

Raúl Delgado Wise<sup>\*</sup> and Humberto Márquez Covarrubias<sup>\*\*</sup>

## The Migration and Development Mantra in Mexico:

### Toward a New Analytical Approach

Paper presented at the conference on 'Transnationalisation and Development(s): Towards a North-South Perspective', Center for Interdisciplinary Research, Bielefeld, Germany, May 31 - June 01, 2007

COMCAD Arbeitspapiere – Working Papers  
No. 20, 2007

\* Director of the Development Studies Doctoral Program of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas and executive director of the International Migration and Development Network. Visiting senior researcher, Danish Institute for Development Studies. E-mail: rdwise@estudiosdeldesarrollo.net.

\*\* Professor of the Development Studies Doctoral Program of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas. E-mail: hmarquez@estudiosdeldesarrollo.net.

Delgado Wise, Raúl, and Humberto Márquez Covarrubias: *The Migration and Development Mantra in Mexico: Toward a New Analytical Approach*, Bielefeld: COMCAD, 2007  
(Working Papers – Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development; 20)

The COMCAD Working Paper Series is intended to aid the rapid distribution of work in progress, research findings and special lectures by researchers and associates of COMCAD. Papers aim to stimulate discussion among the worldwide community of scholars, policymakers and practitioners. They are distributed free of charge in PDF format via the COMCAD website.

The opinions expressed in the papers are solely those of the author/s who retain the copyright. Comments on individual Working Papers are welcomed, and should be directed to the author/s.

University of Bielefeld  
Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD)  
Postfach 100131  
D-33501 Bielefeld  
Homepage: <http://www.comcad-bielefeld.de>

## Abstract

The relationship between migration and development is a topic of growing interest among international organizations. Although there are some variations, those organizations see remittances as an essential resource for the development of the migrant-sending countries. We argue that this view, on which most related public policies are based, distorts the notion of development and obscures the root causes that drive the current dynamics of labor migration. Using Mexico's experiences as our reference point, we suggest that the phenomenon must be analyzed from the viewpoint of the political economy of development, giving consideration to three interrelated key dimensions: regional economic integration, national development models, and social agents. We reach the conclusion that in the context of the regional integration molded by NAFTA, the dynamics of migration to the United States have mushroomed and socioeconomic dependence on remittances in Mexico has deepened. That situation demands a radical change in public policies on migration and development.

**Keywords:** migration and development, remittance-based development model, labor exports, Mexico–United States Migratory System, NAFTA.

## Introduction

International organizations, led by the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank, are pursuing an international political agenda in the areas of migration and development. The basis for this position is that remittances sent home by migrants can promote the local, regional and national development in the countries of origin. By extension remittances are recognized as being an indispensable source of foreign exchange for providing macroeconomic stability and alleviating the ravages caused by such insidious phenomena as poverty. At the same time, the Mexican government is pursuing an erratic policy for migration and development implemented by means of a handful of programs that are unconnected and decontextualized vis-à-vis the complexity of development problems (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2005).

For Mexico, as for other countries that export large numbers of migrants, the great paradox of international migration and development policy is that it provides for no substantial change in the principles that underpin neoliberal globalization or in the specific way in which neoliberal policies are applied in the countries of origin. At most they offer superficial strategies related to the migration phenomenon but not to development, such as the need to lower the cost of transferring remittances or the promotion of financial support instruments to enable the use of remittances for microprojects, with very limited impact in terms of development. In contrast, in the specific case of Mexico, it is clear that the country is designing no coherent or properly contextualized policies for migration and development that could serve as part of an alternative development model and a new form of regional economic integration capable of reducing the socioeconomic asymmetries that exist between Mexico and the United States and of containing —or at least reducing— the burgeoning migratory dynamic that currently exists.

Our argument is that the *remittance-based development model* is not the only one in play in the world, but it is certainly the most regressive (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2006b). The peculiarity of this model is that it is not designed to foster substantial socioeconomic change in the communities and regions of migrant origin, nor to set down roots in the sending country. Instead, with specific reference to migration from Mexico to the United States, it seeks: (1) to deepen the process of asymmetric regional economic integration based on exports of Mexican labor (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2006a); (2) to encourage the neoliberal export-led “development” model in place in Mexico through the contribution made to macroeconomic stability by remittances; and (3) to ensure, in the final instance, a level of governance

and to offer a “human face” to counter the climate of social unsustainability, labor precarization, and productive disarticulation prevailing in the country.

The theoretical approach used in this paper emphasizes the political economy of development, centering its attention on the role of migrant labor within the North American regional economic bloc and assessing remittances as a component, largely equivalent to wages, used for the subsistence of workers who represent a relative surplus population and who are forced to enter the crossborder job market under conditions of labor precarization and social exclusion. This outlook embraces contributions made by several theoretical approaches in casting light on the relationship between migration and development in the search for reconstructing a comprehensive, multidimensional view.<sup>1</sup>

This document is divided into five sections: The first offers a brief overview of current migration and development models found in different socioeconomic and geographical contexts around the world. The second describes the labor export-led model installed in Mexico under the neoliberal aegis and in the context of NAFTA. Section three examines how this model leads to the remittance-based development model, which serves as the framework for most public policies in that area. The fourth section briefly describes the emergence, from within the problematics of development, of the collective or organized migrant. Finally, as a conclusion, it proposes a series of general guidelines toward the creation of an alternative agenda for migration and development in the context of economic integration between Mexico and the United States.

