

Why International Migration has Important Consequences for the Development of Belize

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Abstract

Evaluations of the impact of international migration on development must take into account the increasing complexity of international migration, the transnational nature of social relationships, the micro-level economic and social benefits of remittances, and the impact of migration on culture and social relationships. Such an approach is particularly relevant in the Caribbean, given the severe challenges to development in the region, and a wide array of mobility and settlement behaviors, including circulation, emigration, and 'visiting' patterns. In this paper, we argue that an evaluation of the migration-development relationship that takes into account these factors will yield strategic migration and development policies. International migration between Belize and the United States is used as a case study in this paper. We begin by outlining the material and social challenges to development facing Belizean people today. Second, we review contemporary Belizean migration patterns and existing policies and practices concerning migration and development. We conclude with suggestions for analyzing and developing policies that are sensitive to the complexities of contemporary Belizean migration.

Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that Caribbean nations are embroiled in a dependent position in a global capitalist system. Migration of cheap labor to metropolitan centers in the United States and Europe is one symptom of this dependency and, in fact, migration serves to maintain this dependency (Portes 1978; Sassen 1988). While this argument may be convincing, lively debate continues to ferment about the impact of migration on development. Unresolved questions remain about the proper level of analysis for the migration-development relationship, the time frame which is employed in these evaluations, the best way to evaluate the impact of remittances, and more fundamentally, what constitutes "development" (Thomas-Hope 1985; Russell 1986).

Recently, a number of studies have reexamined the impact of migration on development using innovative methods and a definition of development which gives primacy to social and cultural factors (Massey et al. 1987; Georges 1990; Gmelch 1992; Conway and Cohen 1998). These studies argue that the impact of international migration cannot be assessed using a model which emphasizes the economic over the [end p. 71] social, nor one which is based on a simplified taxonomy of migration patterns. Instead, analytical models must incorporate the increasing complexity of international migration, the transnational nature of social relationships, the micro-level economic and social benefits of remittances, and the often-ignored impact of migration on culture and social relationships (Conway and Cohen 1998).

Of particular importance is the recognition that Caribbean migration patterns are complex and diverse. External influences such as restrictive immigration legislation and unstable prices for primary exports

combine with local constraints, such as land shortages and high rates of unemployment, to produce constantly shifting patterns of international mobility in the Caribbean. The patterns consist of a wide array of mobility and settlement behaviors, including highly varied “visiting” patterns of many Caribbean people, including students, tourists, and business people, all of whom comprise significant proportions of Caribbean international mobility (Conway 1995). Circulation (temporary, repetitive movement between places of origin and destination), emigration (permanent moves), and “sojourning” or “visiting” patterns (Conway 1995, 1988) all reflect strategic life decisions intended to improve the quality of life of migrants and their families both in the home and destination countries (Carnegie 1982; Richardson 1989). The importance of this diversity of mobility patterns lies not so much in the refinement of migrant taxonomies, but in the recognition of an additional class of persons who may have social or economic impacts on their home community.

The severity of development challenges in the contemporary Caribbean makes the lessons gleaned from studies of migration-development relations particularly important to development policy and planning. When faced with the daunting task of evaluating the impact of migration on national development, planners often begin with a cost-benefit analysis of remittances. Such an approach may conclude that remittances have a beneficial impact on a nation's balance of payments and result in, an improved standard of living for recipients. A cost-benefit approach may also identify several criticisms of migration including economic dependency, increased social stratification in sending communities, and a failure to stimulate capital-generating initiatives (Russell 1986; Rubenstein 1992; Conway 1993). Another criticism likely to emerge suggests that the investments which nations make in education and social reproduction primarily benefit wealthy destinations as migrants leave for greener pastures (Brana-Shute and Brana-Shute 1982). Understandably, an analysis such as one outlined above is likely to be inconclusive and contradictory. However, more recent analyses, which take into account complex mobility patterns and the range of social and cultural capital generated by international migrants, provide a more accurate, optimistic, and potentially strategic basis upon which to build development policy (Massey et al. 1987; Connell and Conway 2000).

The purpose of this paper is to examine migration-development relationships in Belize, Central America, and to make suggestions for policy development using the more nuanced approach to assessment described above. Belizean international migration is typical of Caribbean migration in that rates of movement are high and mobility patterns are complex. What is unusual about migration in the Belizean setting is the presence of high rates of immigration as well as emigration, and the relatively recent but uniquely transnational character of the governmental and private sector responses to the impact of migration on Belize's economy and society.

