

**Diasporas, philanthropy and hometown
associations:
the Central American experience**

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Draft

March 22, 2006

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Introduction¹

Although diaspora philanthropic organizing is not a new phenomenon, their projects and interests in local community development have spread out through the visible activism of hometown associations. This paper looks at the experience of hometown associations in Central America as an illustration of voluntary work on development and a manifestation of a transnational identity characterized by the interplay between micro and macro dynamics, living in a real world of 'distant proximities' (Rosenau 2003).

Distant proximities are real-life experiences that both integrate and fragment relationships outside and inside borders. Immigrants and diasporas are increasingly key protagonists of distant proximities: through their labor force, they integrate their home and host countries into the global economy in order to keep their families together. Their lives are also fragmented, however, by the experience of distance and separation from their families and nations. The end result is a transnational lifestyle, characterized by both opportunities and hardships that feature this paradox of distance and closeness.

The paper analyzes the formation of transnational migrants as diasporas that are formed by the influx of history, migration and contact, and identifies characteristic and features of HTAs within a broader context of identity and belonging. The paper also looks at the ways in which these associations operate and posits questions about the challenge to development players to engage with diasporas as partners in development. We argue that development work today needs a deterritorialized approach that includes the realities and desires of migrants as organized diasporas or as individuals with concrete preferences.

The analysis of Central American HTAs includes a review of the work of El Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Honduran groups and their efforts to implicate themselves in local activities through various philanthropic activities, some of which have more bearing on development than others.

¹ Research assistance and support for this paper was provided by Rebecca Rouse and Douglas Pulse.

1. Central American migration and transnationalism

Central America is a region that has experienced significant movement of people over the past forty years, particularly since the civil wars of the late seventies. A combination of at least four trends has influenced migration which, in turn, has set the basis for a transnational Central American diaspora which, among other things, is engaged with its home country.

The repression and civil wars of the seventies and eighties led to mass migrations. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua experienced brutal forms of political repression directed by a ruling class formed by praetorian guards, conservative oligarchies, and conformist elites. The main agents of repression in Central America resorted to ideological tools such as anti-communism or anti-atheism as a way to justify or legitimize increased repression (Vilas, 1994).

In practical terms, a culture of violence persisted in the region, in part through the state, resorting to different arguments in order to retain political power.² Death squads, corrupt police, repressive armies and clandestine security apparatuses promoted the idea of containing any threat against “the established order,” even if such order was historically and structurally rooted in inequality. The end result in each of these countries was a civil war that lasted more than ten years. Repression and war caused a mass movement of people migrating predominantly into Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States (Dunkerley 1994).

While the postwar reconstruction process in Central America opened the door for economic recovery during the nineties, the effect of globalization and structural adjustment reforms on these governments resulted in low growth rates and high

² By culture of violence I refer to Johan Galtung's (291) definition as “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form.” See “Cultural Violence” *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 27, n.3, 1990, p. 291-305. In Guatemala, for example, the army justified its actions in the name of protecting the constitution, and created a series of symbolic acts, such as naming military operations with heroic names, or military units with names of heroes who fought terrible enemies. The same could be observed in El Salvador, as in the case of the Atlacatl Battallion, one of the most savage military units, but regarded by the army and its government as examples of defenders of the fatherland.

unemployment. Thus, the combined effect of a rough political transition emerging from a culture of violence, added to slow economic growth, further influenced people's decisions to migrate and reconnect with relatives who had migrated prior to and during the 1980s. By 2000, 2.7 million Central Americans were officially recognized living abroad.

Table 1: Per capita growth in Central America

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Costa Rica	-1.6	2.9	5.7	5.7	-0.5	-1	0.9	4.5	2.3	2.3
El Salvador	-0.4	2.1	1.6	1.4	0.2	-0.2	0.3	0	-0.2	0.7
Guatemala	0.6	2	2.6	1.5	1.2	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	0.1	0.7
Honduras	0.7	2.1	0.1	-4.5	3	0	0.1	0.9	2.5	1.7
Nicaragua	4.1	1.9	1.7	4.9	2	0.9	-1.3	0.2	3.1	1.9
Panamá	0.7	4.3	5.3	2	0.8	-1.3	0.4	2.3	5.7	4.2

CEPAL. Balance preliminar de las economías de América Latina y el Caribe

Table 2: Caribbean and Central American population in Canada and the United States

	Canada ^a	United States ^b
Central America	73,760	2,681,835

Source: Statistics Canada; U.S. Census Bureau. ^a 2001 Census; ^b 2000 Census

Coupled with these political and economic realities, the region also faced a number of natural disasters from the late nineties to the present that added to the continued flow of migration. A series of events have affected the region in the last few years, such as the decline in coffee prices, drought, hurricanes, and earthquakes. These events have devastated its population and economies. For example, the decline in the value of coffee exports affected its position as a share of total exports.

Table 3: Coffee Exports as Percentage of Total Exports

	1990	1995	1998
Costa Rica	12.3	12	7.3
El Salvador	40.4	21.8	13.1
Guatemala	26.7	26.8	20.7
Honduras	20.2	23.9	21.5
Nicaragua	21.4	24.9	27.9
Panama	3.1	5.8	3.4

Source: ECLAC

In conjunction with the coffee crisis, in early 2000 Central America was hit with a drought that significantly affected four countries: Guatemala, El Salvador and, even more dramatically, Honduras and Nicaragua. According to the United Nations World Food Program, nearly 1.6 million Central Americans were affected, half of them from Honduras. Many Central Americans faced starvation. In Guatemala, more than one hundred peasants died during the first six months of 2001 as a result of the drought. In other countries the death toll was even higher.

Table 4: Drought in Central America: Population affected

Country	Population affected
Guatemala	113,596
El Salvador	412,064
Honduras	791,970
Nicaragua	187,645

Source: World Food Program, WFO, UN.

Following the drought in 2001, two earthquakes in El Salvador affected the economic and housing infrastructure of more than one hundred thousand households. Five years later the country is still recovering from that disaster. Between 2002 and 2006 the region has also faced other natural disasters, which have added to the stress and flow of migration.

These migration trends have also been defined by a market for foreign labor demanding the production of goods and services among industrialized countries, the United States in particular for the case of Central America. This foreign labor force works in service industries that are intrinsically connected to the global economy, demanding cheap labor and activities that other players in the economy are not prepared to work on. This is a labor force that lives under poor conditions and works in various industries such as hospitality, cleaning, construction, and retail. Andrade-Eekhoff (2003) argues that this process of labor “integration” suffers relatively high levels of exclusion and marginalization due to the undocumented nature of many of its migrants who respond to push-pull and transnational networks and linkages. For example, migrants in the poultry industry in the American South working for Tysons Foods (Fisk, 200; Striffler 2005) live under precarious circumstances, working long hours with a limited social safety net. Similar conditions are found among

foreign part time workers in the so called 'logistics sector', such as FedEx, delivering packages on time from all over the world (Smith, Mendoza and Ciscel, 2005).

