

JUNCTURE AND DEBATE

NOTES FOR A STRATEGIC VISION ON DEVELOPMENT, MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

STEPHEN CASTLES*
RAÚL DELGADO WISE**

THE NEOLIBERAL MODEL OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The 1970s heralded the beginning of a new world order based on the restructuring of the global economy influenced by large multinational corporations, the most powerful governments, and international institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Defenders of neoliberalism argue this system ensures high productivity, efficiency and, in the long run, the reduction of poverty in the least developed countries. In truth, however, things have been very different: this economic model is based solely on obtaining profits, has increased inequality, and led to endemic unemployment and underemployment, envi-

ronmental degradation, and devastating cycles of economic boom and stagnation.

One of the fundamental elements of neo-liberal globalization has been the creation of an integrated, global market with production sites located wherever labor costs are cheaper. This way, workers in less developed countries become part of global value chains controlled by multinational corporations. It has even become routine for scientific innovation to be outsourced from southern countries, where highly qualified work is readily available while patents, productive processes and profits remain in the hands of investors located in northern countries. Another key aspect of the global labor market is the movement of workers from the South to industrial centers in the North. Import of highly skilled workers enables destination countries to reduce their own costs

* Department of Sociology and Public Politics, The University of Sydney, Australia.

** Professor and researcher and Director of the Development Studies Academic Unit, Autonomous University of Zacatecas.

in the fields of education and training. Activities such as construction, food preparation and catering, health care, and household work and maintenance are increasingly dependent on workers from the South, especially women.

Labor-importing countries have established differential migration rules. There is a shortage of highly skilled workers, so they issue rules that prioritize their entry and give them residential status; on the other hand, there is an oversupply of low-skilled workers who are forced to migrate in irregular conditions, which entails a high degree of risk and exploitation. There are also cases in which countries of destination have established systems of temporary migration that denied migrant workers certain rights, such as the ability to change jobs, reunite with their family or attain long term residence. Apologists for this system argue that it is vital to “exchange rights for numbers”; that is, give up basic human and labor rights in return for the opportunity to be exploited in a northern economy.

Until the 1980s, most analysts agreed migration had a negative effect on the development of sending countries because it entailed the transfer of valuable human resources to the production systems of destination countries. However, recent years have produced a new ideological justification for the inequitable system that prevails across the world, arguing

that migration encourages the development of sending countries. Currently, the governments of receiving countries, international organizations and even many academics argue that migrant remittances and the transfer of technology lead to a reduction of poverty, multiplier effects, and increased investment in development-related activities in countries of origin. In short, some of the world’s most exploited workers are being asked to pay for the failures of official development policies. Migrants and their diasporas have become the new heroes of development.

THE FICTITIOUS WIN-WIN-WIN MODEL

The official position of receiving countries and the international organizations that work closely with them is that migration from poor to rich countries is conducive to a scenario where “everybody wins”:

- Destination countries benefit from the extant labor force supply, which helps overcome their demographic deficit and solve their economic needs.
- Countries of origin benefit through the effects of remittances and the transfer of technology needed for their development, as well as the return of more qualified and experienced workers who bring with them attitudes conducive to development.

- Migrants and their families benefit from the higher salaries they receive in more developed countries.

However, the “win-win” model only works as long as migrants do not settle permanently in the country of destination. For this reason, temporary schemes that deny workers full rights and prevent them from reuniting with their families play a crucial role in this approach. Many countries of destination—in particular Canada, Korea, the United States, Malaysia, Taiwan and the European Union member states—have introduced temporary worker schemes. Even so, the hostile public attitude toward migration means labor recruitment through official channels has been significantly less than the demand for labor force. In these countries, as well as others whose governments have not even introduced labor schemes (i.e., Japan), millions of migrant workers are forced into an irregular situation. For example, in the United States, there are more than 11 million irregular residents, while the European Union has between 1.8 and 3.3 million. Many employers prefer irregular workers because they cannot get organized or take legal action, so they are even more easily exploited than other migrants.

The “win-win-win” model is fictitious, an ideological construct designed to ensure that the governments of send-

ing countries comply with the policies established by destination countries.

