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¿Educación o desintegración? Parental Migration, Remittances and Left-behind Children's Education in Western Guatemala

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Abstract. Many Guatemalan parents migrate to the United States with the intention of returning earned income to improve the human capital prospects of their left-behind children. This laudable goal is achieved by many – arguably benefiting girls more than boys. However, negative international migration externalities including migration failure, familial abandonment, psychosocial harms and a culture of migration that disproportionally limits the educational prospects of boys need to be considered. Based on qualitative field interviews in western Guatemala with parents and educators, this article presents a nuanced view of economic migration and left-behind children's education, capturing both its remittance-related benefits and parental absence harms.

Keywords: Guatemala, international migration, remittances, education, culture of migration, gender

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Guatemalan migration to the United States is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the end of Guatemala's nearly four decades long civil war in 1996, scores of refugees relocated to neighbouring Mexico, while only a few made their way to the United States.[1] Since the end of the civil conflict, pervasive instability in Guatemala's economy, political systems and a host of natural disasters (e.g. Hurricanes Mitch and Stan) continued to push migrants northward.[2] However, instead of stopping in Mexico, 97 per cent of Guatemala's 1.4 million international migrants continued on to the United States with the stated purpose of providing better opportunities for themselves and their children.[3] This investigation aims to describe the influence of international economic migration, accounting for the disparate effects of parental absences and remittances, on left-behind children's educational prospects.

Several, predominately national-level quantitative, migration studies have analysed the influence of remittances on school attendance, dropout rates, performance and the overall percentage of household expenditures devoted to education.[4] While pioneering important research on remittance influences on education, these investigations may benefit from local-level qualitative assessments that more thoroughly delve into the nuanced nature of international migration and student achievement. Such qualitative studies can

[1] Andrew R. Morrison, 'Violence or Economics: What Drives Internal Migration in Guatemala', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 41: 4 (1993), pp. 817–31; Michelle J. Moran-Taylor, 'When Mothers and Fathers Migrate North Caretakers, Children, and Child Rearing in Guatemala', *Latin American Perspectives*, 35: 4 (2008), pp. 79–95.

[2] Cecilia Menjivar, *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); Richard H. Adams Jr. and John Page, 'Do International Migration and Remittances Reduce Poverty in Developing Countries?', *World Development*, 33: 10 (2005), pp. 1645–69; Matthew J. Taylor, Michelle J. Moran-Taylor and Debra Rodman Ruiz, 'Land, Ethnic, and Gender Change: Transnational Migration and its Effects on Guatemalan Lives and Landscapes', *Geoforum*, 37: 1 (2006), pp. 41–61.

[3] International Office of Migration (IOM), *Encuesta sobre remesas 2010 niñez y adolescencia* (Geneva: IOM, 2011).

[4] For example, Yao Lu and Donald J. Treiman, 'Migration, Remittances, and Educational Stratification among Blacks in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Social Forces*, 89: 4 (2011), pp. 1119–43; Alejandra Cox Edwards and Manuelita Ureta, 'International Migration, Remittances, and Schooling: Evidence from El Salvador', *Journal of Development Economics*, 72: 2 (2003), pp. 429–61; Joanna Dreby, 'Children and Power in Mexican Transnational Families', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69: 4 (2007), pp. 1050–64; William Kandel and Grace Kao, 'The Impact of Temporary Labor Migration on Mexican Children's Educational Aspirations and Performance', *International Migration Review*, 35: 4 (2001), pp. 1205–31; Dean Yang, 'International Migration, Remittances and Household Investment: Evidence from Philippine Migrants' Exchange Rate Shocks', *Economic Journal*, 118: 528 (2008), pp. 591–630; Richard H. Adams Jr. and Alfredo Cuecuecha, 'Remittances, Household Expenditure and Investment in Guatemala', *World Development*, 38: 11 (2010), pp. 1626–41.

disentangle the largely positive remittance benefits from the structural and psychosocial barriers that parental absences have on educational achievement. This case study integrates field interviews of a variety of participants with participant observation and document analysis to provide a well-rounded picture of how parental absences and remittances interact and influence children's relationship with schooling in five rural western Guatemalan communities.

During the past 30 years, researchers have debated the value of international migration and concomitant remittance transfers to emergent nation development and poverty reduction.[5] While conclusions regarding these dynamics have swung back and forth over the years, most investigators now agree that economic migration yields both an upside and a downside. Such countervailing influences similarly affect the educational attainment of children from migrant-sending households and communities. *Prima facie*, one might expect that an infusion of wealth to a migrant-sending household would translate into increased childhood scholarship. Households can invest remittances in school supplies, tuition and private and advanced education and its ancillary costs. At a more rudimentary level, households can use remittances to improve wellbeing through improvements in basic infrastructure, enabling improved access to electricity, clean water and sewage systems. Additionally, remittances can free children from having to assist with farming and household maintenance during the school year – removing a structural barrier to accessing a formal education. Perhaps less obvious, remittances can have a gendered influence on the wellbeing of left-behind children. For example, the absence of fathers combined with the receipt of remittances can hasten improvements in girls' welfare as left-behind mothers invest equally in all their children's human capital.[6] This investigation contextualises these benefits by also describing some of the harms associated with long-term parental absences and other negatives associated with migration.

The disruptive consequences of parental absences – both from a structural and psychosocial perspective – belie the belief that remittances only provide

[5] Joshua S. Reichert, 'The Migrant Syndrome: Seasonal US Wage Labor and Rural Development in Central Mexico', *Human Organization*, 40: 1 (1981), pp. 56–66; Jorge Durand, William Kandel, Emilio A. Parrado and Douglas S. Massey, 'International Migration and Development in Mexican Communities', *Demography*, 33: 2 (1996), pp. 249–64; Richard H. Adams Jr., 'Remittances and Poverty in Guatemala', World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3418 (2004).