These dynamics have intertwined with the formation of transnational ties between a nascent diaspora and its homeland. In reference to Guatemala, Popkin for example, describes the emergence of a Pan-Mayan ethnicity in the Guatemalan transnational community linking Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango Guatemala and Los Angeles, California (Popkin 1999, 2005). Similarly, Honduran Garifuna diasporas in New York and New Jersey maintain strong ties to their community on the Atlantic Coast of Honduras.

The manifestations of these linkages translate into interconnectedness between families, communities and society. We have discussed elsewhere the significance of these connections which include the sending of remittances, traveling back home, calling to the relatives, buying home country goods, and belonging to hometown associations (Orozco 2005b). The Table below shows the extent of connections Central Americans maintain with their home countries. Overall, one in three Central Americans maintains strong linkages with their home country.

Table 5: Practices of Transnational engagement among Central Americans

Country	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua	Latinos
Calls once a week	41	56	57	70	61
Sends over \$300	32	43	8	13	31
Buys HCG	66	50	74	83	73
Has a saving account.	16	19	16	5	27
Travels once a year	24	9	12	19	32
(& Spends over US\$1,000)	61	48	43	26	60
Has a mortgage. Loan	13	4	12	6	10
Owens a small bus.	3	2	4	3	3
Helps. Family w/ mort.	13	1	8	7	12

Source: Orozco, Manuel

One key type of engagement is belonging to hometown associations. Hometown associations (HTAs) are entities formed by immigrants who seek to support their places of origin, maintain relationships with local communities, and retain a sense of community

as they adjust to life in the United States (Orozco 2000; 2003; 2005a). The number of hometown associations within various diaspora groups has multiplied in recent years.³

These associations represent a subset of minority-based migrant philanthropic organizations. Their activities exhibit at least four features (Orozco 2000). First, their activities range from charitable aid to investment. Second, the structure of these organizations varies, with more or less formal domestic structures and sporadic relationships with their hometown and governments abroad. Third, the organizations' decisions about defining their agenda or activities depend on an array of factors, such as availability of resources, relationship with their hometown, preferences of their members, and organizational structure. Fourth, like other Latino nonprofits, they have a small economic base. To some extent, Central Americans participate in these associations as a way to validate their identity. The next two sections analyze these organizations.

2. Identity and Belonging in the Latino Hometown Association

One critical element that defines a person's identity is the ability to exercise their sense of belonging through material and symbolic practices. Belonging to a hometown association is one practical yet substantive activity of attachment to the home country. However, it is important to stress that HTA membership is only one kind of association among organized diasporas; there are many kinds of domestic organizations working for Latinos in the U.S. Moreover, HTA membership should be understood in the broader sense of the word as organizations that include religious or professional groups not only working in the hometown but in philanthropy in the home country.

Within this context of Latino or diaspora community based philanthropic institutions membership is not as large as firmly believed by some. A survey of Latino groups from twelve Latin American and Caribbean countries showed that on average eight percent of people who send remittances belong to an HTA. The numbers vary from group to group, whereby people from the Caribbean have the highest participation rate (Orozco 2005a; Orozco 2004). Although these percentages seem low, they reflect three critical issues. First,

³ As way of comparison, look at the Ghanaian, Guyanese and Mexican cases.

not everyone is involved in some kind of voluntary association, outside of religious membership. Second, HTA membership is one among many available kinds of memberships in the polity (Orozco 2000). Three, belonging to an HTA may reflect specific patterns associated with political culture, family links, material circumstances, cultural identity, and integration which differentiate them from those who do not form part of these associations.

Table 6: Remittance senders who belong to an HTA

Country	(%)
Guyana	29%
Jamaica	16%
Ecuador	10%
Haiti	10%
Honduras	7%
Colombia	6%
Nicaragua	4%
El Salvador	4%
Mexico	4%
Dom. Rep.	3%
Guatemala	3%
Bolivia	1%
Average	9%

Jan Nederveen Pietersen argues that a key issue in this global age is cultural difference, in which people struggle to carve a niche out of the ‘Macdonalization’ of life while compromising their ‘original’ lifestyle and producing a hybrid culture (2004). The relevance of this approach to globalization as hybridization, that is, a condition by which material and symbolic practices incorporate varieties of cultures across locations and identities, is that some diasporas seek to recreate their identity by mixing practices across locations. Thus, some Latinos or diasporas work towards maintaining a transnational identity and use HTA membership as the space through which to do so. This transnational identity is a diaspora’s illustration of hybridization.

An analysis of the survey data shows that those who belong to HTAs differentiate themselves from other migrants in that they are as much involved with their families both in the U.S. and abroad the longer they have been in the country. They are U.S. citizens, but also

visit the home country more often and help the family back home. These members mix their commitments to both homes, signifying a transnational membership.

Table 7: Features of remittance senders and their belonging to an HTA

Type of activity	Belongs to HTA	
	Yes	No
Is over forty years	60	44
Visit country once a year or more	56	30
Helps family in home country with other obligations	55	20
Has been in the U.S. more than ten years	44	29
Remittance sender is a US Citizen	38	22
Sends over US\$350	31	18
His or her income is	\$32,733	\$20,659

This pattern of belonging as an affirmation of a transnational identity is relatively important among various groups from Latin America, such as Central America. Although the percentage of those sending remittances may be small, their contributions are important to the wellbeing of their communities of origin.

3. Central American Hometown Associations at Work

Partly influenced both by the experience of transnationalism as well as by a desire to make things better or offer a contribution to the home country, hometown associations are formed in many countries.

A significant number of Central American civil society groups exist, most of which are not hometown associations, but whose members are in relationship with some of the HTAs. In September 2004, for example, the State Department organized a historic event bringing together more than one hundred Central American associations, such as old standing groups like Carecen, Chambers of Commerce and HTAs such as CUS, the United Salvadoran Communities of Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia. The participation of these associations reflected that there is some level of organization and an interest to work on home country affairs.

Table 8: Number Central American organizations in the U.S.

Costa Rica	7
El Salvador	26
Guatemala	14
Honduras	16
Nicaragua	27
Grand Total	90

Source: State Department.

This section looks at the experience and practices of Central American hometown associations and focuses on the membership structure of the organizations, the type of projects identified as well as the process by which they are identified, fundraising efforts, and project implementation. The material is based on interviews with more than thirty association leaders.

i. Guatemala

Guatemalan migrants have often been organized along different lines, in the eighties as political units mobilizing against military regimes and human rights violations and in the nineties promoting the peace process, indigenous rights and democratization. More recently, this community has sought to further its political ties and also promote links at more basic levels through philanthropic activism.