This paper provides an evaluation of the impact of migration based on a multi-year fieldwork investigation of the transnational migration paths of Belizeans. The data for this paper were collected during fieldwork in 1994, 1996, 1997, and 1998 in Belize and Chicago (one of the primary United States destinations for Belizean migrants). In-depth interviews with Belize government ministers, civil servants, non-governmental organizations, Belizean migrant voluntary associations, and Belizean migrants in both locations provided insights into Belizean mobility patterns, social and cultural ramifications of this mobility, [end p. 72] and the transnational governmental and private responses to emigration and return migration. Participant observation in the private homes of return migrants, migrants in Chicago, and at the meetings and gatherings of Belizeans in Chicago provided valuable insights into the complexity of contemporary migration patterns and the ways in which Belizeans conceptualize the impacts of migration on their home country. A 1997 survey of over 800 teenagers in seven rural and urban high schools, provided further substantiation of the transnational nature of Belizean society, culture, and economy. Secondary data, including census and remittance information, were accessed in government and NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) collections in Belize City and Belmopan.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four parts. In part one, we briefly outline some of the development challenges facing Belize. Part two describes the complexity of migration between Belize and the United States, and outlines some of the social and cultural ramifications for Belizean communities. In the third section of the paper, we examine the transnational character of the Belizean government's attempts to retain the benefits of migration for Belizean communities. In addition, we take a look at initiatives undertaken by Belizean migrants themselves on behalf of their home communities. Finally, we conclude with policy suggestions for recognizing the wide range of social and cultural capital generated by contemporary mobility and remittance investment processes.

Development Challenges in Belize

Underdevelopment in Belize is rooted in British colonial practices and is manifested today in high rates of poverty, increasing foreign debt, and decreased food self-sufficiency. British Honduras/Belize's colonial existence was predicated on the extraction of forestry products using slave and indentured labor under the control of a European minority. Consolidation of land holdings by foreign investors (a practice which continues today) began during the centuries of hardwood extraction and was reinforced by land tenure practices designed to limit small holdings and guarantee a ready supply of wage labor (Moberg 1993). Primary reliance on the export of forest resources dominated the colony's economy through the 1940s, and economic diversification in the form of intensified sugar and citrus cultivation did not occur until the post-war period of the 1950s (Moberg 1993). To this day, the small size of the Belizean economy, reliance on only a few primary exports (citrus, sugar, bananas), a small number of trading partners and imported consumer goods, perpetuates economic vulnerability and dependency.¹

Development efforts in Belize have included structural adjustment plans financed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), participation in a World Bank Social Investment Fund, and a number of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) infrastructure and economic stabilization programs. Membership in CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market) and other preferential trading agreements has in the past provided somewhat stable markets for primary exports. Additional development strategies include tax incentives and loans for commercial agricultural operations, and the establishment of several Free Trade Zones designed to attract foreign investment. One of the most recent initiatives has been the 1990 International Business Companies Act permitting the establishment of tax-exempt offshore companies in Belize (Belize Online 1996; Belize Offshore Consultants 1996).

Social issues pose severe challenges to Belizean development. Many of the rural areas remain without reliable electricity or easily accessible sources of drinking water, and medical services for rural areas are distant and limited in the services provided. An estimated 40 percent of Belizean children fail to complete primary school and only 50 percent of secondary school-age children enroll (United Nations Children's Fund 1997). In 1991, over 50 percent of the working population earned less than BZ\$8,600 (approximately US\$4,300) per year, and unemployment in 1995 hovered around 12.5 percent (United Nations Children's Fund 1997). One survey estimated that 25 percent of all households in Belize should be classified as poor (United Nations Children's Fund 1997). Belize, by any (or all) of these measures is a small, underdeveloped microstate (Figure 1). **[end p. 73]**



Belizean Migration Practices and Their Sociocultural and Economic Impacts

Belize is also a multicultural nation as a result of successive waves of immigration over the course of its history. Early immigrants included British colonists, African slaves from the West Indies, Maya and mestizo refugees from Mexico, indentured laborers from India, and economic migrants from the Middle East and China. The Garífuna, descendants of Amerindians and African slaves, have a particularly well-documented history of forced and voluntary migration, which includes migration to Belize in the early 1800s (Gonzalez 1988). Mennonites from Mexico settled in Belize in the 1950s.

Recent Central American and Asian Immigration into Belize

While Belizean migration patterns and the multicultural composition of Belize's population bear a resemblance to those in other Caribbean countries, the geographic location of Belize in Central America introduces a unique dimension to the migration equation. During the 1980s, a large flow of migrants from Central America entered Belize, due to political and economic crises in neighboring countries. In 1993, an estimated 28,500 immigrants were living in Belize, most from Guatemala and El Salvador, with approximately 9,000 officially recognized as refugees (United Nations Children's Fund 1995). Central American immigrants in Belize tend to find employment in agricultural and construction industries, and engage in subsistence farming. Immigration of such 'foreign' Central Americans is thought to strain limited social service resources. Because these new immigrants are willing to work for low wages, they have displaced native Belizeans in some of the seasonal agricultural industries; not without causing resentment (Moberg 1993). The immigration of Central Americans and the contemporaneous emigration of Creoles (descendants of African slaves and European settlers) and Garífuna migrants has resulted in a shift in the ethnic balance of the country. For the first time in Belize's history, the mestizos (referring to both the Spanish-speaking descendants of refugees from the 19th century Yucatecan Caste Wars and the contemporary refugees from Central America) are the most numerous cultural group,² resulting in what has been called "the latinization of Belize," and contributing to a heightening of ethnic tensions and declining rates of literacy in English (United Nations Children's Fund 1995; Woods et al. 1995).