[6] Francisca M. Antman, 'International Migration and Gender Discrimination among Children Left Behind', *The American Economic Review*, 101: 3 (2011), pp. 645–9; Esther Duflo, 'Grandmothers and Granddaughters: Old Age Pension and Intra-household Alloction in South Africa', *World Bank Economic Review*, 17: 1 (2003), pp. 1–25; Duncan Thomas, 'Like Father, Like Son; Like Mother, Like Daughter: Parental Resources and Child Height', *Journal of Human Resources*, 29: 4 (1994), pp. 950–88; Duncan Thomas, 'Intra-household Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach', *The Journal of Human Resources*, 25: 4 (1990), pp. 635–64.

positive contributions toward human capital formation. While remittances have greatly improved household conditions for many, associated migration events have restructured the nuclear family for others with counterproductive ramifications for children's educational achievement.[7] For instance, migrant parents constitute role models that children are likely to adopt. In doing so, a child may discount the value of local education and/or terminate schooling early if he/she plans to follow in a parent's footsteps as a future migrant.[8] Additionally, the long-term absence of one or both parents during a child's development can lead to depression and rebellion that are not solved by an increase in household income.[9] Such psychosocial effects can translate into childhood truancy, behavioural problems in school and a general lack of motivation to complete schoolwork.[10]

Given the potentially beneficial and detrimental influence of international migration on the wellbeing of left-behind children, how is student achievement ultimately shaped by this dynamic in rural Guatemala? To answer this question, this study unpacks the complex influence of international migration, parental absences and remittances, on the educational potential of left-behind children in Guatemala from the perspectives of parents and educators. Specifically, it contextualises conditions in five rural Guatemalan communities from which households make decisions to migrate. And, based on these migration decisions along with underlying community conditions, the article shows that for many Guatemalan families economic migration and remittances can facilitate opportunities for left-behind students to thrive in school. However, there are also numerous unintended consequences of economic migration (e.g. migration failure, familial abandonment, psychosocial harm and the reprioritisation of schooling for boys when a culture of migration exacts its influence) that can neutralise or even harm education prospects for other left-behind children.

[7] Reanne Frank and Elizabeth Wildsmith, 'The Grass Widows of Mexico: Migration and Union Dissolution in a Dinational Context', *Social Forces*, 83: 3 (2005), pp. 919–47; Rosa María Aguilera-Guzmán, V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder, Martha Romero and María Elena Medina-Mora, 'Paternal Absence and International Migration: Stressors and Compensators Associated with the Mental Health of Mexican Teenagers of Rural Origin', *Adolescence,* 39: 156 (2004), pp. 711–23.

[8] William Kandel and Douglas S. Massey, 'The Culture of Mexican Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis', *Social Forces*, 80: 3 (2002), pp. 981–1004.

[9] Dreby, 'Children and Power', p. 1050; Carola Suárez-Orozco, Irina L. G. Todorova and Josephine Louie, 'Making Up for Lost Time: The Experience of Separation and Reunification among Immigrant Families', *Family Process*, 41: 4 (2002), pp. 625–43; Xiang Biao, 'How Far are the Left-behind Left Behind? A Preliminary Study in Rural China', *Population, Space and Place*, 13: 3 (2007), pp. 179–91.

[10] Dreby, 'Children and Power', p. 1050; C. Jama Adams, 'Integrating Children into Families Separated by Migration: A Caribbean-American Case Study', *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 9: 1 (2000), pp. 19–27.

Remittances and Educational Achievement

A growing body of largely quantitative research investigates the influence of remittances on educational outcomes in developing world contexts. A natural experiment from the Philippines found a rise in remittances due to an international exchange rate shock hastened an increase in education expenditures without a concomitant increase in household maintenance expenditures.[11] Additional Philippines research suggests that remittances are often used to place children in more educationally rigorous private schools.[12] Remittance research in Latin America reinforces conclusions reached from Philippines research. A 2005 Guatemala study showed migrant-sending households invest remittances in education with very little earmarked for food purchases.[13] In Honduras and El Salvador, remittance income primarily funded home maintenance, but was also used to for basic school expenditures and private school tuition.[14]

A few studies assess student dropout rates and education attainment in relation to economic migration and remittances. An El Salvador study found households that received the median amount of remittances, approximately US$ 100 in 1998, had lower hazards for dropping out of school – 54 per cent lower for urban first through sixth graders, 27 per cent lower for urban children beyond the sixth grade and 25 per cent lower for all rural children.[15] A reassessment of the Salvadorean study that accounts for migration selectivity and endogeneity bias, however, failed to corroborate earlier findings.[16]

While in most cases remittances appear to provide recipient households with the economic security to invest in their children's education, these studies do not account for the harms of parental absences. The following section addresses the disruptive effects of international migration on left-behind children's educational attainment.

[11] D. Yang, 'International Migration, Remittances and Household Investment', *Economic Journal*, 118: 528 (208), pp. 591–630.

[12] Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[13] Adams Jr. and Page, 'Do International Migration and Remittances Reduce Poverty?', p. 1645.

[14] Leisy Abrego, 'Economic Well-Being in Salvadoran Transnational Families: How Gender Affects Remittance Practices', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71: 4 (2009), pp. 1070–85; Leah Schmalzbauer, 'Family Divided: The Class Formation of Honduran Transnational Families', *Global Networks*, 8: 3 (2008), pp. 329–46.