The number of Guatemalan associations is uncertain. Under the Berger administration an innovative but ill-funded government initiative within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was created. This was the Office of the Vice-Minister of Migration and Human Rights, originally run by Marta Altolaguirre, a well known human rights expert. Her office was given the task of acting as a liaison to the Guatemalan diaspora, understanding its needs, and building a relationship with this community. The office identified a significant number of community leaders in contact with Guatemala and created a directory of 164 organizations based mainly in California, New York, and Illinois. Interviews of these organizations were conducted in order to identify the range of organizational capacity and involvement with their home country issues.

Table 9: Guatemalan organizations in the U.S.

State	Number
California	38
New York	23
Illinois	19
Florida	10
Virginia	10
Massachusetts	9
Maryland	7
Delaware	6
New Jersey	6
Oregon	5
Other	31

Source: Registro de Asociaciones Guatemaltecas en los Estados Unidos.

Membership and organizational structure

Most Guatemalan associations have relatively small core groups of members that meet on a regular basis. These active members often make up the organization’s board of directors, president, secretary, and treasurer. As membership is on a voluntary basis, some groups report that it is sometimes difficult to hold regular elections to select the board and officers due to the time constraints of their working-class members. As a result, those members who are able to serve in leadership positions often volunteer for posts. Associations have anywhere from five to twenty active members, but often have a much larger individual donor base throughout the Guatemalan community. For example, one association in Delaware boasts a general membership of around 250 people. Most of these groups have been created since 1991 in response to compelling needs in Guatemala, such as natural disasters, or to provide needed representation to the Guatemalan immigrant community in the United States, especially those of indigenous descent.

Like other HTA groups from Mexico or El Salvador, for example, membership is mostly comprised of migrants from a common community or region in Guatemala. As a result, the international activities of these groups are then focused on these municipalities, and association leaders in the United States maintain close ties to community leaders and organizations in their hometowns. Some groups have also made it part of their mission to assist Guatemalan migrants in the United States with anything from legal to social services, in which case participation is not limited to those immigrants from a particular community.

Project Identification and implementation

The activities of Guatemalan hometown associations often include activities for the Guatemalan community both in the United States and in Guatemala. In Guatemala, projects are mostly focused around health, education and disaster relief. Some recent activities carried out by Guatemalan associations have included gathering in kind donations such as blankets and clothing for victims of Hurricane Stan and toys or school supplies for local students, providing prenatal care for women, and assisting in the development of infrastructure such as roads. Groups also promote cultural links between Guatemalans at home and abroad through activities such as the sponsorship of visits by Guatemalan musicians to the United States and funding the repatriation of remains for immigrants who have passed away in the U.S. but wish to be buried in their hometown.

All of the associations interviewed reported that they rely heavily on the recommendations of local community groups and leaders in their respective target regions in Guatemala when identifying future projects and activities. To that end, boards of directors maintain close contact with local groups, churches and municipal governments in order to assess the needs of the community. The decision on project selection is usually made by the board after it has evaluated need and feasibility.

Groups often team up with some of the same entities in order to carry out their activities. For example, Comite Ixchiguan in Delaware has become involved in conflict resolution efforts focusing on a border conflict between two municipalities that has left three residents wounded and ten homes destroyed. The group has been working alongside the local municipal government to establish a dialogue between key players in the conflict.

Fundraising efforts

Guatemalan associations undertake a variety of different fundraising approaches, with varied success. Some groups noted that fundraising is a challenge for them, while others seem to produce a better return. In general, groups tend to raise anywhere between \$2000 and \$8000 a year. Some common fundraising activities include soccer tournaments, dinners, and other events within the Guatemalan community, in addition to individual membership dues.

Some groups have looked outside the Guatemalan community for fundraising, using media to attract attention to their cause or soliciting grants from institutional donors. One group in Florida has received funds from organizations such as Catholic Charities. A second group appealed to local television and newspapers for help in the aftermath of Hurricane Stan in 2005, pulling in donations for disaster relief from outside the Latino community and educating the public about the situation in Guatemala. All groups comment that they are constantly searching for new donors and partners. In particular, one group noted that a single project, the donation of a used ambulance, took the association two years to complete because of the difficulties they had raising funds.

Corn Maya, Inc.

Corn Maya is a hometown association with a transnational focus. Founded in 1991, the group is involved in activities serving Guatemalans of indigenous descent both in the community of Jacaltenango in Guatemala and in Jupiter, Florida, where the group is based. Through their board of directors and an active membership of twenty people, Corn Maya works with the immigrant community in Jupiter to provide a variety of social, legal and employment services. These activities are funded through direct donations and by larger donors such as the Community Foundation for Palm Beach, the Palm Beach County Farmworker Coordinating Council, Amigos de Jupiter, and Catholic Charities.

In Jacaltenango, Corn Maya regularly sponsors cultural events and supports local musicians, in addition to running regular donation drives for the community such as children's toys at Christmas or school supplies in the Fall. One of Corn Maya's largest projects in Jacaltenango was the construction of an orphanage, which was sponsored in part by Catholic Charities of Jupiter. Corn Maya's board of directors maintains a regular dialogue with community leaders and organizations in Jacaltenango, as well as with potential partners both in the United States and in Guatemala. The organization stresses that these partnerships are essential to the success of their projects.

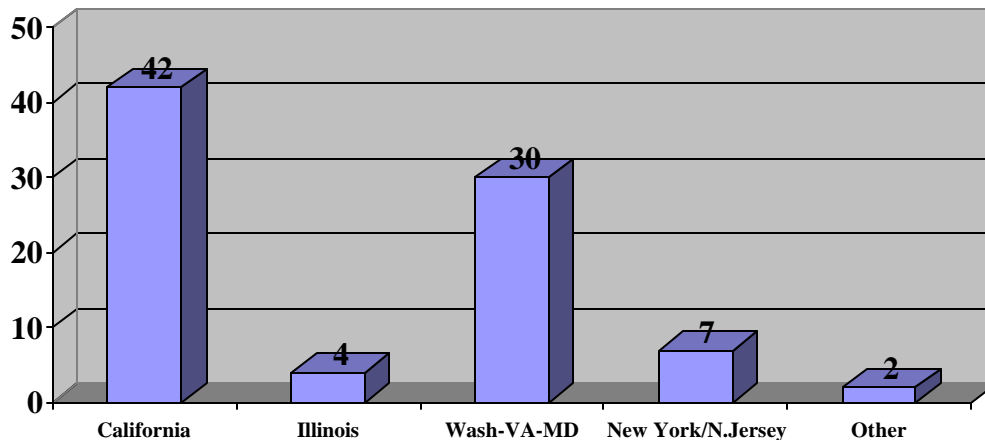
In the next year Corn Maya will be opening a new Community Resource Center in Jupiter with the help of Catholic Charities in order to strengthen the quality of their services for the Guatemalan community in Florida. In Jacaltenango, the group is attempting to forge new partnerships, for example with the Guatemalan microfinance organization in Salcaja.

ii. Salvadoran Hometown Associations in the United States

Salvadoran hometown associations are the better known groups among Central Americans. According to the Salvadoran Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are some 200 Salvadoran HTAs distributed throughout various parts of the United States (see Figure 1). Interviews were conducted with the leaders of twenty associations based in Los Angeles and

Washington DC. Questions were asked about organizational structure, range of projects and activities, resources invested, and extent of interest in partnering with other organizations.

