

Panel:

**“CONTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS TO DEVELOPING COUNTRY OF
ORIGIN AND DESTINATION”**

**THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND OBSTACLES
FOR DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF CENTRAL AMERICANS IN MEXICO**

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I intend to talk about the social capital of international migration based on the experience of the Central Americans, who for different reasons, migrate to Mexico, mainly staying on the southern border, where there is employment to be found, or others in vast numbers who travel through Mexico in an attempt to reach the United States.

Usually when we talk about international migration in Mexico, we have a general tendency to refer to their economic contribution, the remittances, and explain migration primarily from an economic standpoint. There are other elements involved; we rarely stop to explain these and the relative importance of economics through the flow of the generations of migrants and the evolution of the economy over the years. This has also greatly limited our appreciation of all the other social, cultural, linguistic and religious skills that migrants develop during their stay or transit through other countries.

As migrants, they leave their place of origin, with its culture, its society, and on reaching or passing through other places, they learn and develop new things. If they are away for a long period of time, when they return, over and above the money that can fit in their pockets, or advanced in remittances, they bring with them new skills.

The fact that we have paid so much attention for so long in the remittances, which usually are sent to solve the most pressing problems facing families: food, clothing, housing, health and a small surplus used for other purposes, sometimes for the family or local community, for example when the hat is passed round to give a hand to the church, or to repair the road or school, or for any other work needed in the community. This is reflective of the migrants' social organization and their ties to their place of origin.

And what's left of everything else they have learned?

I will list some elements that enable and impede the channeling of learning of migrants abroad to the benefit of their communities of origin.

I've been working on this issue of migration since 1985, when I started my first field work in the coffee plantations in Soconusco, Mexico, watching the Guatemalan workers who came to reap the harvest and other crops. I then did a follow-up on them, observing them from Central America to their final destinations in California, in Texas, Illinois and other U.S. locations. I started to see some elements of what these migrants were doing.

Many of the undocumented migrants from Central America, because of the total 100% of illegal immigrants arriving in or transiting through Mexico, 96% are Central American and I am going to focus on that 96% who are mainly from four nations: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, which for many years now these four nationalities remain the constant.

If we look at their places of origin and understand the economic situation in Central America, we can appreciate the number of limitations. If for many of us not having a clear destination in mind, other than going to California with just have a phone number and \$10 in our pocket, would be enough to deter us from advancing even 100 meters. A phone number in California is a phone in a whole country. California is much larger than many European countries and their economies; it is one of the top 10 economies in the world. So with the knowledge acquired in college or in our social environment, we build barriers that prevent us from going, we reckon winter is

coming, I don't have the clothes, for \$ 10 I won't even get as far as Querétaro, so there's no point in going.

We would have to understand the different logic of people who do not have the money, who have no clear path of where they're going, who neither know nor care about the weather, and if there's negative news, does not prevent them from going and getting to what they have in mind, even without knowing anyone in Mexico. We have to accept that they have different social mechanisms that will allow them to achieve their objectives. These are the social and humanitarian networks along the routes, that migrants establish with the helping hand that gives them a taco, the home that allows them to rest a while, the church that welcomes them, and others who guide them along the way to telling them which way is north.

Societies advance, not only among themselves, but also with the knowledge society offers. University knowledge is not the only one that allows us to transform society. Knowledge is social. At their level and within their social centers migrants do the same.

Let's consider another set of elements, those that allow them not only to leave their home, but to know where they traveling to and how to insert and manage things in their places of destination.

I have witnessed how many Mexicans from Tijuana, Mexicali, Nuevo Laredo, when they cross over the border to the US will stand on the street corner and wait for the traffic lights to cross and who do not throw garbage on the streets and know well what to do. Whereas back here in Mexico, they cross the street anywhere, "bullfighting" their way through trucks and cars. What is it, that makes them behave differently, did they forget the basics of something as simple as the street code, when they cross a border, or are they adapting to the various codes of conduct, civic culture, according to where they are, surely this is the logical explanation.