[15] Edwards and Ureta, 'International Migration, Remittances, and Schooling', p. 429.

[16] Pablo Acosta, 'School Attendance, Child Labour, and Remittances from International Migration in El Salvador', *Journal of Development Studies*, 47: 6 (2011), pp. 913–36.

Family Disruption and Other Barriers to Education Attributable to Migration

In contrast to the largely positive effects that remittances might have on student achievement, the negative ramifications of parental absences on children's ability to attend school and their attitudes toward schooling cannot be discounted. The long-term absence of parents from households has led to numerous instances of infidelity and familial abandonment.[17] Studies have shown that remittance transmissions are sporadic depending upon job availability and can drop off over time as migrants lose connection with their families.[18] In Guatemala, Moran-Taylor reports that most parents intend to send financial support to child caregivers regularly; however, it is not uncommon for payments to diminish over time and for some parents to sever ties with their left-behind families.[19] It was also noted by Schmalzbauer in Honduras that the decline in remitted income can force left-behind children to drop out of school in order to work locally in maquiladoras or to migrate.[20]

The physical separation of husbands from wives that accompanies migration can also be very taxing on a relationship. Salgado de Snyder reported that left-behind Mexican women suffered high levels of stress, depression and fear of abandonment when their husbands left for extended periods. Left-behind children also suffered.[21] They were found to experience higher rates of depression than children who migrate with their parents.[22] Numerous authors have noted high levels of resentment by Honduran, Mexican and Salvadorean left-behind children toward migrant parents leading some to join violent youth gangs or to experiment with readily available narcotics.[23]

To properly analyse international migration and remittance influences on left-behind children's educational attainment, one must also consider the custodial circumstances that remain to nurture these children. The most common circumstance is for the father to migrate alone leaving mothers to raise children

[17] Joanna Dreby, 'Honor and Virtue Mexican Parenting in the Transnational Context', *Gender & Society*, 20: 1 (2006), pp. 32–59; Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[18] Cecilia Menjivar, Julie DaVanzo, Lisa Greenwell and Robert Burciaga Valdez, 'Remittance Behavior among Salvadoran and Filipino Immigrants in Los Angeles', *International Migration Review*, 32: 1 (1998), pp. 97–126; Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes and Susan Pozo, 'The Time Pattern of Remittances: Evidence from Mexican Migrants', *Well-being and Social Policy*, 2: 2 (2006), pp. 49–66.

[19] Moran-Taylor, 'When Mothers and Fathers Migrate', p. 79.

[20] Schmalzbauer, 'Family Divided', p. 329.

[21] V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder, 'Family Life Across the Border: Mexican Wives Left Behind', *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 15: 3 (1993), pp. 391–401; Leisy Abrego, 'Economic Well-Being', p. 170.

[22] Suárez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie, 'Making Up for Lost Time', p. 625.

[23] Robert Smith, *Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey* (New York: Random House Digital, Inc., 2007).

alone. Single, left-behind mothers with children face numerous challenges. Many single mothers live month-to-month with the uncertainty that their husbands will send sufficient income to pay for food and other subsistence needs.[24] These women juggle many responsibilities including cooking, cleaning and attending to the household's farm plots, before they can consider supervising their children's school activities. One must also consider that Guatemala's total fertility rate is between 3.9 to 4.2 children per woman in rural areas.[25] Therefore, it is not uncommon for women to be actively attending to both infants and the needs of older children or to have older children assume caregiver responsibility for younger children. These circumstances can disrupt school activities leading to absences and less study time. Creighton *et al.* found that rural Mexican children living without a father due to migration were at greater risk of dropping out of secondary school than children in two-parent families.[26] A less common arrangement is for both parents to migrate together leaving their children with grandparents. In Guatemala, this situation has resulted in numerous disciplinary problems as grandparent caregivers are less able or willing to compel their grandchildren to do well at school.[27]

A few researchers have thoroughly discussed a 'culture of migration' concept where entire migrant-sending and receiving communities are affected economically, socially, politically and culturally when they lose members.[28] The culture of migration effect has a distinctive gendered dimension where boys are differentially influenced from girls, often negatively, on a host of outcomes including educational prospects. For example, as communities become increasingly tied to migration, children of that community, especially male children, grow up with the expectation that they will follow in the migrant parent's footsteps and migrate northward as soon as they are ready.[29] Such expectations can diminish educational aspirations of boys when the prevalence of migration within the household and community increases.

[24] Abrego, 'Economic Well-Being', p. 170.

[25] Guatemala Ministry of Health and Social Assistance, University of Valle and Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Guatemala Reproductive Health Survey 2008–2009* (Atlanta, GA: CDC, 2009).

[26] Mathew J. Creighton, Hyunjoon Park and Graciela M. Teruel, 'The Role of Migration and Single Motherhood in Upper Secondary Education in Mexico', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71: 5 (2009), pp. 1325–39.

[27] David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala: 1760–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Michelle J. Moran-Taylor, 'Guatemala's Ladino and Maya Migra Landscapes: The Tangible and Intangible Outcomes of Migration', *Human Organization*, 67: 2 (2008), pp. 111–24.

[28] Douglas S. Massey, 'Social Structure, Household Strategies, and the Cumulative Causation of Migration', *Population Index* (1990), pp. 3–26; Jeffrey Harris Cohen and İbrahim Sirkeci, *Cultures of Migration* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[29] Jeffrey H. Cohen, *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004).