An additional source of ethnic tension revolves around the increasingly visible (East) Asian presence in the country. A drive along the Northern and Western Highways out of Belize City reveals a number of new condominium and residential complexes owned by immigrants from Taiwan and mainland China. One report claims that between 1990 and 1994, 13,000 permanent residency papers were approved for Asian **[end p. 74]** immigrants (about 6 percent of an estimated 1996 total population of 222,000) (United Nations Children's Fund 1997). Nationalistic fears have emerged about the economic "clout" of this group, their alleged failure to involve themselves in entrepreneurial activities to create jobs for other Belizeans, and their access to prime real estate.

Recently, charges by the nongovernmental sector have been leveled against the Economic Citizenship Investment Programme (BECIP) for increasing the population of Asian "foreigners" living in the country. Under the amendments to the Belize Nationality Act of 1985, a person can acquire nationality provided that he or she "has to the satisfaction of the Minister made a substantial contribution to the economy and/or well-being of Belize or has rendered distinguished service to Belize" (SPEAR 1991). Under this program, a prospective citizen pays a fee of US\$50,000 per family (1998 figures) and is granted a Belizean passport. "Selling passports," the more politically laden term for the Economic Citizenship Program, has occurred during the administrations of both political parties, according to a SPEAR (1991) report. A number of international companies claim to be licensed by the government of Belize to act as immigration consultants for this program (for examples, see International Company Services 1996; Belize Passport Consultants 1996).

While both major political parties in Belize have participated in the BECIP program, each accuses the other of benefitting financially and politically from the selling of passports (Amandala 1995; Reporter 1997). Other problems revolve around questions of land accessibility, and maintenance of a multicultural democracy. Some worry that BECIP and the accompanying ethnic tensions will create a second-class citizenship for immigrants and Belizeans who "look different," a divisiveness detrimental to the democratic process in Belize (SPEAR 1991).

Contemporary Belizean International Emigration

Emigration, or the continuous outflow of Belizeans, is the other half of the migration equation in Belize. The first large-scale emigration occurred during the 1940s and 1950s, when over 1,000 Belizean men were recruited for work in agriculture and industry in the United States. Many other Belizeans worked in construction in the Panama Canal Zone (Miller 1993). Belize also sent a volunteer force comprised of approximately 400 foresters, the British Honduras Forestry Unit, to Scotland during World War Two (Fairweather 1977). Some of these Belizeans remained abroad and started families. Hurricane Hattie, which hit Belize in 1961 and devastated homes, agriculture and businesses, is often cited by Belizeans as a primary cause for increased emigration during the 1960s. Demand in metropolitan areas for low-wage service workers during the 1970s also attracted the migration of women to the United States (Sassen 1984). Belizean women working as live-in domestics continue to comprise the majority of the current international migration stream (Central Statistical Office 1991).

Systematic estimates of Belizean emigration vary widely, but the most widely quoted figure suggests that at least 60,000 Belizeans live abroad (almost 1/3 of the in-country population in 1991), most of them residing in the United States (Vernon 1990). According to the 1991 Population Census, 3,119 Belizeans emigrated between 1980 and 1991 -- about 2 percent of the in-country population in 1991 (Central Statistical Office 1993). However, census data seriously under-report the number of Belizeans living outside the country, due in part to a reluctance to answer the census questions about family members abroad, and the emigration of entire families (Central Statistical Office 1991). Nonetheless, some important trends emerge from two analyses of the 1991 census data (Nawijn 1991; Central Statistical Office 1993). Seventy-six percent of Belizean emigrants hail from urban areas. Half of the emigrants are Creole, while one third are mestizo, as compared to 30 and 44 percent of the total population respectively. The United States has absorbed 86 percent of the emigrants, and 55 percent of the reported emigrants are women. About half of the emigrants are between the ages of 15 and 24. Half of the emigrants have completed secondary education at the time of migration, and a majority are **[end p. 75]** from relatively affluent families, by Belizean standards.

United States statistics provide the other half of this transnational picture, although, as with the Belizean census data, actual numbers are under-reported. The 1990 United States *Census of Population* reported that 31,222 foreign-born Belizeans live in the United States (United States Department of Commerce 1991). Between 1991 and 1993, 48,000 Belizeans entered the United States using non-immigrant "visitor" visas (INS 1991, 1992, 1993). Between 1985 and 1993, 16,170 Belizeans received permanent resident status (INS 1992, 1993). Within the United States, notable concentrations of Belizeans can be found in the states of California, New York, Illinois, Florida, Texas, and Louisiana (United States Department of Justice 1991). The primary cities of destination include Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and, more recently, Miami.

