistanis who begin to study Islam when their first child is born, or the Chinese American business school students who specialize in Asian banking are doing just that. At critical junctures in their lives, the children of immigrants claim what were latent identities and skills, becoming transnational actors in the process.

**Cultural Resonance** – Culture is part of the development diagnosis. Interventions will be more effective if culture is considered when problems are framed, leaders are chosen, and solutions are designed and implemented.



This implies, according to Rao and Walton (2004), that generalizable best practices are difficult to come by because they must be developed in response to specific local conditions. Cultural resonance also implies a different time horizon. Institutions that assume projects can produce rewards within a short timeframe do not bring about lasting social change or enable learning by doing. They create unrealistic expectations which set projects up to fail before they even begin.

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