Figure 1: Salvadoran HTAs in the United States



Source: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comunidades en el Exterior, <http://www.comunidades.gob.sv/>

Salvadoran hometown associations are usually organized to help one particular community in El Salvador. Moreover, similar to Mexican associations, the majority of the Salvadoran HTAs interviewed were created in the early 1990s.

Membership and organizational structure

Most Salvadoran associations have a well-defined structure, involving a board and a few active members, numbering around 10. They often work with a parallel board in their home community. This group, often consisting of the relatives of HTA members, sends ideas for projects and oversees the disbursement of funds. For the most part, Salvadoran HTAs rely solely on events and donations to support their activities, similar to Mexican HTAs. HTAs form around a disaster, such as Hurricane Mitch; around a cause, such as lack of a high school; or at the urging of a prominent member of their home community, such as their pastor.

Salvadoran HTAs focus their activities on one town. The members come together because they are from the same area, and have shared connections to a singular community and often

a singular political history. Frequent visits keep members in close communication with association members or family members in the hometown, as well as maintain their connection and drive to better their home community. While it may seem obvious to note, most hometown associations are limited in scope because their goal is to help an individual community. There are instances of partnership with other HTAs from other towns, but their focus is almost always on their place of origin.

COPRECA (El Comité ProPaz y Reconstrucción de Cacaopera en Los Angeles) works in Cacaopera, El Morazan and with the Salvadoran community of Los Angeles. Founded in 1992, the club initially worked on reconstruction of sections of town destroyed by war. The members have worked on the construction of a health clinic, wells, and bought an ambulance for the town. They also have raised money for medical and emergency donations. COPRECA has rebuilt the church, school floor and basketball courts, created a radio station and a clothing factory run by women. It has also distributed rope-making trees and vegetable seeds to help with reforestation and the reinsertion of the rope-making industry. Their latest project was a children's daycare center.

The ideas for COPRECA's projects come from the citizens of Cacaopera. The construction projects that COPRECA undertakes always involve the labor of the community. COPRECA began raising money through a monthly quota for the members and then moved on to raising money through dances.

COPRECA has worked with the national government and the local mayor on both the reforestation project and the construction of a water tank. A government office helped to teach townspeople how to take care of the seeds and seedlings. Los Angeles City government also funded them to hold motivational talks for Salvadoran-Americans in the Los Angeles area; COPRECA would like to continue this series with health education talks.

HTAs often find their strength in dealing with the most immediate needs of their home community. Natural disasters or the lack of basic human needs such as health care and elementary education incite HTAs to gather around the cause. They are volunteer organizations, however, and are limited by the amount of free time available to their mostly working-class members.

Project identification and implementation

Salvadoran HTAs work on a range of projects that often involve a binational exercise of activities carried on both countries. On the Salvadoran side, the majority of projects seem to focus on health and education. In health, the funds are invested in building health clinics, medicine and ambulance donations. On education, the funds are invested in libraries, school water systems, school supplies, and school repairs.

HTAs also carry out projects of charitable and infrastructural nature. These include constructing laundry facilities, recreational areas, and stadiums, and undertaking church renovations. In addition to carrying out projects in El Salvador, some organizations work on the U.S. side to promote cultural and religious identity. Some of the activities include cultural events (dances, Independence Day celebrations), scholarships, religious events, youth motivational talks and sports and recreation.

The decisions on project selection and implementation result from consultation among board members. In some cases, the organizations report being approached by people (both private citizens and elected municipal leaders) and organizations in El Salvador and petitioned to work on specific projects. The groups who do not have a team in El Salvador ask the townspeople about their needs and try to meet them.

Chinameca's parish priest was the catalyst for the creation of the **Comunidad Unida de Chinameca** in 1991. The priest asked his former church-members to form a committee in the U.S. to finish installing a water system in the local school. The Comunidad Unida de Chinameca began by constructing the school's water tower, as well as 12 restrooms. From there, they went on to construct a laundry facility, a recreational park for the town, as well as painting and putting a roof on the local church. Each project lasts 1-2 years and maintains the functioning of the HTA. The Comunidad gathers around \$30,000 annually, raised mostly through banquets. Future projects for the Comunidad Unida de Chinameca include constructing a trade school to train students to be electricians, plumbers, mechanics, and welders. They are motivated by the lack of opportunities for young people, and would like to keep them away from drugs and alcohol.

As word of the work of the Comunidad Unida de Chinameca spread, the petitions for help began to rain in. The Comunidad votes to decide which projects they will undertake. Comunidad Unida de Chinameca has a board of directors composed of a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and others totaling 12. There are also non-board members (for a total of 33) who are allowed to vote but are not part of the leadership. All members are volunteers, and their goal is to teach the townspeople to work. Members of the Comunidad travel constantly to Chinameca and oversee the projects.

Comunidad Unida de Chinameca received donations of construction material from the French embassy to build a wall for the Red Cross building in the town, and the town participated by donating labor. The group had a negative experience working with the government in reconstruction projects after the earthquake, and does not currently work with the government to complete their projects. The Comunidad has corporate sponsorship for some of its events, as well as local business sponsors in the U.S.

One group described the number of community-based petitions as overwhelming, creating the need for the board to whittle down the projects to the ones most in-line with their goals, as well as most feasible. Los Angeles City government gave one group funds to hold motivational talks for Salvadoran-Americans in the area.

Salvadoran HTAs, much like their Mexican counterparts, are small organizations whose binational character allows them to choose projects based on the most urgent needs of their home communities. The needs of the town are identified by those close to the HTAs.

Fundraising efforts

Efforts to raise funds translate into various kinds of activities, including raffles, pageants, and dinners arranged for the migrant communities. Donations in kind are also commonplace to support these activities. Many have a community base of 50 to over 100 people who participate in their fundraising events. Most groups raise less than \$15,000 a year for projects, but a few raise more. Even when the total is greater, it does not necessarily all go to El Salvador, instead, the money is used for activities supporting Salvadoran culture in the United States.