Although likely to be conservative estimates, Belize census enumerations do exist for return migrants prior to the 1990s. The 1991 census reported 4,096 return migrants, 50 percent of whom returned from the United States, with the majority (70 percent) of these choosing to reside in the urban areas. Only 25 percent of the return migrants were between the ages of 25 and 34, 18.2 percent were over the age of 60, and, and 53 percent were men (Nawijn 1991; Central Statistical Office 1993).

Reasons for Migration

Ethnographic field work among Belizeans in Chicago and return migrants in Belize revealed that primary reasons for migration include obtaining secondary education, perceived economic opportunities abroad, and a lack of economic opportunities in Belize. According to those interviewed for this research, highly educated Belizeans tend to remain abroad to work because they would face underemployment in Belize, especially in technical fields such as computer science and engineering. Opportunities for overseas migrants are also reported to be relatively scarce in Belize in some semi-skilled occupations, due to a flourishing of vocational training programs for those who stay at home.

On the other hand, many of these locally trained people are now apparently emigrating in order to use these service-industry skills in the United States. Several Belizeans interviewed in Chicago and Belize City for this research explained that their migration decisions have been influenced by perceived economic or political opportunities, which arose after national elections. Social ties also prompt migration, and many Belizeans move to be with family and friends in the United States. A less frequently cited reason, but one which is thought to be prevalent among young people, is the pressure to leave because "it's the thing to do." Several professionals in social services interviewed for this research report a concern that young Belizeans are looking for a utopia and "greener pastures" in the United States

Sociocultural Impacts of Migration on Sending Communities

The sociocultural impact of migration on sending communities gets mixed reviews in the migration literature, depending on one's perspective. Structuralists view migration as a manifestation of an exploitative world system in which workers are uprooted from their communities and consoled with minimal wages, thereby retarding social change (Rubenstein 1992). Some argue that return migration is thought to increase social tension and stratification in sending communities when migrants bring back with them, or send from abroad, desirable consumer goods (Hirabayashi 1993). Perhaps the most enduring of the negative assessments of migration is the "brain-drain" hypothesis, which assumes the loss of skilled workers and the loss of national investment in education to the capital demands of other countries (Thomas-Hope 1993).

Some researchers strive to point out the positive developmental impacts of migration. Admittedly, they are difficult to isolate from indigenous processes of change. Gmelch (1987) points out that, in Barbados, return migrants from England were of great assistance in the transition to independence. Political consciousness and new forms of political empowerment in countries of origin have also been attributed to the return of migrants with experience in the United States (La Guerre 1983; Gmelch 1992). Opportunities for [end p. 76] social change are also thought to arise from the increasing numbers of political-action and environmental NGOs within developing countries, which are often led by migrants trained abroad (Berman-Santana, 1996). Migration and associated remittances allow the continuance of cultural traditions, such as the cargo system in Latin American communities, and social obligations to home communities (Rubenstein 1992; Hirabayashi 1993; Conway and Cohen 1998).

As we indicated in the introduction, the sociocultural impact of migration on Belizean communities is best understood by conceptualizing migration as a transnational endeavor. Belizean migrants, like their Caribbean and Mexican counterparts, conceptualize and act upon economic and social opportunities in the context of a "binational social sphere" in which kinship, political, and economic ties to Belize are assiduously maintained over long periods of time (Massey et al. 1987; Conway 1988; Chavez 1992; Basch et al. 1994). Migrants interviewed for this research confirm the popular notion that Belizeans seldom migrate without expectations of returning. Many of the migrants interviewed in Chicago, many of whom have lived in the United States for over twenty years, still view Belize as their home and as the place to which they would like to retire. Some Belizeans, particularly those who have resided in the United States for several years and who have met their

economic or educational goals, are considering a move home to Belize or of maintaining dual residency. Some with investment capital hope to start up businesses in Belize once they have saved up adequate sums. For many migrants, the years outside of Belize are filled with frequent trips back and forth to supervise construction of homes, to field test entrepreneurial ideas, and to maintain a social network in preparation for an eventual return.