## Migration and development models

Most studies dealing with the relationship between international migration and development focus on the former element, as if migration were an independent variable and the development perspectives of the countries of origin depended on migrants’ resources and initiatives.

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that most studies of international migration reflect the concerns of those countries that receive migrants: assimilation/integration, security, wage differentials, etc. In countries of origin, studies into demographic dynamics, remittance flows, ethnography, cultural impacts, and other topics predominate. In turn, development studies do not seriously address the problem of migration, except as some form of secondary or external factor. In contrast, most of the studies addressing relations between migration and development have tended to focus on the local, community, or regional level, overemphasizing the role of remittances, offering a limited view of development, and neglecting the transnational nature of the phenomenon and, more importantly, the macrosocial variables that shape the migratory system (Delgado [Wise and Márquez, 2006a](#)).

Additionally, the contributions of migrants to the receiving countries tend to be hidden, neglected, and underestimated. Within that analytical scheme two broad and apparently conflicting approaches can be identified:

1. *The vicious circle.* Migration and development are dealt with as antithetical concepts, particularly in connection with South–North labor migration. From that angle, the migration phenomenon is seen as unable to induce development dynamics in the areas from which migrants emerge; instead, it is associated with adverse effects, such as inflation, productive dearticulation, reduced economic activities, and depopulation, which in turn lead to more migration. Rather than a theoretical model of migration and development, these are diagnoses that describe, from different angles, the trend that has historically dominated that relationship in countries and regions with high levels of migration. In this regard, mention could be made of authors such as Papadimitriou (1998), Delgado Wise (2000), and many others.
2. *The virtuous circle.* In mature migratory processes, with consolidated social networks and migrant organizations, the diaspora is believed to be in a position to assist, albeit in a limited way, local and regional development. This perspective stands on the limited margins for a degree of social development that neoliberal policies allow within countries of migrant origin. The approach covers a broad range of authors and analytical perspectives — some of which stand in contrast to each other — that emphasize remittances and/or migrant organizations. Because of their political influence, at the forefront stand those international agencies with an interest in promoting post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism “with a human face,” such as the World Bank (2005), the Inter-American Development Bank (2000), and the United Nations (2006). Secondly there are those authors who have developed an outlook that is closer to the interests of migrant society, in an approach that could be called “transnationalism from below” and that emphasizes the role of migrant organizations as potential subjects of regional and local development (Moctezuma, 2005; García Zamora, 2005; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).

However, given the analytical complexity of the relationship between migration and development, there is a need to undertake studies that go beyond the confines of that analytical scheme, which has the migratory phenomenon as its starting point, and take up a position on the other side of the equation — in other words, the macroprocesses of development. This alternative analytical approach sees migration as an aspect of development problematics

and visualizes development as an analytical field where the structural dynamics and strategic practices of social agents are deployed at the international, national, and regional levels.

From this perspective, international experience can identify — in a very schematic way and with the only purpose of showing the possibility of alternative modalities of relationship — at least three different forms of migration and development by applying three analytical dimensions: (i) regional economic integration, (ii) the national development model, and (iii) the role of migrants in local, regional, and crossborder development (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2006b):

1. *Economic integration promoting the development of countries of origin.* In a context of nonasymmetric regional economic integration that promotes cooperation schemes that lead to the development of the least developed countries with supplementary funds, labor-exporting countries can largely resolve their socioeconomic backwardness and also evolve from being exporters of migrant labor to become countries that host immigrants from countries outside the regional bloc. This is case with countries such as Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Italy within the context of the European Union (EU) (Wihtol de Wenden, 1999). It should also be noted, however, that the EU's experience also involves relationships of asymmetrical integration with non-Union countries that are associated with large waves of undocumented immigration under conditions of labor precarization. The equation that explains this model is as follows:

*Compensatory economic integration (based on cooperation for development) → National development → Reconversion of the migratory pattern leading to growing immigration flows*

2. *State-led development in countries that export labor.* The State designs a national development strategy with a significant component of education, high-level human resource training, scientific and technological innovation, and public and private investment in strategic areas (Amsden, 1989; Kim, 2000). Although migration is not a central element, it is included in the national development strategy with a view to return flows and human resource training. As a result, as the process of endogenous development targeting the international market develops, the migration problem is resolved when the country of origin turns into a destination for migrants, as clearly shown by the case of South Korea. Note, however, that this case took place under particular historic conditions — the cold war in Asia — that favored the progress of

the Korean development strategy in its initial or launch phases. The formula that describes this case is:

*State-led development strategy* → *National development* →  
*creation of a national innovation system* → *Reconversion of*  
*the migratory pattern leading to growing immigration flows*

3. *Remittance-based development.* Most labor-exporting countries do not have coherent national development strategies; in contrast, they have been subjected to the structural adjustment policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank and they have placed some of their development expectations — particularly at the local or regional levels — on the contributions that migrants can make through remittances. These same resources, at the macro level, serve as (i) a source of external income to help swell national accounts, and (ii) a support for social stability, by mitigating poverty and marginalization and offering an escape value in light of the constraints of the local, regional, and national labor markets (RIMyD, 2005). This model — found with some variants in countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Philippines, and Morocco<sup>2</sup> — is in reality a perversion of the idea of development that offers no prospects for the future. Its formula, following a reconstruction of how the model has function taking as the Mexican (case as shown in the following sections), is:

*Migration* → *Remittances* → *“Socioeconomic stability”* →  
*Deepening underdevelopment* → *Growing asymmetries be-*  
*tween sending and receiving countries* → *More migration* →  
*More dependence on remittances*

With reference to the remittance-based development model, international agencies — World Bank (2005), IDB (2000), and others — have set out an agenda of policies for migration and development that centers its attention on the role of remittances in the development of countries of origin. In most cases, however, the predominant outlook on immigration involves se-

---

<sup>2</sup> There are variants of this model: State-led model (Philippines, which has been officially conceived of within the State-discourse as a nation of “workers for the world”) or laissez faire model (Mexico-neoliberal).



curity, human rights, and managing migration. The development problem of the sending countries is basically seen as fighting poverty. Thus, by emphasizing security and remittances over international cooperation, the policies address only the manifestations of migration and not its root causes. Five principles lay behind the misleading promotion of the remittance-based development model:

- *Management of migration.* From a geostrategic perspective, achieving governance over migratory flows is a concern of all migrant-receiving developed countries, in line with their security agendas and the organization of regional economic blocs.
- *Remittances as an instrument of development.* In the absence of a true policy favoring the development of underdeveloped countries, which are currently the largest sources of emigrants, the idea adopted is that migrants themselves are generators of resources — remittances — which can be used to catalyze development in their places of origin.
- *Financial democratization.* The global volume of remittances represents an attractive market for financial capital and, at the same time, provides marginalized sectors with banking services. Remittance-funded savings and credit schemes are proposed for leveraging development processes.
- *The economic empowerment of the poor.* Remittances can serve as an instrument or motor of development, since it is assumed that the potential multiplier effect of remittances awards the poor some degree of economic power.
- *Training of human capital.* Faced with an uncontrollable migratory flow, sending countries can improve their education and technical training systems so labor migrants can find better job opportunities. In turn, the possibilities for migrant return<sup>3</sup> open up the possibility of employing qualified workers in their places of origin.

## Basis for Mexico's cheap labor export-led model

The way in which Mexico entered the orbit of U.S. capitalism under neoliberalism and, most

---

<sup>3</sup> In most cases, return has not been incorporated as part of a state policy on migration and development.

particularly, in the context of NAFTA is fundamental in understanding the model of “development” adopted in the country. As has been documented elsewhere, what is in place in Mexico, contrary to what its progress along the secondary-exporting path would indicate — i.e., the establishment of a successful model of manufactured exports — is a model based on exports of cheap labor (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2005, and Delgado Wise Cypher, 2005). This model, which is crucial to the U.S. productive restructuring process, comprises three inter-related mechanisms that, taken together, indicate the asymmetrical integration of the country’s economy with that of the United States:

1. *The maquiladora industry*, made up of assembly plants and involving a strategy of productive relocation led by large U.S. corporations in order to take advantage of low labor costs in Mexico. The result for the country is a very low level of integration with the domestic economy and, in addition, a further dismantling of its productive apparatus.
2. *Disguised maquila*, taken as meaning manufacturing plants with productive processes that are more complex than maquila assembly operations but that operate under the same temporary import regime as maquiladoras, as occurs in the automobile and electronics sectors.

It should be noted that maquila and disguised maquila share two characteristics: (a) they are practically devoid of productive links — both upstream and downstream — to the rest of the national productive apparatus, and (b) they are subject to intense processes of labor precarization, with wages at around 1/10 those of manufacturing sector wages in the United States in maquiladoras, or 1/7 those levels in disguised maquila. Due to their high levels of imported components (between 80% and 90% of the total export value), their contribution to Mexican economy is basically restricted to the wage earnings — in other words, the value of the labor incorporated into the exports. This means that what is occurring is the *indirect exportation of labor* or, alternatively, the embodied exportation of the Mexican work force without requiring the workers to leave the country (Tello, 1996). This is a crucial conceptual element that demystifies the purported orientation of Mexican exports toward manufactured goods and that reveals retrograde movement in the export platform.

3. *Labor migration*, which involves the mass exodus of Mexicans to the United States, as a result of the constrained size and precarization of the Mexican formal labor market and the process of neoliberal integration of the Mexican economy with that of the U.S.

In light of those broad facts, if indirect exports of labor are added to the *direct exportation of the work force* through labor migration, the true makeup of Mexico's exports is revealed. This is the basis for our characterization of the current model of export growth as *the cheap labor export-led model*.

## The emergence of the remittance-based development model in Mexico

In Mexico, the remittance-based development model is a byproduct of the labor export-led process in effect under the aegis of Mexico's economic integration with the United States (Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2006a). The main goal of this integration is to assist the productive restructuring process underway since the 1980s, and thereby strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. capitalism on the current international stage. It is based on series of unequal trading relations that exacerbates the asymmetries existing between the two countries and that, for the same reason, provides no mechanisms for promoting the development of Mexico, much less any form of complementary support for the high-migration areas that are currently net suppliers of cheap workers. In this regard, NAFTA has undeniably played a role as a catalyst of migratory flows and not as a catalyst of international cooperation for development, as promised by the treaty promoters.