We can also mention other examples over here like if we buy an appliance and it goes wrong, we swear at the whole family tree of the guy who sold it to us, but most likely we won't go and complain, we probably won't buy anything again from that store, and will go to the one opposite. But in the US we demand our rights as citizens, begin to argue and demand that they give us another blender or whatever it

was, because it's broken, and we have the bill and know that we will be respected. I could give a lot other examples where the more conceptual knowledge that you see on screen is telling us how we as a society are becoming stronger.

If I were to ask many of you here right now why you sat where you sat, you will probably say, well, because this is a friend next to me or they come from the same neighborhood. In this way, we are calling on a number of skills that enable us without words to say where I am and who I get on with. The same applies to migrants who are looking for accompanying codes, such as nationality, language, sex, age, where they come from, where they are going, the places where they will stop over, and you see how all of this generates knowledge that forms a social fabric. This is where the weight of economic aspect comes up again because many times when we say I'm going to Los Angeles or New York, you say I'll go by plane, here's my passport, visa and plane ticket and as the individual thinks, according to the resources and means chosen, you're not concerned who will travel with you, because it's completely irrelevant from this way of thinking, that is there is no social fabric weaving, or appeal to codes of sociability, but contractual codes.

On the social side, all this provides us with a source of wealth that allows us to understand how migrants function along the way. There is a set of ten different elements that help explain how migrants, without knowing English – which is not indispensable for them to live, work and send money or to do anything else in the United States – can survive from their place of origin, during transit and at their destination, by forming these core social nucleus that are perfectly well connected to their places of origin.

After the reading of these positive elements, one could ask why, with so many pros in their favor, migrants are so badly off, why are there always low social sectors, which are reproduced and remain low. Only one or two manages to jump to the middle class and eventually have greater social mobility, as happens in some cases.

In the same way as we travel with our society and our culture and our positive aspects, we also travel with the negative. Let's consider how some elements that encourage the daily development of positive social capital are also accompanied by others that weaken us.

One thing that is very painful is that it first must be remembered that many of these migrants are from Central America, where the building of the nation state is hard work, unfinished and with many weaknesses.

But we are social hubs and many of you also work with social groups that move in the range of institutions. That the State does not arrive or arrives late or arrives erratically or with different aims, means that these subordinate groups in society, who have also developed ways to reproduce, also have ways to avoid interacting with institutions. So sometimes we are faced with a problem of communication, from institutions that do not know how to work with these groups, but also with the groups who do not understand the institutions. This is a big weakness as we come across very well-intentioned civil servants who want to do something and are misunderstood by the sector, who don't want to know. Often they are also struggling with a history of disagreement between society and institutions and when a new well-intentioned member of staff arrives and crouches and starts to run like a dog beaten in the street. Who is going to sit and wait for the next beating? Whoever is not accustomed to receiving kindness, expects to be beaten and social groups also sometimes react instinctively as well. So that's the first problem, but there are also others.

Sometimes the building of a nation state which helps us to identify common elements also helps us to form our identity. In Mexico we say that as the gringos stole half our country, for whatever reason it may have been, they are a bunch of crooks. Many times in order to strengthen national identity, nation states sometimes overestimate positive elements, but if we look in the mirror at our neighbors and we get emphasize their negative points, and this is what leads to confrontation between the two. Well, the same happens to Central Americans.

They come here in separate groups, as Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans here and there. If consider other elements, we see that the *Garifuna* communities of Honduras, a black population who do not mix with the *mestizos* neither do the *mestizos* mix with the *Garifuna* who are black and have their own language, and then any possible benefit we could have begins to vaporize, the social fabric begins to fracture and there is no moving forward, and this doesn't help

us. We ourselves are boycotting any progress we could achieve. If we appeal to other kinds of social distinctions, we begin to see how on the way we start to divide up before we suffer any kind of aggression.

Another aspect in the case of the U.S., are the cyclical waves of new proposals to change the U.S. immigration law. In Congress in Washington, 400 to 500 proposals to amend the law are presented. Many of them are hard-liners, with proposals not to receive any more immigrants and when one sees the origin of the representatives proposing the initiative, there is a high rate of first-generation migrants who are the ones who don't want any more migrants. This has been the case since the end of 1970 up to the present day. The first generation wants to deny access to those who come back from similar backgrounds.