Founded in 1993, the **Comité Unidos por Intipuca** in Washington holds fundraising parties in the area to support their works in Intipuca, La Union. Fourteen board members in Washington, as well as a board in Intipuca, decide which projects the group will undertake. They have worked on church, given health clinic support, and school and medical donations..

The Comité holds parties and fundraisers to garner funds for their projects. Their biggest project is fundraising for and organizing the travel of 300-400 people to Intipuca for every March 1st. They bring their “reina” (queen) to participate in the contest in El Salvador. The reina is chosen by the number of votes that she sells, which is also a fundraising mechanism. The Comité raises around \$25,000 a year.

They have been working for 8 years on the construction of a stadium. They have raised around \$200,000 for the project, of which the national development agency FISDL has given them \$110,000. The Comité has worked with the FISDL and the mayor’s office. They lobbied the government to re-instate a bachillerato school in the town; 5 years ago they worked with the FISDL to rebuild a bridge that was destroyed by Hurricane Mitch. Their newest project is the construction of a “casa de cultura” which also has the support of the FISDL.

Government diaspora outreach

A recent study on Central American transnationalism suggested that “the Salvadoran government as compared to the other governments in the region, both central as well as local, has a much more institutionalized response to international labor migration” (Eekhoff 2004). Despite the limited resources available in a poor country like El Salvador, the government has sought to adapt to changing circumstances and promote policies towards their emigrant communities.

One of the first steps in that direction was the creation of a General Directorate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address the Salvadoran community living abroad (DGACE). The directorate, created in January 2000, has been the main official link between the government and the Salvadoran community. The Directorate justifies its existence by pointing to the continuing reality of migration and remittances of the Salvadoran community living outside El Salvador. The program is organized in three areas: economic ties and integration; community and local development; and cultural and educational ties (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador 2006).

This government office has been active in forging and maintaining relationships with their compatriots by working directly with consulates and the embassy, coordinating projects with other government agencies, visiting the community and its leaders on a regular basis, and keeping the community informed through its online publication “Comunidad en Acción” which reports on various activities and projects implemented by the diaspora as well as in collaboration with government or private entities (Viceministerio para los Salvadoreños en el Exterior 2006). The government outreach strategy has focused predominantly on education and community outreach, but has not addressed political matters such as the right to vote abroad and broader representation of the community.

In the past two years the government has established a Vice-Ministry of Foreign Affairs for relations with the diaspora. The vice-minister is one of the most active, committed and engaged public officials in Latin America and the Caribbean working to improve the relationship with its community.

The government outreach efforts have also been met by other institutions. The media in El Salvador in particular has created an active strategy to keep the diaspora informed about its affairs as well as events in their home country. Newspapers like *La Prensa Gráfica* and *Diario de Hoy* have a section on Salvadoran diaspora news ranging from political events to social issues, including topics like crime and conditions of the community. *La Prensa Gráfica's* section, “Departamento 15,” maintains a regular news section that also operates online (<http://www.laprensagrafica.com/dpt15/>).

Development Partnerships with HTAs

Unlike the absence of initiatives on remittance transfers, the Salvadoran government has worked closely in forging partnerships with hometown associations (HTAs) to work on a range of development projects in rural El Salvador. One important example is the initiative managed by the Social Investment and Local Development Fund (FISDL) of the government of El Salvador.

Hometown associations have established partnerships with various organizations. These groups include the national government (often in the form of the national development agency FISDL), municipality, churches, other nonprofits, and businesses. Depending on HTA political affiliations (or lack thereof), local mayors and the FISDL are among the top liaisons for project implementation. Churches also are on top of the list. Additionally, some Salvadoran HTAs are closely connected with other Salvadoran organizations, through groups like El Rescate or Carecen or through umbrella HTA groups like Comunidades Unidas Salvadoreñas and have been essential to the lobbying power of the HTAs on their home government.

To take advantage of the success that Salvadoran HTAs have had in the design and implementation of projects in El Salvador, the FISDL, in partnership with the DGACE, has developed a program through which HTAs abroad compete for matching funds from the national government to complete development projects. The program known as “Unidos por la Solidaridad” is designed to work with Salvadoran organizations raising funds to support their hometowns. Through this program, HTAs submit applications describing the project and funds required and FISDL reviews it for feasibility and responsiveness to community needs.

In order for a project to participate in the partnership, FISDL has various requirements, some of which include:

- a) The Project must conform to the municipal government’s plan on civic participation;
- b) The HTA must match at least 10% the project costs.
- c) The municipal government must be solvent;
- d) Only social infrastructure projects are included;
- e) Projects must cost at least US\$30,000 (FISDL 2004).

By January 2004 there were 14 contests for FISDL matching funds involving more than forty projects to which HTAs have contributed US\$2.1 million. FISDL has maintains a liaison approach through the program “Conoce tu municipio” which provides information to HTAs about the status of their hometown, as well as the projects FISDL has undertaken in individual towns.

Of the 45 projects that HTAs have partnered with the FISDL on, 28 have benefited the provinces of La Union (11), La Paz (10) and Chalatenango (7). Ahuachapan, La Libertad, Morazan, San Vicente and Santa Ana have had one project each, and Sonsonante has no HTA-FISDL partnership experiences to date. The average cost of a project undertaken in these partnerships is \$278,689.73, but varies with the department (\$1,210,349.58 in Usulután to \$40,000 in Ahuachapan) or partnership with an HTA.

Table 10: FISDL-HTA Partnership Projects

Department	Projects	HTA Funds	FISDL Funds	Total project costs	Avg Cost Project	HTA Donation	FISDL Funds
LA UNION	11	\$306,317.45	\$2,394,216.51	\$3,627,382.76	\$329,762.07	8.4%	66.0%
LA PAZ	10	\$62,500.00	\$782,254.94	\$1,366,122.39	\$136,612.24	4.6%	57.3%
CHALATENANGO	7	\$109,570.15	\$408,652.80	\$682,514.28	\$97,502.04	16.1%	59.9%
CABANAS	3	\$98,787.91	\$778,277.68	\$1,133,533.85	\$377,844.62	8.7%	68.7%
SAN MIGUEL	3	\$66,045.69	\$336,622.02	\$446,560.89	\$148,853.63	14.8%	75.4%
CUSCATLAN	2	\$22,000.00	\$184,261.98	\$254,902.90	\$127,451.45	8.6%	72.3%
SAN SALVADOR	2	\$6,000.00	\$387,798.37	\$638,945.90	\$319,472.95	0.9%	60.7%
USULUTAN	2	1,384,221.82	\$1,025,048.77	\$2,420,699.16	\$1,210,349.58	57.2%	42.3%
AHUACHAPAN	1	\$4,000.00	\$21,000.00	\$40,000.00	\$40,000.00	10.0%	52.5%
LA LIBERTAD	1	\$14,517.89	\$134,586.91	\$149,104.80	\$149,104.80	9.7%	90.3%
MORAZAN	1	\$4,972.00	\$342,539.91	\$497,155.16	\$497,155.16	1.0%	68.9%
SAN VICENTE	1	\$36,779.00	\$30,092.00	\$66,871.00	\$66,871.00	55.0%	45.0%
SANTA ANA	1	\$18,298.04	\$93,929.94	\$121,986.93	\$121,986.93	15.0%	77.0%
Total/Average	45	2,134,009.95	\$6,919,281.83	\$11,445,780.02	\$278,689.73	16.2%	64.3%

Source: FISDL, Proyectos de "Unidos por la Solidaridad" con Salvadoreños en el exterior, FISDL: San Salvador, El Salvador, Enero 2004.