The model for Mexico-U.S. integration based on the cheap labor export-led model has created a binational job market that enables the United States to supply itself with sizable contingents of Mexican workers to meet its labor needs and demands. Ignoring the workers employed by maquiladoras and concealed maquilas, since NAFTA came into force the *migrant factory* has exported almost 4 million Mexicans to the United States and, by the end of the Fox administration, it is estimated that the figure will have surpassed 7 million (Rodríguez, 2005). The privileged mechanism of this buoyant industry is the creation of a reserve army of workers at the disposal of the U.S. economy, the training costs of which are mostly borne by Mexican society. In the United States there is a system of worker exploitation in place, based on the increased flexibility and precarization of migrant workers under which, in most cases, they acquire undocumented status and are highly devalued and, as indicated in the previous section, they are assigned to a variety of occupations associated with industrial restructuring.

Another way in which migration has an impact on the economic sphere takes place within the so-called "migration industry," taken as meaning the chain of activities with both direct and indirect links to international migration in the United States and Mexico. In addition to its impact on families, migration fuels a series of related activities that affect local and regional

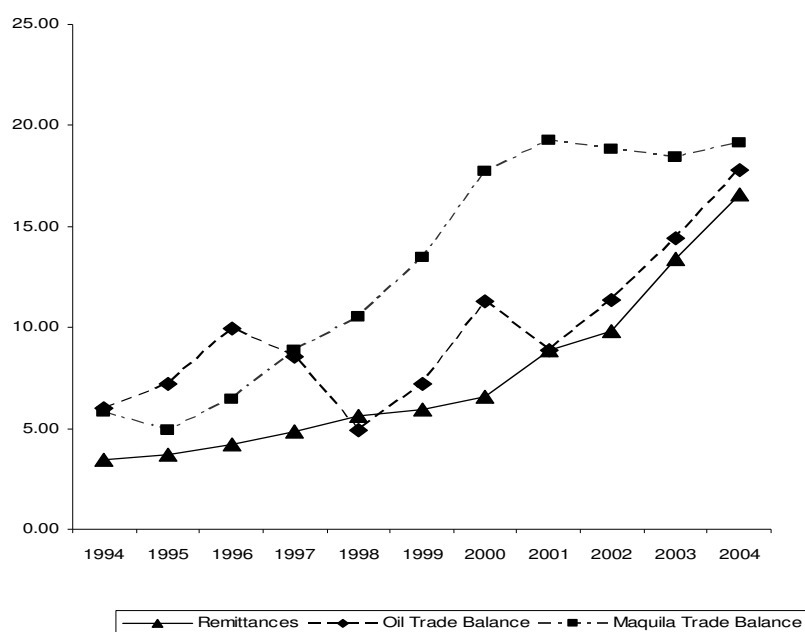
economies. At the macro level, several companies benefit from the demand for goods and services catalyzed by remittances: sending and receiving those remittances, telecommunications, transportation, tourism, and the “paisano market.” Given the scant entrepreneurial development of migrants, the migration industry is mostly run by large multinational companies, particularly those of the receiving countries — Western Union, Money Gram, AT&T, City Bank, Continental, American Airlines, Wall-Mart, etc. — and, to a lesser extent, in the sending countries: Telmex, Mexicana, Cemex, etc. In addition, small and medium-sized businesses have emerged, such as travel agencies and currency exchange bureaux. At the places of origin, remittances reorient consumption patterns toward the purchase of U.S. products and, at the destination points, they encourage the domestic market through the growing purchasing power of the migrants (in 2003, their incomes totaled USD \$272bn), which is still a part of the machinery whereby the asymmetries are reproduced and the international status quo is maintained (Guarnizo, 2003). In sum, there is a broad range of economic activities at the points of origin and destination alike that are caught up in the logic of neoliberal globalization but that nevertheless benefit the receiving country the most — in this case, the United States.

On a more general level, the implications of the cheap labor export-led model for Mexican economy and society can be summarized under four broad headings:

1. *The unleashing of deaccumulation processes within the Mexican economy.* Exports from maquiladoras and disguised maquila imply *net transfers of revenues* to the U.S. economy; this reveals a new form of dependence, one that is more severe than those foreseen by the ECLAC’s structuralist theory and the theory of dependence.
2. *The transfer of the production costs of the exported labor.* For Mexico labor migration means a growing loss of human resources that leads to the abandonment of productive activities, the squandering of the money spent training and reproducing those workers, and, to a certain extent, the displacement of qualified labor in relative terms.
3. *The dismantling of a large proportion of Mexico’s productive apparatus.* The collateral costs derived from the institutional policies intended to promote and maintain the labor export-led model have provoked an extensive dismantling of production intended for the domestic market. At least 40 productive chains in the Mexican small and medium-sized business sector have been destroyed following the reorientation of the economy toward overseas markets (Cadena, 2005).
4. *The critical dependence on remittances for the socioeconomic stability of Mexico.* For Mexico’s macroeconomy, remittances are the most dynamic source of foreign ex-

change and the mainstay of the balance of trade, together with oil and the maquiladora sector, although the dynamism of the oil industry is unlikely to be maintained and the maquiladora business has stagnated (see Figure 1). At the same time, remittances represent a source of family subsistence. Conapo (2004b) estimates there are 1.6 million households that receive remittances (8% of the country's total), and for 47% of those remittances are the main source of income. Family remittances are primarily channeled into satisfying basic needs, including health and education, and a surplus of not more than 10% for saving or small-scale investment in housing, land, livestock, and commercial undertakings. One of the main functions of family remittances has been to act as a palliative against the problems of poverty (Rodríguez, 2005); this does not mean, however, that they can be seen as substitutes for public policies promoting socioeconomic development.