As in many small countries, business and professional relationships in Belize are highly personalized and contribute to the partisan nature of public life (Benedict 1967). Since full independence in 1981, the United Democratic Party (UDP) and the People's United Party (PUP) have repeatedly exchanged political control. There is some evidence to suggest that Belizean migration patterns correspond to changes in national government. For example, a number of people interviewed emigrated just prior to full independence (1981) because of fears of economic instability and victimization by the party in power at the time (the PUP). Once the opposition party regained control in 1984, some of these people returned to Belize. Similarly, some PUP supporters left for the States when the UDP gained control in 1993, and may consider a return home since the PUP returned to power in 1998. Despite this "ideology of return" (Rubenstein 1979:296), the number of Belizeans who remain in the United States is much greater than the number who actually return.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the diversity of mobility patterns in the Caribbean complicates the assessment of migration's development impact. We do know, however, that diverse mobility patterns strengthen and expand the transnational social networks, which maintain international circulation (Massey et al. 1987; Gurak and Caces 1992; Connell and Conway 2000). In the Belizean case, students comprise one type of diversity within the mobility patterns in the Caribbean. While often disregarded in assessments of the sociocultural impact of migration and development planning initiatives, and although relatively small in number, migrant students have a potentially enormous impact on Belizean society. A 1997 survey conducted in seven Belizean high schools (representing a cross section of rural, urban, poor, and wealthy institutions), revealed the extent to which young people in Belize are involved in transnational networks (Babcock 2000). Of the 868 students responding in the survey, 11 percent had a mother living abroad and 16 percent had a father living abroad. A remarkable 87 percent had a relative other than a mother or father living out of the country. Forty percent of the students had traveled to the United States at least once, and 38 percent reported receiving goods or money from abroad on holidays.

In Belize, international circulation has influenced positive social and cultural change.[end p. 77] Much of the students' travel reported in the above survey can be attributed to visits to live with parents or relatives in United States cities each summer, a cultural immersion experience that results in changed perspectives on national and cultural identity. An earlier study, based on a survey of four high schools, found that international travel among Belizean high school students contributes to the incorporation of new foods into their preference system, while leaving intact a love for "Belizean food" (Babcock and Wilk 1997). Some of the social impacts of teenage "sojourning" may be less innocuous, however. Social service providers in Belize attribute the increase in gang-related activity in the early 1990s to the return migration of Belizean teenage gang members.

Adult migrants who have participated in women's organizations abroad have returned to Belize with an increased consciousness of the subordinate role of women in the Belizean economy and have organized around issues such as abortion and domestic violence (Miller 1993; McClaurin 1996). Three years ago, a rehabilitation center was established for young criminal offenders by a return migrant, who brought with him years of experience in youth work and community organizing gained in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. The 1997 Warigoun Barangun/Barranco Homecoming, organized by a transnational committee of Garífuna families and friends via the Internet, reaffirmed and celebrated Garífuna culture and transnational family ties. Admittedly, these benefits are long-term, intertwined with domestic processes of change and, for the most part, quite local.

Government and Private Responses to Migration

Governmental Programs and Policies

The need to assess the relationship between international migration and social and economic development has received increased attention by Belizean development planners over the last several years. While other Caribbean countries may have responded earlier and more aggressively to the social and economic potential and dangers of migration, some of the Belizean government's responses are of particular interest because of their transnational focus. The government-sponsored responses to migration under consideration here include the tracking of remittances, creation of a Population Unit, land investment programs for Belizeans abroad, and incentives for return migration.

Accounting for Remittance Flows

Under reporting and the popularity of cash and in-kind transfers thwart any attempt to estimate the full value of remittances sent to Belize from the United States. Nonetheless, estimates of "Family Maintenance and Migrants' Transfers," are collected annually by the Central Bank of Belize from the commercial banks in the country. Yearly figures reported by the Central Bank and the Central Statistical Office do not always correspond, but the most conservative estimates indicate that, in 1995, remittances totaled BZ\$34.4 million, 3.5 percent of the 1995 GDP (Central Bank of Belize 1996, 1997; United Nations Children's Fund 1997). The Belize Post Office also maintains records of remittances in the form of postal money orders sent from abroad. In 1996, the value of postal orders cashed totaled approximately US\$2 million (Belize Post Office 1997). Western Union also has become a popular way to transfer money from the United States. Over the past few years. One branch in Belize City reported over 17,000 transactions in the first nine months of 1997, many of which were transfers from the United States over the holidays and summer vacations (Western Union 1997).

The Developmental Impact of Remittances

The most common approach used to assess the economic impacts of remittances on sending communities is the "cost/benefit approach" (Russell 1986:677). Remittances are thought to improve a nation's balance of payments through the influx of foreign exchange, to provide imports of capital goods needed for industrial development, to promote savings, to ensure an improved standard of living for the recipients, and to encourage investment in the informal economy [end p. 78] (Russell 1986; Conway 1993). On the other hand, remittances are accused of increasing consumerism and exacerbating economic dependency, causing a decline in good work habits, and increasing social stratification in sending communities. Even more condemning is the argument that remittances stimulate little economic development in terms of capital-generating initiatives. Instead, remittances tend to be injected into "unproductive" investments such as real estate or consumer goods (Rubenstein 1983, 1992).