- Those who benefit from this situation are employers and the elites of the receiving countries, while the working population is subject to falling living standards and worsening labor conditions. Neoliberal policies have consistently deregulated the labor market and weakened trade unions, opening the door to a system of precarious labor based on the fragmentation of the working class according to race, ethnicity, gender and legal status. In fact, the overexploitation of migrants also hurts the interests of the majority of native workers in the countries of destination.
- Remittances do not automatically affect development because their amount often diminishes due to the high costs of transfer, corruption and the bureaucratic barriers that oppose procedural changes. Only in countries where migration has been linked with land-ownership reforms, improvements in infrastructure, democratization processes and investment-friendly policies have remittances had positive effects. In the majority of countries, remittances have simply become a new form of dependency, which rather hinders local and national development. Similarly, the presumed transfer of technology often does not take place

because migrants tend to work in fields that require low qualifications (even if they are skilled workers themselves). With regard to the supposed benefits of migrant return, many only go back when they can no longer work due either to old age, illness or an accident. Far from being an economic benefit, return often means that the country of origin must cover the health and pension costs of workers who have, in turn, contributed to the economy of the richest countries.

- Some migrants and their families actually benefit from income earned abroad. Migration can contribute to poverty reduction on a household level, but if the labor force is mainly employed in other countries, the country of origin will stagnate as result and will not develop economically at either the local or national level. Rather, migration can mean the opposite of development: depopulation in the countryside and predominance of elderly people and children in local communities, given that, lacking opportunities for work and economic growth, the working age population goes abroad. But, above all, the current migration order is based on a systematic denial of the human rights of millions of migrants. People are forced to migrate because the global economic system hinders their development across large regions

of the world and denies them opportunities for a dignified life.

It is the belief of the International Network on Migration and Development (INMD) that we must create new approach to migration and development based on:

- A comprehensive approach to migration, development and human rights, rather than the reductionist one that has characterized the “win-win-win” view.
- Regional integration processes based on solidarity and fair trade, rather than asymmetric integration and free trade.
- Human security, rather than national security and criminalization.
- Freedom of movement, instead of forced migration.
- Decent work, rather than labor over-exploitation.
- Universal citizenship, instead of social exclusion and racial, ethnic and gender discrimination.

NEW INDICATORS AND NEW DATA FOR A NEW APPROACH

So far, it has been difficult for the governments and civil societies of sending countries to question the dominant paradigm in the field of migration and development given that the production of data and research has been mostly in the hands of

receiving countries and international organizations. Policy analyses and social science studies have overly focused on two issues: migration's alleged threat to the national security and public finances of host countries, and the supposed benefits of remittances in countries of origin.

This narrow and reductionist approach tends to veil other key aspects. For this reason, the INMD calls for a wide-ranging and exhaustive analytical approach that takes into account factors that are often pushed aside, such as:

- The way in which the import of migrant labor benefits employers and the elites of receiving countries, allowing them to counteract demographic deficits (an ageing population, growing dependency rates) while satisfying economic demand.
- The way in which migrant workers contribute to production, productivity, and public finances in host countries.
- The real costs that the upbringing, education and training of migrant workers represent to countries of origin, whose ready-made workforce then labors in receiving countries that have not incurred any formation costs.
- The costs “inverse remittances” represent for countries of origin—i.e., the money transferred to destination countries by relatives in the sending country to pay for the education and training of

migrant students, who subsequently enter the labor market of the host country.

- The human costs and high risks migration poses to migrants and their families: the denial of human and labor rights, family separation, and the dismantling of communities of origin.
- The costs of migration for countries of origin: depopulation, dependence on external sources of income, and a decline in local economic activities.

The International Network on Migration and Development calls on governments, international organizations and academics to bring together their resources and expertise and develop new indicators, create and share data, and ensure the highest standards of professional analysis to construct a broad and comprehensive model better suited to dealing with issues involving migration, human rights, and development. The goal is to construct a set of strategic indicators on migration, development and human rights.

The proposed Global Index should be ready for submission at the second High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development of the United Nations in 2013. Said index can help change the way policy makers and the general public understand immigration issues and could become a starting point for a new world order in the field of migration.

BUILDING AGENTS OF CHANGE

Historical experience shows that dominant groups are reluctant to reform the political and economic order that has brought them so many benefits in the past. The current migration order and the neoliberal economic order itself are based on inequality and exploitation. This is not sustainable given the long-term damage to human potential and the environment. The change, however, will not happen by itself.

The purpose of the INMD is to unite migrant organizations, migrant support organizations, trade unions, and religious and academic communities from across the world that advocate a fair and sustainable immigration order. The construction of agents of change (or social actors) who can effectively challenge the current unfair system requires the creation of networks and an extensive debate based on democratic procedures and respect for the autonomy of all participants. It is also essential that the organizations that participate in the INMD cooperate with a much wider array of civil organizations working in the fields of human rights, environmental care and sustainable development. The struggle for a fair immigration order is part of a broader struggle for a more equitable and sustainable world. For this reason, the INMD calls for the construction of a civil global movement

on behalf of the rights of migrant workers, their families and communities, in a world where migration can remain an option but shall no longer be a necessity.