Salvadoran HTAs, on average, give 16% of the support, both in financial donations and in-kind support, but the percentage ranges from 1% in San Salvador to 57% in Usulután. In the department of Cabañas, where HTAs have partnered with the FISDL on three projects,

HTAs have put up \$99,000 (9% of total funds) to match the FISDL \$780,000 (69% of total funds). The average cost of each project in Cabañas has been \$380,000.

Of the 45 projects, 17 deal with infrastructure, 14 with recreation and 6 with health (See table below). The Cuscatlan-origin HTAs (SALA, L.A. and Asociación Adentro Cojutepeque) have sponsored two projects with FISDL. In Cojutepeque they worked to remodel and furnish a recreation area for the town. In Suchitoto, Cuscatlan, SALA worked with the FISDL to repair and install streetlights on an access road to the Port of San Juan. By June 2004 the associations had raised a total of US\$4.53 million, double the amount they had committed until January 2004.

With the new administration of President Saca a new program was inaugurated with a call for proposals that led to the approval of 12 new projects amount 3.1 million, sixty percent of which was committed by the Salvadoran community living abroad (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de El Salvador 2006).

Another case where institutional relationships and partnerships have occurred with government involvement refers to the participation of the International Fund for Agricultural Development of the United Nations (IFAD) in co-financing development projects with HTAs. IFAD has a widespread rural project network in the Latin American and Caribbean region and has been working on projects concerning the relationship between rural development and remittances in El Salvador.

IFAD has been working to determine the role of remittances, especially as untapped capital, coming from the United States to Latin America. IFAD has been working with the World Bank and Salvadoran hometown associations in the U.S. to sensitize them on the conditions of rural Salvadoran communities and identify potential cooperative projects, pooling HTA and IFAD resources.

IFAD has worked with a Los Angeles HTA supported by El Rescate and a Virginia-based HTA to privately construct a local high school. Besides providing 53% of the funding,

IFAD's main contributions were technical assistance and help obtaining the support of the Ministry of Education for the project.

What IFAD has done is to incorporate HTA initiatives in its Rural Reconstruction and Modernization Program which in turn encourages migrants and migrant associations to invest in income-generating projects in their home countries. By matching migrant funds, IFAD has provided technical and financial assistance for projects in targeted Salvadoran communities.

iii. Honduran Associations

Like organizations supporting other countries of origin, it is uncertain how many Honduran associations exist. From a compilation of associations thirty were identified, four of which were interviewed for this analysis. Their activities are similar to those of the other groups.

Membership and organizational structure

Like other hometown associations, Honduran groups are also led by a board of directors as well as presidents, secretaries and treasurers who are elected on an annual or biannual basis. Groups have between 15 and 100 members who meet on a regular basis. However, given the binational nature of many of the groups' activities whereby they work to provide services both to local Honduran immigrants as well as communities in Honduras, locally based volunteers and clients could number into the hundreds. Like other hometown associations, Honduran groups tend to be made up of members from a specific town or municipalities in Honduras, although some have expanded their focus to include several municipalities, either on their own or in partnership with other HTAs. One New York based group, Travesia Nueva Ola, was founded specifically to represent immigrants from Travesia within pre-existing Honduran umbrella organizations in the area. Other groups have come together around other common causes such as Afro Latino culture or an interest in investment.

Project identification and implementation

Honduran organizations tend to keep in close communication with their hometown communities in Honduras in order to best understand what their needs are. They cite churches, local government entities and community groups as important contacts for their

work. Decisions on project selection are then usually made by the board of directors, although some groups do indicate a more formal process. One association interviewed, for example, sends a representative to their target community in Honduras every two years to hold community focus groups. The club then meets back in the United States to discuss the findings and vote on new projects. Like other associations in the region, activities tend to concentrate on health, education, infrastructure and disaster relief.

Honduran associations have also become involved in innovative campaigns to link the Honduran community in the United States to their homeland. The group Unidad Hondurena de Florida recently organized a voter registration drive for immigrants wishing to vote in the last Honduran presidential elections and personally delivered voter registration cards to officials in Honduras to make sure that they would be accepted. The Organizacion Hondurena de Palm Beach, also based in Florida, secured in kind donations from local Honduran-owned painting businesses for use in construction projects throughout San Pedro Sula. Other projects include assistance with the repatriation of remains, school supply drives, the construction of community centers and computer labs, the donation of medical supplies and investment in tourism projects.

While all organizations reported their willingness to partner with other groups, such as neighboring HTAs and umbrella groups like the Garifuna Coalition, in the implementation of projects, several indicated their hesitation to work directly with local Honduran municipalities. Some groups indicate a fear of corruption, and others have had negative experiences with local government. However, that is not true for all associations. For example, one New York group which is currently working with the government in San Rosa de Aguan to rebuild a bridge or another which received funding for a school repair project from the government of Travesia.

Fundraising efforts

Fundraising efforts on the part of Honduran associations are often creative and have a strong cultural focus. Fundraising activities have included trips to the beach and to casinos, a Mother's Day buffet and other dinners, dances, pageants and other cultural performances. Many groups also rely on the individual donations of their members, for example the New

Horizon Investment Club in New York, whose members pool their personal contributions for collective investment in things like stocks or real estate. Most groups raise less than \$10,000 a year, but some indicate that they have taken advantage of other sources of funding, from participating in entrepreneurial business activities to acquiring the support of major donors such as the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter American Development Bank.

Transparency and corruption is an important issue for many of these groups. One Miami organization personally delivers all of its donations on monthly trips to Honduras and brings back photos and testimonies from the beneficiaries to share with its members. They commented that many people prefer to donate to development projects in Honduras through their association rather than through other vehicles, because they can be confident that the donations will be going to the right place.