Critics of the cost/benefit model argue that the negative view of remittances can be attributed to a failure to delineate explicitly the relationships between specific investment patterns and the effects of remittances (Conway 1993). The cost/benefit model is also criticized for giving short shrift to the social and cultural ramifications of remitting, including the "human capital development" effects on education and health, which can be quite positive (Russell 1986).

Impact of Remittances on Belize

Cash remittances provide support for migrants' family members still in Belize. Remittances, sent in the form

of cash, checks, money orders, and wire transfers, are used to build or upgrade houses in Belize. They are also used to purchase consumer goods, food, clothing, schoolbooks, and to finance the migration of other family members (Miller 1993). Popular in-kind remittances include televisions, VCRs, stereo equipment, and clothing.

In Belize, remittances play an essential subsistence role for many families (Miller 1993). In the 1997 high-school survey conducted for this research, 76 of 103 (74 percent) students in a Benque Viejo (a rural town bordering Guatemala) school received money or goods from relatives abroad at least once a year. When asked what they do with the monetary remittances, 36 percent of the students reported spending the money on school, 25 percent spent the money on clothes, and 13 percent spent the money on food. Principals of high schools in Belize City and Benque Viejo report that, without remittances, a number of their students would be unable to attend secondary school, given the high costs of textbooks, uniforms, and school fees.

Close examination also has revealed the positive potential of remittances when used to stimulate the informal economy or small business development (Diaz-Briquets and Weintraub 1991), thereby promoting economic diversification (Chevannes and Ricketts 1997). In some Belizean communities, the investment of remittances in housing has ameliorated housing shortages and provided jobs for people in the construction industry (Miller 1993). In addition, housing built with remittances often doubles as storefronts and places of business in Belize (see McClaurin 1996).

Institution Building: a Population Planning Unit

Considerable challenges face Belizean leaders as they struggle to gain a more comprehensive picture of Belizean mobility. Until recently, there were no coordinated governmental policies or programs that incorporated migration as a factor in development planning and policy. On June 1, 1996, the situation changed with the establishment of a Population Unit (PU) within the Ministry of Human Resources. This department is funded by the Government of Belize and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. The unit has embarked on a multi-year national development and policy initiative, which integrates the study of population issues and development planning. The primary initiative underway by the Population Unit consists of drafting a comprehensive research and policy paper to be endorsed by the Cabinet. The paper was expected to address the following issues: 1) migration, including immigration, refugee movements, and the causes and consequences of out and return migration; 2) fertility, including reproductive health and family planning; and 3) urbanization and spatial distribution of new communities of immigrants. The PU has completed the section on international migration, which is primarily descriptive in nature, and a draft of the reproductive health and family planning section. However, the 1998 election and accompanying change in government, and the political sensitivity of family [end p. 79] planning issues in Belize, has prevented acceptance of the policy document by members of the Cabinet. A consortium of non-governmental organizations is currently working with the Population Unit to revise the policy statement with the hopes of overcoming these obstacles.

Land Ownership Programs

While the Population Unit attempts to understand better Belizean mobility, other transnational initiatives have been designed to tap the economic and human capital of Belizeans abroad. These include a land ownership program and repatriation efforts for Belizean professionals. The Belizean Land Ownership Program operated out of the Ministry of Natural Resources during the last UDP term (1993-1998). In 1997, this initiative was marketed in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago by Belizean politicians during their visits to expatriate communities. Belizean politicians often visit the United States and Canada to solicit contributions for political campaigns and to lobby key figures in the expatriate communities. In some cases, Belizeans at home find out about major governmental policy initiatives only after decisions have been

announced in the United States, further evidence of the transnational nature of Belizean social and political life.

In this particular example, the UDP government reserved 400 residential lots (each 85' x 90') at mile 17 and 18 of the Western Highway exclusively for Belizeans in the United States. Each lot, including water, sewer, and electrical service, sold for US\$4000.00. The owner was required to develop the land for residential use, with minimum housing values set at BZ\$50,000. The land purchased through this program could not be sold for five years and, if then, only to another Belizean (defined as a person born in Belize or a person having parents or grandparents born in Belize). As of December 1997, 150 lots of the original 400 were still for sale, a disappointing figure from the perspective of the UDP sponsors. Such land ownership programs have been heavily criticized by Belizeans abroad. Belizean Americans cite instances of lots being assigned without accurate surveying, expatriate lots being given to government officials in return for political favors, and unfulfilled promises regarding infrastructure development. In addition, the cyclical changes of parliamentary power between the two major Belizean political parties are thought to exacerbate abuses of power within programs such as the land ownership program (Ack 1995). Consequently, many Belizean Americans prefer to invest in other privately sponsored residential subdivision developments, despite their higher costs.