Evidence of this dynamic has been shown in Mexico. Specifically, boys from migrant households have been found to make less progress at school and to be are more apt to terminate schooling earlier than children from non-migrant households.[30]

The options that become available to remittance-receiving households regarding schooling generally outweigh the negatives of potential union dissolution, parental absences and other migration-related harms. However, many studies fail to address the fact that remittance-receiving households are not uniformly affected. As a group, remittance-receiving households might send their children to school more consistently than non-remittance-receiving households; but will these children thrive in school? The case studies that follow characterise the nature of educational attainment in the context of international migration and remittances in western Guatemala.

Interactions with Parents and Educators in Western Guatemalan Villages

The small rural villages that dot Guatemala's Western Highlands provide a perfect opportunity to investigate the positive and negative repercussions of migration and remittance on left-behind children's relationship with schooling because they support varying levels of rural to international circular migration. The case studies were carried out during a six-month period in 2008. During that time, individual interviews were conducted in Spanish in communities (Figure 1). Participant observation and analysis of public records complemented interview data. Community-level demographic (including ethnicity and population), economic and educational data are summarised in Table 1. All five case study communities lie within an hour's bus ride of Guatemala's second largest city, Quetzaltenango. The five communities were purposefully chosen because they support varying levels of international circular migration to the United States, receive differential amounts of remittance income and capture a range of Western Highland community development, social and cultural characteristics. Two of the communities (Sinaí and Santa Rita) represent modest, subsistence-farming communities with few paved roads, a smattering of *tiendas* and an absence of community services except their public schools. The two largest communities (Palestina and Zunil) hold the municipal seats of government for their respective municipalities. They each support a police force, municipal government offices, public health clinics, and numerous restaurants and shops. The last community,

[30] Andrew Halpern-Manners, 'The Effect of Family Member Migration on Education and Work Among Nonmigrant Youth in Mexico', *Demography*, 48: 1 (2011), pp. 73–99; David McKenzie and Hillel Rapoport, 'Can Migration Reduce Educational Attainment? Evidence from Mexico', *Journal of Population Economics*, 24: 4 (2011), pp. 1331–58.

Figure 1. *The Department of Quetzaltenango and Case Study Sites*

Curruchiqui, is a quiet canton (similar to a US suburb) with few public services that sits across Río Salamá from the larger community of Salcajá.

The author interviewed 92 participants to probe impressions of international migration, remittances and their ability to foster the educational development of their children. Initial study participants were recommended by community leaders while subsequent informants were chosen through snowball sampling. Participants included eight teachers and administrators (three female/five male) from one secondary (seventh to ninth grade) and five primary (kindergarten to sixth grade) schools, five male community leaders, 56 parents (60 per cent mothers), and one group of 15 women who regularly meet to discuss community events and women's issues. With the exception of one migrant participant who returned from the United States in the early 1990s, all current and/or recent migrants interviewed or referred to by study participants migrated in the mid- to late-2000s. The taped interviews lasted up to an hour and queried the attitudes of community members through consistent but informal, open-ended questions. A Guatemalan Ladina research assistant accompanied the author during the interviews to help facilitate interactions and to ease informant anxiety due to the presence of a foreign interviewer.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Five Case Study Communities*

	Sinaí	Palestina de Los Altos	Curruchiqui	Santa Rita	Zunil
Population (approximate)	1,800	15,470	1,200	1,500	12,130
Area	12 km^2	48 km^2	6 km^2	12 km^2	92 km^2
Employment mix	Subsistence agriculture	Subsistence agriculture Commercial agriculture Commercial services	Weaving Subsistence agriculture	Subsistence agriculture Weaving	Commercial agriculture Subsistence agriculture Weaving Commercial services
Relative level of development	Very low	Low	Low	Very low	Low
Distance to urban area	35 km	0 km	1 km	2 km	0 km
Literacy rate (above 14 yrs.)	40%	56%	90%	75%	56%
Graduated from 6th grade	50%	58%	90%	50%	30%
% migrant-sending households	60%	52%	60%	15%	40%
Primary US destinations	CA(7), FL, GA(4), MD, MI, NJ(2), NY(2), PA, VA(2), DC(4)	AZ, GA, IL, MD, NB, NY, TX	CA, NJ(2), PA, TX	CA, IL(2), NJ(3), TX(2), DC	CA, OK(2)
Ethnic composition (Indigenous/ Ladinos)	75/25	50/50	50/50	90/10	90/10
Languages spoken	Mam, Spanish	Mam, Spanish	K'iche, Spanish	K'iche, Spanish	K'iche, Spanish
Religious composition	60% Catholic 40% Evangelical	60% Catholic 35% Evangelical	80% Catholic 20% Evangelical	50% Catholic 50% Evangelical	100% Mayan/Catholic

Following the transcription of electronically recorded interviews, the author compiled all responses that directly and indirectly addressed children's welfare. The case study narratives were grouped into positive and negative impressions of international economic migration and further divided into parent perspectives and educator reflections. Caution should be exercised when assessing the opinions of parents, more so than educator reflections, owing to the fact that parental views are often biased by their participation (or not) in migration. In general, the educator reflections provide a more unbiased view of student performance and behaviour and by extension how these factors influence the learning environment for all students. Individual quotations that best represent the totality of the opinions voiced by the informant groups were taken from the consolidated child welfare responses. These responses were then expounded upon (interpreted) by the author to place the informant and his/her opinions in proper perspective given their community position and to address the fact that the interviewer was foreign to the community. Additionally, interview data were supplemented with participant observations and online municipality documents that provided rudimentary descriptions of community demographics, economics and history.