**Figure 1. Mexico: Importance of remittances to the balance of trade**



Source: Banxico

Structurally, the labor export-led model is a key component in the neoliberal machine. With the decomposition of the Mexican economy, that model leads to the remittance-based development model, as migration displaces maquiladoras and disguised maquilas as the central

element in economic dynamics. In that way, the model can be said to acquire its purest or plainest form.

Mexico follows the remittances-based development model, in that it does not have a comprehensive, sustainable policy for migration and development. The three main programs that supposedly tackle the causes of migration — Contigo, NAFTA, and the Partnership for Prosperity (CONAPO, 2004a) — are directed in the opposite direction from development and do not tackle the root-causes of rising migration. Indeed, Contigo is nothing more than a collection of assistance programs focusing on extreme poverty, NAFTA has consolidated itself as the central point for the asymmetrical economic integration of Mexico to the USA, and the Partnership for Prosperity has evolved into the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America — in other words, a geopolitical security agenda in accordance with the interests of the United States.

Mexico's migration policies follow an underlying logic of adaptation through unconnected programs geared toward addressing partial effects related to the effects of migration. The government's basic aim has been to ensure that migration passively fulfills its functions vis-à-vis macroeconomic balance and social stability. The current programs can be classified into six categories:

- i. *Human rights.* Protective measures aimed at covering certain aspects of migrants' human rights, such as the Beta Groups, the Paisano Program, consular registrations (MCAS), and expanding the network of consulates itself.
- ii. *Transnational ties.* Identity-strengthening around the concept of Mexican communities abroad, which led to the creation of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME), which partially covers several areas: ties, education, and health.
- iii. *Political rights.* The promotion of citizens' rights at the binational level, based on the 1996 reforms regarding the non-surrender of Mexican nationality and the approval of extremely limited voting rights for Mexicans abroad in 2005.
- iv. *Social development with collective remittances.* The Three-for-One Program is an example of negotiation involving a "bottom-up" transnationalism for the pursuit of socially beneficial projects; in addition, while not a stated goal of the program, it promotes binational organization among migrants. Because of its origins, this program illustrates the clash between two views of "solidarity": a neoliberal one (pursued by the government) and a community-based one (promoted by the migrants).

- v. *Remittance receipts.* Reduced transfer costs and the financial use of remittances, through competition and the recent initiative to incorporate additional users into the formal banking system, particularly through the National Savings and Financial Services Bank (BANSEFI) and the People's Network.
- vi. *Investment of remittances.* The productive use of remittances, leading to a small series of individualistic and disperse productive projects, difficult to conceive of as a form of local or regional development. This is the case with the Invest in Mexico program of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Nacional Financiera (Nafin).

Although the cheap labor export-led model and its by-product, the remittance-based development model, are complementary and useful for the expansion of the U.S. economy and of Mexico's socioeconomic stability, there are also indications of its *unsustainability*. Migration from Mexico to the United States cannot be taken as an inexhaustible source of cheap labor given the growing trend toward *depopulation* that already affects 34% of Mexican municipalities (INEGI, 2006). This is compounded by the dilemma posed by the extreme exploitation of workers and the upswing in poverty and social marginalization, which serves as a breeding ground for potential social and security conflicts, just at a time when international agencies, led by the UN, are calling for efforts toward attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

## The problem of downward social integration and the emergence of the collective migrant

The largest minority of the U.S. population is that segment called "Hispanic" or "Latino," which accounts for 40.4 million people (14% of the total population). Of this group, people of Mexican origin account for 66%; 40% of them were born in Mexico, with the remainder being first- or second-generation immigrants or more distantly descendents. Although historically the Mexican immigrant population was concentrated in a handful of U.S. states, the diversification of destinations has expanded notably in recent years, to the extent that in the year 2000, Mexicans were the largest immigrant group in 30 states. Taken together, Mexico's diaspora is the largest in the world concentrated in a single foreign country.

In a context such as that found in the United States, where inequalities in income distribution have been increasing and the productive restructuring strategy leads to increasingly precarious labor conditions, the process of integrating Mexican migrants into U.S. society can be seen in terms of labor insertion and access to public services such as health and education. And that is without taking into consideration the fact that most Mexicans live in overcrowded conditions, confined to marginalized *barrios* that keep them separate from the rest of the U.S. population and that Mexican children are among the most segregated in public schools (Levine, 2005). So:

1. Most Mexican migrants are wage-earners who occupy the lowest rung on the U.S. income ladder and, consequently, report the highest levels of poverty.
2. Mexican immigrants' access to health services is limited. In spite of the contribution they make to the U.S. economy, public policies tend to restrict their access to such services, when they are not completely excluded from them. In 2003, more than half of those Mexicans were reported as having no medical coverage (52.6%), a higher proportion than that found among immigrant groups from Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole (36.7%), and much higher than immigrants from other parts of the world (Conapo, 2004b).
3. Mexican emigrants have very low levels of schooling, if compared to migrants of other nationalities and with U.S.-born Mexican-Americans: 2.2% of Mexican migrants have no formal education whatsoever; 60% have 12 years or less; while 5.5% have university degrees or postgraduate studies.