Repatriation Efforts

Both UDP and PUP governments have utilized informal and formal repatriation initiatives to lure Belizeans back to fill high-level civil service jobs. These initiatives include technology transfer programs co-sponsored by the United Nations, government scholarships that mandate a term of service, and personal recruitment of expatriates. It is the hope of one ministry official that the government's initiatives can utilize the talents of highly educated Belizeans and prevent the "brain drain." These efforts have met with mixed reviews. Some civil servants voice concerns that returning Belizeans know much less about Belize than those that remained behind. They argue that familiarity with the situation in Belize might be more valuable than skills learned while abroad. Some believe that those who left Belize "abandoned ship" and therefore the few available positions in the civil service should be reserved for Belizeans educated at home. On the other hand, return migrants who fill such positions often express frustration with party politics in Belize, explaining that patronage and political agendas get in the way of well-intentioned efforts on their part to improve the country. As mentioned above, appointment to civil service positions can be, in some circumstances, dependent on the return migrant's political affiliation. If the party in power is ousted during an election, the migrant may be faced with the choice of returning to the United States or seeking alternative employment in Belize.

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Duty free privileges are provided for Belizeans returning home. Belizeans living abroad can apply to the Comptroller of Customs in Belize City to exempt their household items and personal effects from customs duty tax and from value added taxes upon return to Belize (Customs Office 1996). One voluntary association comprised of return migrants has been lobbying to increase the per-capita exemptions for return migrants, hoping that such measures would facilitate return migration.

Development Initiatives Sponsored by Belizeans Abroad

The above-mentioned initiatives are government-sponsored and can be considered fairly conservative attempts to leverage the social and economic capital of migrants. Nonetheless, they do reflect acknowledgment by the Belizean government that development initiatives must include an appeal to migrants abroad and to those who are considering a return. More innovative approaches, albeit smaller in scope, have been initiated by Belizeans abroad. The American Belizean Investment Company and the Jancrow Investment Pool identify and capitalize small-scale (US\$0.5 to US\$10 million) investment opportunities in

Belize, using the resources of Belizean-Americans. Some of the investments thus far have included a citrus farm and housing developments. These companies are limited to Belizean investors or people of Belize parentage (Belize Network 1996).

Belizeans have also established voluntary associations in the United States dedicated to assisting Belize. The Consortium for Belizean Development, the only national Belizean non-profit organization, is dedicated to "fostering and promoting the education, care, culture, and general well-being of the people of Belize and Belizeans" (Consortium for Belizean Development n.d.). The Consortium has provided a number of charitable grants to Belizean institutions such as schools and hospitals. The Consortium is also considering the possibility of establishing a business partnership in Belize with a local NGO, the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse (NOPCA), the proceeds from which would benefit NOPCA.

Smaller, more local Belizean-American organizations sponsor frequent fund-raising events, such as raffles and dinner dances. These events help maintain a community identity, as well as raise funds for health-care items, educational materials, and scholarships for Belizeans. Another popular form of philanthropy among Belizean-Americans is the educational exchange program. The Belize-Michigan Partners is a quasi-governmental initiative that involves residents of Michigan (both Belizean-Americans and other Americans) in cultural and educational exchanges with Belize. The program has sent doctors to Belize to conduct clinics and Belizean farmers to Michigan.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Belize is faced with severe development challenges, made more complex by the contradictory sociocultural and economic impacts of large-scale migration and the variety of migration patterns exhibited by Belizeans. Some migrants leave the country for decades with only occasional return visits. Others visit the United States to find short-term employment, which allows them to meet specific financial goals. Still others, such as school children, make regular and frequent sojourns as a means of maintaining ties to their families abroad.

In common with other Caribbean countries, Belize is struggling to come to terms with both the positive and negative impacts of this migration. As we have explained above, an accurate assessment of the impact of migration on Belizean development must take into account not only economic factors, such as remittance flows, but also the social and cultural impacts of migration. Most importantly, such an analysis must recognize that access to and production of economic and cultural capital takes place not only abroad but also in the transnational exchanges between migrants and those who remain behind (Georges 1990; Glick-Schiller et al. 1993; Hira- **[end p. 81]** bayashi 1993; Olwig 1993). In our analysis, we have attempted to outline some of the ways in which Belizean migration generates this economic and cultural capital. Some examples include:

- Long-term and short-term employment abroad funds education, housing, and subsistence needs for friends and family in Belize, as well as generating capital which is invested in household commercial ventures;
- Travel abroad by teenagers enhances preferences for symbols of national identity, such as Belizean foods;
- Maintenance of social networks in Belize and the United States allows migrants to adapt to constantly shifting employment opportunities in Belize and the United States which are contingent on the political milieu;
- Cultural celebrations and extended family reunions are organized and executed by transnational networks, facilitating the preservation and expression of Belizean cultural traditions at home and abroad.

