



### **Beyond the Fence:**

*Research Lessons on How Immigration and Remittances Shape Global Development*

Center for Global Development  
1800 Massachusetts Ave NW, Room 1026/28  
SEIU Conference Center  
Washington, DC 20036  
Tuesday, May, 26<sup>th</sup>  
8:30 AM – 6:00 PM

### **Conference Statement**

Cross-border movements of people and the money that migrants send home have an enormous impact on global development. Yet the development impacts of migration are often overlooked or misconstrued, both in heated domestic debates about the impact of migration on receiving societies and in discussions of development policy. The migration-development disconnect makes it harder to create prosperity at the global level and undermines the development of policy solutions, such as temporary worker programs, that would benefit both developed and developing countries. Immigration reform is not a priority of current development strategies, and development impact is not a central part of the world's immigration debate. This conference takes up the task of uniting these historically separate policy discussions by offering new insights into the links between immigration and development.

Part of the challenge is that the immigration question has historically been examined from a receiving country perspective. Despite the tremendous gains that people from and in developing countries experience from migration and remittances, the global immigration discussion remains firmly focused on the economic, political and cultural implications for developed countries and their citizens.

Several pieces of evidence speak to the disconnect. Close to \$300 billion of remittances flowed from rich countries poor countries in 2006, compared to just \$70 billion in foreign aid. And according to the World Bank, if OECD countries allowed just a three percent increase in the size of their labor force through loosened immigration policies, the gains to citizens of poor countries would exceed \$300 billion per year. With some notable exceptions, however, the world's development agenda has yet to reflect the economic force of these flows of labor and associated capital.

Attempts to link immigration to development strategies are complicated by the traditional ways of thinking about development. Most development efforts focus on the welfare of people *in* poor countries rather than people *from* poor countries. This framing rules out many ways for developing-country households to improve their welfare, ways that include finding better work in other countries. If the central goal of development policy is to assist people in their pursuit of prosperity, we must grapple with the fact that migration dramatically shapes that pursuit. This is particularly true in economic environments where prosperity is an improbable outcome during the lifetime of potential migrants.

From this new, unified discussion emerges an opportunity to explore the potential for redesigning global labor markets. Could development impact be incorporated into immigration reform in the developed world? If migration could be used more effectively to drive global development, could immigration

policy also be used to increase the benefits of immigration to citizens in receiving countries? Researchers estimate that roughly \$150 billion in welfare gains that accrue to natives of richer destination countries from the greater productivity that immigrants bring. Could immigration policy be reformed to increase these gains? If so, at what costs?

For example, does this new frame change the political and economic calculus around focusing on temporary labor mobility rather than more traditional permanent migration? What are the trade-offs of this kind of a shift? Conventional wisdom in the U.S. suggests that these questions are non-starters, particularly in a recession, but emerging research challenges this assumption and offers new ways to measure and understand the economic value of more accessible borders.