New Horizon Investment Club was founded in 2000 by 10 Garifuna Honduran immigrants in New York City. These founding members had the idea to pool their resources in order to learn how to invest in the stock market and then assist in the economic development of the Honduran community in New York City. New Horizon is a member of the Garifuna Coalition in New York and strives to empower Garifunas and Afro Latinos in general with investing knowledge. Since its inception, the organization has grown to over 100 members who convene for monthly meetings to deposit their investments and discuss possible stocks. In order to diversify their investments, the group decided to make its first real estate investment in 2004 in the form of a five unit apartment building in the Bronx.

More recently, the organization has become interested in the idea of leveraging remittances to boost economic development along the North Coast of Honduras. Specifically, New Horizon views tourism as an intriguing entry point for remittances to promote job creation and to attract more foreign currency to the region. To this end, the organization has developed a strategic alliance with The National Garifuna Tourism Chamber which is comprised of Honduran entrepreneurs involved in the tourism industry. New Horizon has been active in negotiating investments in these tourism-related activities through funding from the Multilateral Investment Fund as well as the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development. In addition, the organization is a co-sponsor of the 8th Annual Garifuna National Conference which will take place in April 2007 in La Ceiba, Atlantida on the North Coast of Honduras. The event will involve many local Garifuna organizations and entrepreneurs and will serve to promote tourism in this region of Honduras.

Hometown associations and development

There is consensus among scholars that there are certain basic issues to address regarding the relationship between hometown associations and economic development. The key

question is whether the attributes and properties of an HTA intersect with those of development players and development work.⁴

The UNDP defines development as a condition that creates “an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives.” A development player aims to find solutions to human needs and to offer alternative ways to promote self-sustainability. Some of the features that characterize development players involve choosing to promote some positive form of social, economic, or cultural development, having the capacity to allocate resources, and exerting an ability to identify needs as well as assess the impact of their assistance. The points below describe some criteria that relate to a civic organization like the HTA as a potential developmental player:

Development Potential of an Organization

- Capacity building: Process of strengthening capacity to identify priorities, resources and implementation
- Organizational nature: How an organization operates its activities and functions
- Partnership and Collaborative Capacity: Ability to carry out projects in collaboration with other institutions
- Long-term durability: Organization’s institutional capacity to last for at least five years
- Impact: Developmental Outcome of the project in targeted areas

A preliminary response to this question is that HTAs are primarily philanthropic groups whose work sometimes overlaps with economic development, but not always. The philanthropic work is instrumental to solidifying relationships with the community and promoting well-being. Moreover, those projects that generate wealth and employment contribute to the economic growth of a community and serve as models. Social projects on the other hand will have an impact depending on the way in which their objective coincides with the realities of local needs, whether they are sustainable over time, and if

⁴ Salvadorans in Houston are raising money to turn their hometown by a lake into a thriving tourist spot that can provide jobs and prosperity (Moreno 2006).

they pass ownership onto the community and can be replicated elsewhere (Orozco 2005a).

The development impact of HTAs is thus twofold. First, the community activism creates a critical mass of efforts aiming at addressing social needs that otherwise will be unmet. However, these needs will not always be fully satisfied by HTA efforts because the amount of funding is not large enough, the projects may not be sustainable or commensurate with realities. Second, the impact of these associations is more effective when they conduct their work in partnership with other groups and the organizations are organizationally more mature. This latter issue means that HTAs offer a development potential particularly among those that grow over time.

4. Diasporas, Philanthropy and Development

The discussion here about Central American associations brings into the debate the extent of their role as development players and diasporas. Partly as a result of the dynamics of globalization, the opportunities from political and economic opening in their societies, and circumstance, international migration over the past thirty years has shown that migrants have substantively become involved in different economic and social activities in their home countries. One of the resulting outcomes of this involvement is the formation of transnational families and communities; the latter defined as groups or families that maintain relations and connections that include home and host societies.⁵

In practical terms, a typical immigrant's economic linkage with the home country extends to at least four practices that involve spending or investment: family remittance transfers, demand of services such as telecommunication, consumer goods or travel, capital investment and charitable donations to philanthropic organizations raising funds for the migrant's home community (see box below).

⁵ There are a range of definitions, for example one is "groupings of migrants who participate on a routine basis in a field of relationships, practices and norms that include both places of origin and destination" (Lozano 1999).

Figure 2: Immigrant economic practices



These links have contributed to shaping a transnational identity that defines their place as diasporas. Sheffer defines diasporas as a “sociopolitical formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries” (Sheffer 2003, 10-11).

As diasporas define themselves through relationships with the homeland, international entities, and host-country governments and societies, they are thus influencing various dynamics such as development. Their practices are formed in part as a response to changes in the composition of the international system, be it the global economy or the international political landscape, as well as development or underdevelopment. People leave their countries because of poor social, economic and political conditions there, yet they continue to engage with their homelands at various levels. Such engagement stretches the idea of development beyond territorial boundaries.

In fact, taking diasporas into account when designing a development strategy is justifiable. The presence of millions of immigrants who are regularly connected to their homelands, as well as the impact that those connections have on local economies and communities, are

non negligible. Although some donors have engaged in activities as experimental strategies or trials, an institutional strategy that links their work with diasporas remains to be found. Several reasons may provide cues as to why this is the situation. First, some development experts are in disbelief that migrants can participate in development schemes. Second, because of the limited knowledge that exists about organized diaspora groups, some donors have uninformed expectations about what the results these groups can achieve. For example, there are problems of symmetry between a donor and a diaspora organization that need addressing. Third, diasporas' good intentions do not commensurate with their lack of development expertise and focus on how to become involved in development and what to expect out of their involvement. Fourth, academics who have worked in this field of diasporas have contributed little to offer a systematic approach that links diasporas and development. There is a lack of knowledge, theory and method on how to bridge the assumed link. At points there have even been errors made by academics. The term 'collective' remittances, is an example of an expression invented by academics but that in actuality does not exist outside the minds of non-HTA practitioners. The appropriate term is donations. Similarly is the extrapolation of terms like 'social remittances'. Fifth, the subject matter itself cuts across issues of migration and thus makes many uneasy about the political implications of doing migration related work. Sixth, even when there are good intentions among donors, there is no communication among them, much less outreach.

The current challenge is therefore to bridge that reluctance and relative disconnect between diasporas and development players. Here we offer some clues to keep in mind when considering this debate. First, is important to contextualize the various dimensions in which diasporas relate to development. Jenny Robinson (2002) speaks of the relationship between diasporas and development as being three-pronged: a) development in the diaspora, b) development through the diaspora, and c) development by the diaspora. The first refers to the use of networks in the host country, which includes the formation of ethnic businesses, cultural ties, and social mobilization. Development *through* the diaspora refers instead to "how diasporic [sic] communities utilize their diffuse global connections beyond the locality to facilitate economic and social well being" (Robinson 2002, 113). The third applies to the ramifications of "the flows of ideas, money, and political support to the migrant's home country" (123).