The persistent socioeconomic deterioration of first-, second-, and further-generation Mexican migrants in the United States has served to cut off access to social mobility. The serious implications of this process must not be underestimated. It should also be noted that Mexicans report relatively high levels of prison incarceration and social lumpenization, which affect U.S. society in general. To make matters worse, their levels of participation in political affairs and elections is the lowest of any group of immigrants ([Portes and Rumbaut, 2005](#)).



**Table 1. Population of Mexican origin living in the United States by social characteristics, 2003**

Social characteristics	Total	2003		
		Mexican emigrants	First generation	Second generation
University and postgraduate	6.5	4.6	7.5	8.9
U.S. citizen	68.9	21.8	100.0	100.0
Poor	23.0	25.4	25.6	17.8
No health coverage	34.9	52.6	26.1	22.4

Source: Conapo estimates based on Bureau of Census, *Current Population Survey (CPS)*, March 2003.

In reaction or response to their declining levels of social integration, residents of Mexican origin are strengthening their social networks and, more recently, have developed many and various forms of organization. The spectrum of these organizations ranges from hometown associations and federations to trade unions and media outlets. As noted by [Fox \(2005\)](#), these organizations can be classified by three organizational criteria: (i) integration into U.S. society: trade unions, media, religious organizations, etc.; (ii) ties with places of origin and promotion of development there: hometown associations and federations; (iii) binational relationships that combine the two previous types: pan-ethnic organizations. Together, these organizations work to bring political, social, economic, and cultural influence to bear on the areas in which they work.

At present, the most dynamic and representative organizational types are the hometown associations and federations. According to the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, 623 hometown associations currently exist (Vega, 2004), covering 9% of the total migrant population (Orozco, 2004). Collective remittances are funds made available by hometown associations for social projects and other work in their places of origin. Between 2003 and 2005, the Three-for-One Program (*Tres por Uno*), which combines public resources with collective remittances, spent an annual average of USD \$15m on projects ranging from surfacing streets and refitting churches to laying down highways and building dams. Since the program's in-

vestments are subject to governmental budgetary constraints, some migrants' projects and initiatives are carried out without government participation.

It can be claimed that the expansion and evolution of these organizations is leading to the emergence of a new social subject: the collective or organized migrant (Moctezuma, 2005). To date, the contribution of collective migrants to development processes in their places of origin has essentially been restricted to their involvement in the Three-for-One Program. To a lesser extent, there have been other incursions by migrants into the promotion of development through productive investments, microfinance, and crossborder business partnerships.

The arrival of migrant organizations and their incipient institutionalization and expansion is leading to a crossborder arena that is opening up certain possibilities for development in the binational context. Their resources and capabilities are useful here: job skills, business culture, paisano market, productive, commercial, and service infrastructure, capacities for finance and savings. A dilemma emerges at this point: using these resources and skills as one of the elements for keeping the remittance-based development model afloat without breaking the vicious circle of growing dependence on remittances, or seeing migrant participation as part of an alternative strategy for local and regional development that is promoted by the state and involves local players, social organizations, universities and research centers, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, foundations, public institutions, and government agencies.

Declining standards of living, growing awareness of their class position, and the strengthening of their racial identity, fueled by the systematic harassment of the most conservative sectors of the U.S. political class, have led to an unprecedented mobilization — on March 25, April 10, and May 1, 2006 — of Mexican migrants, in conjunction with those from Central and South America, Asia, and certain sectors of the African-American population. On those days, 5 million immigrants demonstrated in 156 cities in 43 states. This phenomenon denotes a milestone in the organization and participation of the migrant population, granting them previously unheard of levels of visibility.<sup>4</sup> Along with this unquestionable political repositioning of migrants, there are real possibilities of attaining more evolved forms of organization to promote the defense of their human, social, and labor rights in the United States. This process,

---

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the Spanish-language media have played a key role in activating these collective synergies: there are 300 Latino radio stations, 700 daily and weekly newspapers, 160 local television stations, 60 cable tv channels, and two national television networks (Contreras, 2005).

at the same time as earning the sympathy of social organizations and trade unions, has also encouraged the rejection of the most conservative sectors of U.S. society.

Faced with the mood of confrontation fed by racist and xenophobic theses such as those put forward by [Huntington \(2004\)](#), it is important, first, to acknowledge the contribution to U.S. society made by migrants and, second, to open up appropriate channels for the social mobility of the Latino population, in order to avoid heightened social conflict and polarization. After all, there is data that shows how upward social integration in the receiving society, channeled through migrant organization, in no way conflicts with maintaining ties of solidarity with their places of origin ([Portes, 2005](#)).