Parent and Local Educator Views of International Economic Migration[31]

When asked, 'What are the most important uses of remittances in migrant-sending households?', the universal response was to build a *casita* (small house). The second most common response voiced by over half of interviewees was to improve the wellbeing of their children through better education, nutrition and healthcare. The views and opinions expressed by the numerous participants throughout the case study communities varied widely and are summarised in Table 2.

Remittance benefits to education

In response to a question concerning the difference between remittance and non-remittance receiving households and children's education, Doña Maddy, a Sinaí community elder and mother, explained that families in Sinaí who do not receive remittances need their children to work in the fields. However, all Sinaí families who receive remittances send their children to school for at least a couple of years. At the upper end of the education spectrum, Doña Maddy's daughter-in-law had visions of sending her daughter to university with the money she received from her migrant husband while Curruchiqui's auxiliary mayor used remittances to supplement a scholarship

[31] Informant names have been changed to protect their identities.

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Table 2. *Positive and Negative Views of International Economic Migration and Educational Achievement*

	Sinaí	Palestina de Los Altos	Curruchiqui	Santa Rita	Zunil
Positive aspects of remittances					
Improve child hygiene	X	X			X
Modernise homes	X	X	X	X	X
Improve child nutrition	X	X	X		X
Allow children to attend school in lieu of household chores	X		X	X	X
Improve school attendance and performance	X		X		
Fund advanced education			X	X	X
Fund private schools			X	X	X
Fund school uniforms and supplies			X	X	X
Fund computer purchases			X		
Negatives aspects of migration and parental absences					
Contribute to disciplinary problems at home		X	X	X	X
Lead to truancy		X		X	
Result in classroom disruption		X		X	X
Children discount education in favour of future plans to migrate		X	X		
Causes depression in children				X	
Lead to infidelity, parental separation and family abandonment		X	X	X	X

to send his daughter to study medicine in Cuba. Other parents in Sinaí responded to questions about remittances and education by citing the importance of providing *alimentación* (nourishment) and *un techo* (roof). One mother went so far as to state that migrants from her community, including her husband, travelled to the United States to 'luchar por la vida de los hijos' (struggle for their children). She argued that migrants including her husband made a great sacrifice by undertaking dangerous ventures abroad in order to provide for their families, something that was becoming increasingly difficult given current economic conditions and US law enforcement activities.

Nearly all returned migrants interviewed share the opinion that their ventures to *El Norte* allowed them to better provide for the basic life needs of their children (food, clothing, shelter) and to vastly improve their educational opportunities. This view is encapsulated in the narrative provided by Henry, a father of two, who suffered many hardships growing up in Curruchiqui during the Guatemalan Civil War, 'There was not much food or work during the war. My father owned a couple of cows, so we were better off than most, but during hard times we would sell cow's milk and rely on

small portions of corn tortillas and beans.' Henry left the area when he was 17 and worked for six years in New Jersey where he saved a sizeable sum of money. Upon returning to Curruchiqui, he constructed a new home, married and says he and his family eat well, 'eggs three times a week'. His children get a full lunch in contrast to the few tortillas he would take to school. He is also able to afford private school tuition for both of his children. The communities studied in this endeavour were very poor without well-financed community organisations or support programmes to facilitate infrastructure or household-level improvements. Thus, remittances represent one of the few external sources of capital that can catalyse household improvements and to a lesser extent, community improvements.

Evidence for empowering women and girls was captured in some parent interviews. In response to a question about primary remittance uses, Sara from Sinaí, whose husband has been working in Atlanta for the better part of the last 15 years, reported, 'to allow my children to study'. Sara has three girls and one boy. All her children have completed or were completing secondary school, a rare occurrence in rural western Guatemala. Sara stated that two of her girls were studying in Quetzaltenango and San Marcos, respectively, while her son was commuting to secondary school in Palestina. Her third daughter, Kari, completed her nursing degree and was working in a nearby community's health outpost. Girls in Sinaí and other indigenous communities are often taken out of school after the sixth grade to assist with home maintenance activities. However, for Sara's family, the absence of her husband combined with the ability to administer remittances sent from abroad allowed her to keep her girls at school through the ninth grade and in the case of Kari to obtain a professional degree.

The teachers and administrators from Zunil, Sinaí and Curruchiqui also conveyed largely positive opinions of remittances. The primary benefit of remittances to Zunil's children was better nutrition and higher energy according to its primary school principal. Sinaí's primary school teacher's view is encapsulated in the following response:

> When I first arrived in this community, there was no potable water in the houses. Now, migrant households live better. They have washing machines, electricity; before they only used candles. Before, children's education was poor. Children would come to school with very old and very, very ratty clothes. Now, they attend class well-groomed with clean clothes that are not old and worn. Now, their education is better, the parents are investing in their children's education.[32]

Sinaí's teacher also acknowledged that communities were losing many potential students to international family migration. However, she explained that most of these migrant households represented the poorest and least educated

[32] It should be noted that only a minority of households within the studied communities live under such destitute living conditions described by Sinaí's primary school teacher.

families in the community who were less likely to send their children to school. In general, international migration is not a common livelihood strategy practised by the poorest members of communities due to prohibitive initial expenses.[33] However, in the communities studied in rural Guatemala, this generality did not hold. While poorer households were at a distinct disadvantage, migration costs were not an absolute barrier to sending someone to the United States. The communities studied were very tightly knit, thus borrowing money to cover the cost of hiring a *coyote* (people smuggler) from family or community members who successfully migrated previously was not uncommon.