Belizean leaders and development planners within the last few years have begun the process of documenting

and assessing the impact of migration on the economic and cultural lives of Belizeans. What is most interesting about Belizean governmental initiatives on migration is the recognition that development planning must involve more than tracking remittance flows. Migrant communities abroad and the community of return migrants must be engaged in the effort. Programs such as the Belizean Land Ownership Program demonstrate such an awareness. However, this example and the others reviewed in this paper highlight some of the challenges faced by the government as it attempts to secure the cooperation and participation of Belizean migrants. Although they are not currently incorporated in governmental development planning, privately sponsored initiatives, such as the American-Belizean Investment Company discussed above, may also have an important role to play in extending the benefits of migration to the country at large. Private efforts face their own challenges. These efforts are small in number and limited in scope; they have yet to be replicated on a larger scale.

The above analysis suggests some possible steps (by no means a comprehensive list) for consideration by policy makers in Belize and for those migrants who are interested in enhancing the impact that their remittances and charitable contributions may have on their home communities:

1. Recognize and take into account the complexity of mobility patterns in the contemporary Caribbean. Analyses of the impact of international mobility must include an expanded conceptualization of mobility patterns, including tourist and business movement, and movement by Belizeans of all ages and at different stages of the life cycle, to reflect more accurately the transnational context in which social and economic transformations may occur. As Belize continues to develop a comprehensive migration and development policy, we would encourage an approach that understands and accommodates the complexity of mobility patterns among Belizeans and that recognizes the transnational nature of migration decision making.
2. In addition to improving the remittance tracking strategies, investigate creative ways for leveraging remittances for sustainable development. As the process of defining a migration and development policy proceeds in Belize, we would encourage re-examination of the social and economic impact of remittances, as well as the incorporation of remittance investment strategies gleaned from other Caribbean countries. Bascom (1990) outlines a number of ways in which remittances can spur economic development if they are properly managed and encouraged by the financial policies of the labor-exporting country. The definition of remittances should be expanded to include all transfers of wealth by individuals living outside of the country of origin, not simply support payments for dependents. Further investigation into the transfer of skills and the development of transnational commercial networks between sending and receiving communities is also required. Such an **[end p. 82]** investigation most likely would reveal previously ignored benefits associated with remittances (Conway 1993; Connell and Conway 2000).
3. Do not discount the small incremental benefits accrued by migrant families and communities in the sending communities. By documenting the potentially beneficial small-scale and household-level impact of migration on subsistence practices, we also come to understand more about the ways in which transnational relationships are maintained and could be potentially harnessed for the development of Belize.
4. Leverage the development potential of the migrant voluntary associations and transnational private efforts at small-scale capitalization. In this paper, we have described a number of efforts undertaken by communities of Belizean migrants on behalf of home communities, as well as the nation as a whole. While small in scale, and often geared toward ameliorating immediate crises in home communities, these efforts are valuable because they represent innovative approaches free of the political constraints faced by government-sponsored programs and development policies.

Undoubtedly, international migration will continue to play an important role in shaping the cultural and economic climate of Belize. The challenge for the Belizean government, and for communities of return

migrants and those still living abroad, will be to understand the variety of Belizean migration patterns and to explore the impact(s) of such migration. Close account must be taken of the sociocultural as well as economic ramifications of migration, and these findings must be incorporated into policies and development strategies that are appropriate to Belize's unique cultural and political position in Central America and its long history of transnational migration.

Notes

1. 1996 GDP per capita was US\$2,307.50 (Central Statistical Office 1997). The exchange rate for Belize dollars fluctuates around US\$1=BZ\$2.

2. *Mestizos* constitute 43.6 percent of the population, while the Creoles now make up only 29.8 percent of the population. This is a striking shift since the 1980 census, when *Mestizos* comprised 33.1 percent of the population compared to the Creoles' 39.7 percent (Central Statistical Office 1991).

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Resumen

Para evaluar los impactos de emigración en desarrollo es necesario considerar la complejidad de emigración, la cualidad transnacional de las relaciones de los migrantes, los beneficios de las remesas, y el impacto de emigración sobre los sistemas socio-culturales. Este tipo de examen es pertinente para el Caribe, dado que el desarrollo en la región es un problema crítico y que hay una orden extenso de comportamientos de movilidad y establecimiento, incluyendo la circulación, la emigración, y varios modelos de "visitante." En este ensayo, sugerimos que una evaluación de la emigración y desarrollo en que se consideran los sistemas culturales y sociales rendirá las políticas estratégicas de la emigración y del desarrollo. Tomamos Belice como un ejemplo. El ensayo comienza con un repaso de las adversidades económicas y culturales al desarrollo en Belice actualmente. Después, hemos repasado de las costumbres de migración en Belice y de las políticas de migración y desarrollo. Finalmente, sugerimos unas ideas para evaluar y crear políticas que tomen en cuenta a los sistemas de migración en Belice.

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