## Toward an alternative model of migration and development for Mexico

In addition to the unsustainability of the labor export-led model identified above, within the framework of Mexico-U.S. bilateral relations shaped by NAFTA and the kind of asymmetric economic integration it promotes, the issue of security is becoming a source of increased concern to the United States. One sector of the U.S. political class has proposed, as a possible solution, the abrupt contention of the migratory flow by imposing punitive measures on migrants: mass deportations, the criminalization of migrants, and the construction of a border wall set out in the Sensenbrenner Bill (H.R. 4437). However, the Government and Congress of the United States are also considering a proposal for a temporary worker program.

Working on the assumption that, on the one hand, deepening asymmetries ([Delgado Wise and Márquez, 2006a](#)) exacerbate the exodus of the Mexican population rather than containing it, one key point in establishing inclusive bilateral negotiations is the incorporation therein of the perspective of Mexico's development. In second place, Mexico's comprises the world's largest diaspora, and today it is firmly settled in the United States and simultaneously maintains solid ties with Mexico; it is therefore illusory to conceive of a mass return and, at the same time, absurd to ignore it as an important player in the development of both Mexico and the United States. In compliance with that line of thought, the following principles are fundamental:

- Full acknowledgement of the contributions that Mexican migrants make to the societies and economies of the U.S. and Mexico, as a starting point for establishing cooperative bilateral relations in pursuit of development. This notion goes beyond the approach of joint responsibility that underlies the failed negotiation of a bilateral migra-

tion agenda at the start of the Fox administration, which was frustrated by the events of September 11, 2001.

- The introduction of mechanisms to increase the Mexican migrant population's integration into U.S. society. There are data indicating that this process is beneficial to both the sending and receiving societies (Portes, 2005). This presupposes that the human and labor rights of migrant workers, be they documented or not, are upheld. It also implies actions to encourage social mobility among the second and third generations of migrants (Portes, 2004).
- Promoting new channels for migrant circulation. In connection with this, encouragement can be given to the design of temporary worker programs that provide for migrant return, with favorable working conditions and training standards, for their subsequent proactive reincorporation into Mexico's development efforts. The possibility of permanent settlement in the receiving society should also be considered in these programs. Such programs can create savings and investment funds as part of a strategy for local and regional development. This approach can also include the promotion of programs aimed at the most highly trained members of the work force, so they can put their skills and know-how into practice in Mexico. Circularity, however, cannot be seen as a self-regulating process (Massey, Durand, and Malone, 2002); instead, it needs to be conceptualized within the framework of public policies that generate benefits for both the society of origin and the host society (Agunias, 2006).

The political debate about Mexican immigration in the United States cannot ignore the growing presence of migrants in social, economic, political, and cultural life. The same can be said of the Mexican government. The following paragraphs, as a conclusion, offer a series of ideas and guidelines for responding to some of the most urgent challenges posed at present by the Mexico-United States migratory system.

One essential condition for redirecting the present migration debate and incorporating development considerations is the full recognition of the contributions made by Mexican migrants to the economies and societies of both the U.S. and Mexico. In connection with this, the following principles are fundamental:

- *Cooperation for development.* In the context of regional economic integration, there is a need for a form of bilateral cooperation that addresses the root causes of migration

— namely, increasing socioeconomic asymmetries — and that replaces security concerns as the central focus of the two countries' political agenda.

- *Full respect for the labor and human rights of workers.* Given the forms of precarization and social exclusion prevailing in the binational arena, there is a need to create legal and political instruments to defend the living and working conditions of workers and to contain the current climate of social conflict.
- *Alternative development model for Mexico.* The immorality and clear economic, social, and political unsustainability of the cheap labor export-led model imposes the need for a radical change in development policy as it currently stands (which, in practical terms, is a regressive model for the country that promotes negative development).
- *Incorporate the Mexican diaspora into the country's development process.* Considering that Mexico has a sizeable population in the United States that maintains its original national identity and keeps strong ties to its places of origin, it is necessary to encourage the participation of those individuals in an alternative development model for Mexico.

Since Mexico's migration policy is framed by the remittance-based development model, there is a need for a drastic change in the national development strategy that drastically moves away from the neoliberal paradigm that governs present policy. This implies a concomitant drastic change in migration and development policies, by means of a state policy that addresses, at the very least, the following concerns:

- Guaranteeing the full political rights of migrants so that they are seen as binational citizens with an active involvement in decision-making about the country's future.
- Promoting the defense of the human and labor rights of migrants through all possible channels.
- Working for closer crossborder ties between the migrant community and their regions of origin, within the framework of a development policy.
- Encouraging the autonomous institutional strengthening of migrant organizations within the binational arena, favoring upward social integration of migrants into the re-

ceiving society while at the same time stimulating their contributions to the development of their places of origin.

- Designing public policies to work in parallel to the migrants' initiatives, in harmony with local society and aware of the differences that exist between different migratory circuits.
- Establishing an institutional framework commensurate with the strategic importance of Mexican migration.
- Setting out guidelines that address Mexico's problems as a transit country, using an approach based on international cooperation.

Finally, it is important to recognize that migration policies possess a regionalistic aspect, dominated by the attitudes of the countries that receive migrants. This view is prevalent in the ideas and policies of international agencies. Only to a very small extent have the experiences of the labor-exporting countries been discussed and studied from a comparative analytical perspective, taking into account the variety of contexts of integration and development that exist. Without fueling confrontation, the possibility exists for working for the construction of a new international agenda on the topics of migration and development, wherein the views and initiatives of both sending and receiving countries could converge. Ultimately, the successful management of migration is of no use unless it seeks out mechanisms for reverting the root causes of the problem: growing asymmetries between countries (Castles, 2004).