In addition to improving basic living standards, remittances have been used to improve students' academic experiences. The director of Curruchiqui's school describes how many of the school's children have *padrinos* (godparents) who sent money to both the child's family and directly to his school to pay for tuition and school uniforms. According to the director, 'Approximately 90 per cent of my students received some money from the US. The others own businesses. We have had great success with graduating our students. Most will complete the 6th grade and 25 per cent will attend university. Much of this success is aided by migrants in the US.' Curruchiqui's secondary school director contended that children who regularly received remittances had better attendance records and performed at a higher level than other children. Zunil's school director stated that in addition to improving basic living conditions and paying for school supplies, remittances also allowed some children to attend more academically rigorous private schools, which is considered a big advantage due to the government's poor record of funding public schools.[34]

Manuel Orozco prepared a paper that addresses remittance effects on several Guatemalan communities, including the rural town of Salcajá, a commercial town that lies adjacent to Curruchiqui and Santa Rita.[35] Orozco noted that test scores in Salcajá rose modestly between 1996 and 2001, a time period that corresponded with an increase in remittance receipts to the community. He also noted that many remittance recipients sent their children to private schools in either Salcajá or Quetzaltenango.

[33] Jeffrey Harris Cohen and İbrahim Sirkeci, *Cultures of Migration* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011).

[34] Private primary and secondary schools or *colegios* in Guatemala are considered more rigorous compared with their public counterparts, especially in rural areas. However, much of this perception is not based on fact. According to Guatemala's Ministry of Education, school quality as measured by completion, repetition and dropout rates was not significantly different between public and private primary schools in rural areas.

[35] Inter-American Dialogue, Between Hardship and Hope: Remittances and the Local Economy in Latin America, Manuel Orozco's report commisioned by the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank, October 2006, available at http://thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/Remittances and the local economy in Latin America REPORT.pdf.

Migration disruption to education

A majority of parents interviewed who did not participate in migration expressed very strong opinions on the ills of migration and remittances. Familial disintegration was a commonly voiced concern. Augusto, a Santa Rita parent, captured the sentiment perfectly, 'When a husband travels to the US, he will provide a good house for his family but he will ultimately find another woman there. To soothe his guilt after hearing his children constantly ask him when he will come home, he will send a few dollars to silence them.' Augusto also described a family destroyed by migration due to a father's abandonment. In this case, a mother now 'toils alone' and cannot allow her children to attend school because they need to work to help pay the father's debts.

Parental absences can also create feelings of abandonment, depression and resentment in left-behind children that manifested themselves in many forms. Meri, a Santa Rita parent, described an increase in disrespect toward and a refusal to mind adult caretakers due to a combination of anger from being abandoned and empowerment through the direct receipt of remittances. She described these dynamics through a story of a boy whose father was in the United States. According to Meri, 'I know a family with the father in the US. The mother sells shoes to make ends meet. When the boy's mother asked him to help her sell the shoes, he responded by saying, "I don't have to help you because my dad is sending me money so I don't have to work."' Meri also recounted instances of remittance-receiving children squandering their money, 'they join gangs, where they hangout, eat, smoke, and drink alcohol'.

Javier, a 25-year old recent deportee who was forced to leave his two children and 'American' wife in Nebraska, indirectly argued against many of the negative assertions expressed by other parents and community members about US economic migration. He said he migrated to the United States to seek better educational opportunities for his children so they would not have to migrate. Javier's story gets more convoluted, however, when he divulges that he was married to a Guatemalan and had a son prior to migrating, both of whom he abandoned to marry his American wife. So, while Javier had good intentions when he left Guatemala, those intentions changed after spending time in the United States.

Teachers and school administrators also voiced many negative opinions of international economic migration. Their general complaints revolved around classroom disruption attributable to parental absences combined with a sense of empowerment (increased agency) associated with remittance receipts. When we first approached the fifth-grade teacher of Escuela Rafael Landívar in Palestina and described the purposes of our study, to characterise the benefits and detriments of international migration and remittances on

migrant-sending household lifestyles, he shrugged with undirected disdain. He explained:

> Children of migrants are well cared for. Remittances are used to buy clothes, houses, cars, cable televisions, internet, video games, thus these children live more comfortably with better clothes, better food but their study habits are bad. The use of handheld video games at school has led to many classroom disruptions, while the internet and cable televisions taken the place of homework for many children.

Santa Rita's school director stressed that while many migrant fathers sent money for the express purpose of paying private school tuition, that this money was often wasted because children of migrants skip class.

The principal argument of these authorities is that a split family with a father living abroad does not adequately discipline its children. They went on to explain that many children in migrant-sending households regularly missed school and did not pay attention when they did attend. This dynamic is heightened when both parents migrated, leaving their children with grandparents. According to Santa Rita's auxiliary mayor and a primary school teacher, 'There are cases when the father and mother go away and leave their children with grandparents and the grandparents spoil these children. The grandparents cannot push these children to attend class and all the parent's intentions for improving the education of these children are lost.' Essentially, the failure of these students to attend class, graduate and move on to higher education possibilities was directly counter to their parent's primary reasons for migrating to the United States. Jorge García, the principal at Escuela Curruchiqui, who had expressed largely positive opinions of international migration, also mentioned that left-behind children were commonly disrespectful to their grandparental caregivers and discounted the need for education. Reflecting the arguments proffered by Kandel and Massey about a 'culture of migration', these educators believed that many boys have developed a mind-set that international migration is the key to their economic future, thus school is a waste of time.[36] This is reinforced, according to Palestina's school director, by the fact boys often follow in their father's footsteps by leaving for the United States without documents when they reach 15 to 18 years of age. According to Sinaí's teacher:

> Children who migrate to the US leave with less than a sixth grade education while those who succeed in obtaining a higher education degree migrate to Guatemala City or the coast to work as professionals. Once they reach 17 years of age, boys have no interest in studying, they just beg their parents to let them join their fathers in the US without completing the sixth grade.