Many migrants already in the United States, rent an apartment and then sublet a room, or sublet the sitting-room or space within the sitting-room, to their compatriots, and sometimes the sublease to 8 or 10 fellow-countrymen pays the rent and even the migrant who rented the apartment earns a bonus. That's how we exploit our own communities.

If we look at the subject of human trafficking, we can see how many women migrants from Puebla, Tlaxcala and other places are taken to New York to satisfy the sexual appetites of Puebla Mexican immigrants living there. These are many of the elements.

There are other actors who do see the potential that can be made out of migration. Those red dots there on the map correspond to the 1,600 cash points where migrants' remittances can be cashed in Elektra Western Union in Mexico and is what has made it easier for migrants to receive partial remittances throughout the territory to help pay their transit through the country.

This boosts the economy, trade and, unfortunately, has boosted criminal gangs that 5 years ago began express kidnappings of migrants when they saw this was a lucrative business. Since last year mass abductions of migrants began, so that it is estimated that in one semester, more than \$25 million dollars have been paid in the ransom of kidnapped migrants in Mexico.

This map points to the routes, where the institutions are located, where humanitarian aid is available and the red asterisks point to the zones where most attacks are committed against migrants.

There are areas where 60% of kidnappings and violent assaults occur than we have on file. When I say us, I'm talking about a joint social effort, which involves 10 humanitarian shelters, all with the mandate of aid to migrants. We register all who pass by and the type of aggression and the result so far this year is a record of already more than 20 thousand Central Americans who have gone through this network. This operates without any subsidy or grant other than the social moral commitment of the priest, religious and volunteers who work there. Certainly if we had a budget, we could do many other things, but without it this is what we are able to do.

Here we can see a few of the elements that could strengthen the social capital of migrants and Mexican networks that help create social permeability. Notice how in the 20th Century, civilized Europe has changed national borders several times because of the conflicts affecting everyone and that does not mean it is not civilized in many other things. We may be without similar parameters for many other things in the economy of culture, but we have enjoyed great stability on our borders since they were established in the 19th Century. There must be good reason for this, namely, because of permeability, good relations among border communities of Guatemala, Belize and Mexico and some Mexican border communities with the United States. These are some positive elements.

In relation to the negative elements, I would say that we need to work hard, because apart from the fact that they undermine institutional life and the construction of state rule of law, they also have strong negative effects on the governance and daily life of the populations involved.

In conclusion, I would summarize with two sentences:

We need to encourage a redefinition of state policy on migration and new practices to understand migration, not only from its economic point of view, but from all aspects.

We have a general law of population that dates from the '70's and for the last 30 or 40 years our Mexicans and foreigners who come or go through our country has changed a lot in social composition, in gender composition and in territorial composition, but the laws we have still date from the '70's. The legal framework we have is totally anachronistic to the new realities of the 21st Century; we are still living in the 20th Century when we are people who are going to cross the 21st Century. So we need to change the general law of population, but we must also give a new dimension to general human mobility.

We cannot view migrants as a workforce or as a source of cash, because in doing so, we are enriching our own social development. We need to see migration in its wider view, with benefits both ways. So we need an ample legal framework.

We need to have a stronger society and from society to have the clarity to say we're here, we can share and we can grow.

Some time ago we used to talk about what it meant to be Latin American. Last year I analyzed trade between Mexico and Central America. Total trade with Central America reached 1.6 in the last 20 years. That means that our relationship with Central America isn't an economic one fails, our relationship is through the population. So we should update our laws to understand the population and if we strengthen the population, perhaps we can also encourage the economy because if we don't do it soon, that 1.6 is going to go down to zero, because China is already in Costa Rica and Chinese products are growing by leaps and bounds, faster, which we already know their different quality and price and in the country, they will soon eliminate that 1.6 that we have now. So even for these reasons I think it is appropriate to strengthen our social, cultural, linguistic, religious and all technical bonds, with Central America and not lose sight of the contribution of their social capital to achieve this goal.