A second clue lies in establishing operational links with the economic practices in which migrants engage. Within the context of changing dynamics and realities there are important development alternatives to consider. Donors can identify their role by linking the activities of diasporas and their nexus to development. In turn, they can better operationalize policies and strategies. Thus, the various relationships that immigrant communities have with their home countries demand strategies that have a direct impact on issues relating to reducing transaction costs, leveraging the capital potential of remittances through banking and financing, promoting tourism, nostalgic trade, and investment, and establishing a state policy that attends to a country's diasporas.

Table 11: Dimensions of diaspora relationship to development

Development	In the diaspora	Through the diaspora	By the diaspora
Family remittances	Banking the unbanked	Financial intermediation; MFI	Thamel, MTOs,
Consumption of goods and services	Small business development		
Investment of capital		Technical training in remittance receiving areas	Manufactured goods; nostalgic trade; tourism
Cash and in kind donations	Capacity building	Project identification; networking	Social philanthropy

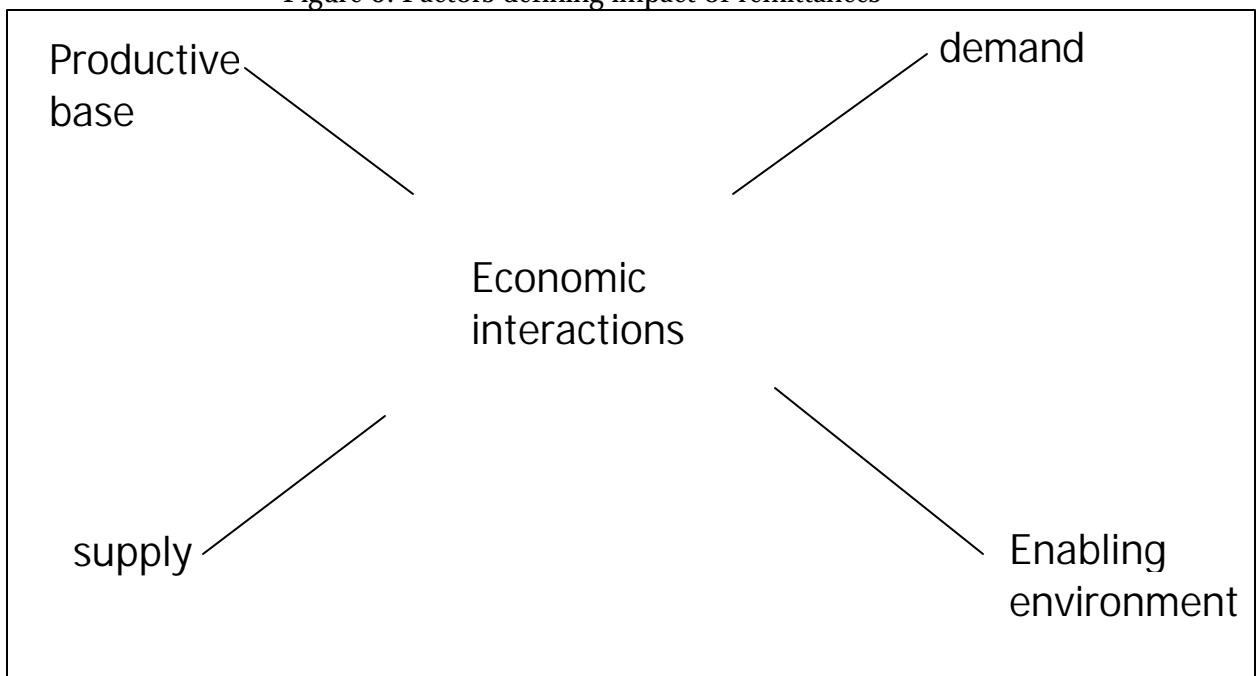
Third, it is important to recognize that while remittances and other economic exchanges primarily go to the poor, these interchanges alone are not a solution to the structural constraints of poverty. In many and perhaps most cases, remittances provide a temporary relief to families' poverty, but seldom provide a permanent avenue into financial security. To do this, structural reforms regarding inequality in Latin America as well as specific policies for integration and financial democracy for sending and receiving households are necessary.

When thinking about the intersection between development and remittances, it is important to understand that the social and productive base of an economy significantly defines the ways in which remittances will effectively function in that economy. Remittances need to be understood exactly as what they are: foreign savings. As with any other source of foreign savings, like aid, trade or investment, remittances interact with the structure of the local

economy. The extent to which such structures absorb those savings is the first question for development practitioners. This means that it is important to analyze the productive forces in an economy, the efficiency levels, how modern it is, what level of diversification/concentration of production exists within the various sectors, how entrepreneurship operates and is enabled, what technology tools exist or are missing, and the extent to which governments provide an enabling environment to motivate an interaction between investment and production.

Performing such an analysis will give cues about the extent to which the local economy exhibits substantive opportunities or failures that are enablers of migration and remittances. If an economy is unable to produce in a competitive context, its labor force will be depressed and eventually a portion will migrate to take care of their families. Even once they are away and send money, however, the beneficiaries may only be able to do so much with that money in so far as the local economy provides an effective supply to the demand of services and products.

Figure 3: Factors defining impact of remittances



Consumers have a demand for a range of economic and financial commodities and services, and their knowledge of what they can obtain depends on whether efficient information on the marketplace of goods exists as well as a supply driven economy and businesses that react to remittance recipients' interests. Some of these interests involve savings, credits and other financial services, but there are other interests such as basic consumption and investment in education and health. This latter point is significant when considering these issues from a gender perspective: women can improve their social position when the local economy offers incentives. If the productive base of the local economy cannot provide for that demand, imports of goods will then ensue. None of these situations are created by remittances but rather by the structure of the local economy which is also connected to the global context.

Fourth, understanding the level of engagement diasporas can have in development is crucial. Assuming that everyone is involved or can be involved is unrealistic. When looking at the extent to which groups form these types of organizations we find that at most one quarter of individuals who send remittances belong to a kind of organization. Their level of engagement is far greater in other activities relating to the family or personal investments.

Fifth, establishing a line of communication with migrant organizations is critically important. Both diaspora organizations and donors need to find a space for interaction and communication to bridge the divide that separates them by virtue of their social conditions: diaspora groups are predominantly volunteer groups. Many conferences and policy discussions about HTAs, remittances and migration exclude migrants themselves in the debate silencing a group that already is weak by its own nature and reducing its chances of effectively participate in development.

These five clues are steps that open opportunities and spaces to think about development outside the territorial confines of nation-states and focuses on the conditions of transnational families and communities.

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