The topic of depression was also brought up by Santa Rita's principal. He stated:

[36] Kandel and Massey, 'The Culture of Mexican Migration', p. 981.

Yes, a migrant father sends money for clothes, games, everything for his child but that is not all that is needed. What the child needs is his affection, his presence; yes these children are harmed when their father is away. When both parents are home the children participate in class, they are more willing to do their work and thus they are more successful.

In the principal's opinion, many of the classroom disruptions and/or lack of motivation to apply oneself were directly related to a sense of abandonment felt by the children because they do not know when their father will return.

Palestina and Santa Rita administrators and teachers discussed some of the community-level impacts of migration. Following up on the topic of family disintegration, Santa Rita's school administrator went so far as to state that some children with absent migrant fathers drop out of school and get involved in street gangs.[37] According to Palestina's fifth-grade teacher, 'When the father is not around, some children use remittances to buy drugs – a mother's authority is not respected.' Furthermore, it was not uncommon for migrant husbands to be unfaithful to their spouses and eventually abandon their families in Guatemala. These participants also mentioned that a substantial number of migrants have been deported back to Guatemala. In many of these cases, migrant households find themselves in severe debt as they funded the cost of a coyote with familial or institutional loans. This has resulted in high rates of crime in the community including robberies and assaults because deportees lack employment and fail to possess sufficient educational skills to obtain a job.

The Palestina school director placed some of the blame for poor student outcomes on discrimination. The school director recounts the following:

I had a very intelligent indigenous girl in my class; she could have gotten a scholarship to study engineering. However, her parents took her out of school during the 5th grade to care for her siblings. Women, primary women of indigenous origin are not educated, this is a problem we have here. The father believes that females are only and exclusively responsible for taking care of the family.

This example illustrates why mothers are likely to be poorly educated and less able to help their children with schoolwork. According to the Municipality of Palestina de Los Altos' website, 1,396 out of 4,233 (33 per cent) of its men are illiterate, while 2,356 out of 4,323 (54 per cent) of its women are unable to read and write.[38]

[37] As described in Moran-Taylor, 'When Mothers and Fathers Migrate', p. 79, the term 'gang' in smaller Guatemalan communities does not connote belonging to a violent organisation often associated with illegal activity. Rather in these rural settings, gang activity is generally limited to engaging in minor socially unacceptable behaviour such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, carrying out pranks on other children and tagging buildings.

[38] Palestina de los Altos, 'Palestina de los Altos, Quetzaltenango Municipal website', vol. 2009 (2009).

Zunil's school director took a more philosophical outlook on the migration/remittance/education dynamic. He believed that more important than a generic response to the question of whether a child whose family receives remittances is better off educationally than other children in the community is:

> Does the child, regardless of economic condition, have the desire, vision, and drive to advance in his studies? There are poorer children from this community that do not have economic advantages, who do their work, excel in school, and receive scholarships to advance in school. There are others who have every economic advantage that spend all their time eating. These children do not pay attention, they only eat.

But the director concluded by asking rhetorically, 'Some of these problem students were once very poor, so what is better – some behaviour problems or poor nutrition and living conditions?'

The Multiple Ramifications of Economic Migration on Western Guatemalan Students

The take-home message from these case study narratives, which differs from most other studies on this dynamic that have found purely positive or negative outcomes, is that international migration and the flow of remittances from the United States have countervailing ramifications for children's education. On the one hand, for many children, especially in households that exist at the margin, the lifting of basic living standards through the provision of regular meals, clean clothes, electricity, and sewage systems has profoundly positive impacts on a child's ability to more comfortably access a public education. An infusion of remittances has allowed some parents to free their children to attend school rather than keeping them at home to assist with household chores and farm work. Furthermore, there are instances of left-behind mothers feeling empowered to more judiciously invest remittances received from absent fathers in the education of both boys and girls. Additionally, as witnessed in Curruchiqui, many public and private schools regularly receive money directly from migrant parents to pay for children's education. However, the remittance/education dynamic is complicated by the fact that absent parents are poor role models who lack the ability to motivate their children to take school seriously. Due to the lack of discipline in the home and/or difficulty with coping with the absence of a parent, some children seek arguably, destructive paths to fill this void.

There are other instances where families are torn apart by international migration. Many migrants have been seriously assaulted on their northward journeys from Guatemala while others have unsuccessfully crossed into the United States or have been deported before earning sufficient income to replace savings or loans paid to human traffickers to get them to the United States.

In recent years, increases in US immigration enforcement combined with the global recession have made the migration gamble more difficult with migration success taking many more years to achieve. Another factor leading to migration failure mentioned by the study's participants is the not infrequent occurrence of migrant fathers or mothers taking up residence with other partners. Unfaithful migrants often continue to send money back to their families initially. But, in time, pressure from the new partner and more mouths to feed conspire to force the migrant to abandon his first family. The educational ramifications of migration and remittances vary by specific circumstances including: community differences, caregiver dynamics, psychosocial impacts and the trade-off between migration and education.