## References

- Agunias, D. (2006). "Literature Review on Circular Migration. From a zero-sum to a win-win scenario?" *Working Paper*. Washington: Migration Policy Institute.
- Amsden, A.H. (1989). *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*, New York: Oxford University.
- Banco de México (2006). *Informe anual 2005*. México: Banxico.
- Banco Mundial (2005), *Perspectivas para la economía mundial 2006*. Washington: BM.
- BID (2000), "Capitalización de remesas para desarrollo económico local". Memorando de donantes.
- Castles, S. (2004). "Why migration policies fail". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2.
- Conapo (2004a). *Informe de ejecución del Programa de Acción de la Conferencia Internacional sobre la Población y el Desarrollo*. Mexico: Conapo.
- Conapo (2004b). *La nueva era de las migraciones. Características de la migración internacional en México*. Mexico: Conapo.
- Conapo, (2005). *Migración internacional*. <http://www.conapo.gob.mx>
- Contreras, F. (2005). "The State of the New Media 2004". An Annual Report on American Journalism Published by the Project for Excellence in Journalism.  
<http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org>
- Delgado Wise, R. y Márquez, H. (2005). "Migración, políticas públicas y desarrollo. Reflexiones en torno al caso de México". Seminario Problemas y Desafíos de la Migración y el Desarrollo en América, Red Internacional de Migración y Desarrollo, April 7-9, Cuernavaca.
- Delgado Wise, R. y Márquez, H. (2006a), "The Mexico-United States Migratory System: Dilemmas of Regional Integration, Development, and Emigration", Proceedings of the Conference: Migration and Development: Perspectives from the South, July 10-13, Bellagio, Italia.
- Delgado Wise, R. y Márquez, H. (2006b). "¿Las remesas como soporte del desarrollo? Paradojas del papel de la fuerza de trabajo mexicana en la integración económica de México

a Estados Unidos”, Doctorado en Estudios del Desarrollo, Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas.

Fox, J. (2005). “Repensar lo rural ante la globalización: la sociedad civil migrante”, *Migración y desarrollo*, no. 5.

García Zamora, R. (2005). *Migración, remesas y desarrollo. Los retos de las organizaciones migrantes mexicanas en Estados Unidos*. México: Doctorado en Estudios del Desarrollo.

Guarnizo, L. y Smith, M. (eds.) (1998). *Transnationalism From Below: Comparative Urban and Community Research*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Huntington, S. (2004). *¿Qué somos? Los desafíos a la identidad nacional estadounidense*. Barcelona: Paidós.

INEGI (2006). *II Censo de Población y Vivienda*. Aguascalientes: INEGI.

Kim, L. (2000). “The dynamics of technological learning in industrialization”, INTECH-UNU Discussion Paper Series # 2000-7, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

Lanly, G. y Valenzuela, B. (2004). “Introducción”, en Lanly, G. y Valenzuela, B. (comps.), *Clubes de migrantes oriundos mexicanos en los Estados Unidos. La política transnacional de la nueva sociedad civil migrante*. México: Universidad de Guadalajara.

Levine, E. (2005). El proceso de incorporación de inmigrantes mexicanos a la vida y el trabajo en Los Ángeles, California. *Migraciones internacionales*, vol. 3, no. 2.

Massey, D., Durand, J. y Malone, N. (2002). *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors. Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economic Integration*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Moctezuma, M. (2005). “Morfología y desarrollo de las asociaciones de migrantes mexicanos en Estados Unidos. Un sujeto social y político extraterritorial”. *Migración y desarrollo*, no. 5

Papadimitriou, D. (1998). “Reflections on the Relationship between Migration and Development”, Seminar on International Migration and Development in North and Central America, Mexico, May 21-22.

Portes, A., and Rumbaut, R. (2005). “The second generation and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.

Portes, A. (2004). “The New Latin Nation: Immigration and the Hispanic Population of the United States”. Working Paper Series, Center for Migration & Development.



Portes, A. (2005). “Convergencias teóricas y evidencias empíricas en el estudio del transnacionalismo de los inmigrantes”. *Migración y desarrollo*, no. 4.

RIMyD (Red Internacional de Migración y Desarrollo) (2005), “Declaración de Cuernavaca”, *Migración y desarrollo*, no. 4.

Rodríguez, H. (2005), “Tendencias recientes de la migración de mexicanos a Estados Unidos”. Seminario Problemas y Desafíos de la Migración y el Desarrollo en América, Red Internacional de Migración y Desarrollo, April 7-9, Cuernavaca.

Vega, B. (2004). “La formación de los clubes del Estado de México. Mecanismos de organización de nuevas comunidades de migrantes mexicanos en los Estados Unidos”, en Lanly, G. y Valenzuela, B. (comps.), *Clubos de migrantes oriundos mexicanos en los Estados Unidos. La política transnacional de la nueva sociedad civil migrante*. Mexico: Universidad de Guadalajara.

Wihl de Wenden, C. (1999). *Fault-il ouvrir les frontières?*, París: Presses de Sciences.