Migration and the community

At the community level (see Table 1 for community-level differences), there are both positive and negative consequences of international migration and remittances related to education. On the positive side, the teaching environment was vastly improved in some respects. Sinaí a small, rural and isolated village in the Western Highlands that was undoubtedly the poorest of the five communities, was also one of two communities that expressed positive views about international migration and remittance flows, particularly how they improve children's wellbeing and education. A key difference between this community and the other four was its strong integration. This community supported one well-attended church, while the community's women met regularly to discuss community activities, the latest news and gossip. All children in Sinaí were expected to assist with household and farming chores and their assistance level was dependent upon the relative level of household poverty. When a household successfully integrated international migration into its livelihood strategy, remittances reduced the children's burden of having to help with household maintenance activities, freeing them to attend school. For Sinaí's left-behind children, remittances were not a development panacea that allowed them to go to college; nor did many of these children progress beyond *primaria* (sixth grade).[39] However, remittances did allow these children, who were often living at the margins, to attend elementary school more regularly in better physical form, with clean clothes and full stomachs.

Curruchiqui, the second community that had been positively benefited by remittance flows was also very small. However, it differed substantially from Sinaí in that it lies across a small river from a medium-sized Guatemalan

[39] With the exception of Sinaí, all communities have primary (grades K–6) and (at least one) secondary (grades 7–9) schools. Sinaí students wishing to advance beyond primary school needed to travel approximately 30 minutes to Palestina de Los Altos to attend a secondary school.

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town (Salcajá) and did not depend upon subsistence agriculture as a livelihood strategy. Like Sinaí, Curruchiqui had an integrated feel where everyone knew what each other was doing. Curruchiqui, along with its more urban neighbour, have been dependent on migration as a livelihood strategy for nearly 25 years. This community fits Kandel and Massey's description of a 'culture of migration' perfectly. About 60 percent of the community's households and nearly nine in ten children from the community's public school had sent at least one member to the United States.[40] Following the long-term establishment of social networks abroad, it was much easier for Curruchiqui migrants to successfully find employment in the United States. This has translated into more money being transmitted back to Curruchiqui and in particular to its primary and secondary schools. These funds have been used to purchase computers, school uniforms, provide internet access, and in some cases to allow children to seek higher education opportunities in Quetzaltenango and abroad.

A number of negative side effects have been expressed by school directors, teachers and parents regarding migration and remittances. Santa Rita, in comparison to its neighbour over the hill (Curruchiqui), makes for an interesting case comparison as the two sit in close proximity to one another and have similar population sizes. However, while Curruchiqui had embraced migration, Santa Rita had not with only 10 per cent of it households reported participating in migration. Santa Rita was a subsistence agriculture dependent community that supplemented its income by producing products made by traditional weavers. Santa Rita was less cohesive than Curruchiqui. While most of Santa Rita's residents were indigenous K'iche, they divide their loyalties evenly among its three churches (one Catholic and two Evangelical). And unlike Curruchiqui whose homes were built right next to one another, Santa Rita households were spread out. Santa Rita's lack of acceptance of migration cannot be discounted as a prejudicial factor among its residents. However, there were other circumstances that made Santa Rita distinctly different from Curruchiqui. While both Santa Rita and Curruchiqui lie in close proximity to a small urban centre, Curruchiqui's compactness and higher level of community closeness allowed it, as a community, to keep better watch of its children so they are less likely to skip school and get in trouble with other idle members of the greater community. Furthermore, Curruchiqui's long and successful history of economic migration has translated into higher academic achievement that its students could strive for in school while Santa Rita's poorer school facilities and performance provided fewer incentives for its students to take education seriously.

The two remaining communities (Palestina and Zunil), which were six to ten fold larger in population than the three communities discussed above,

[40] Inter-American Dialogue, Between Hardship and Hope.

both expressed negative views (Zunil less so) of migration and children's educational attainment. In these larger communities, opportunities for children to get into trouble, embracing vices such as joining gangs, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and generally causing small problems for their communities were greater than in the other communities. The absence of parental discipline removed structural impediments to the adoption of harmful habits. Additionally, like Santa Rita, the educational environments in Palestina and Zunil were poor, Zunil reported a 30 per cent graduation rate at its primary school leading many students to discount the value of time spent in school compared with the economic opportunities that economic migration could afford. A more neutral observation cited by a couple of participants in Zunil was that remittances had limited positive impact because Zunil did not have the educational infrastructure for students to advance beyond the ninth grade unless large amounts of money were sent to allow students to travel and attend higher level and/or private schools in Quetzaltenango. However, given the very low primary school graduation rates for Zunil's students, using remittances to enhance school attendance could be considered a great benefit.

Left-behind household dynamics – discipline/psychosocial affects

Much of the influence of international migration and remittances on left-behind children's educational attainment rests with the caregivers charged with nurturing these children. There are examples of children left with their mothers that benefited from the migration/remittance dynamic. A few examples in Sinaí bear this out. Regular remittances sent from migrant fathers allowed mothers to hire labourers to harvest the household's crops thus freeing children to attend school. However, numerous informants argued that left-behind children ultimately suffered when their fathers were not able to regularly send remittances and/or failed their families entirely.[41] During this investigation, numerous examples were voiced in Palestina, Zunil and most acutely in Santa Rita on this dynamic. Roberto's account of a Santa Rita mother and her four children toiling alone in their cornfield after the head of the household abandoned them for another woman vividly illustrates one of the not uncommon consequences of the international migration phenomenon. Perhaps because non-parent caregivers lack interest or the ability to assist children with their schoolwork, many children from financially stable households often played truant, were more apt to act out in class, more likely to disrespect teachers, and were not properly prepared to participate in

[41] Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 'The Time Pattern of Remittances', p. 49, Menjivar et al., 'Remittance Behavior', p. 97; Moran-Taylor, 'When Mothers and Fathers Migrate', p. 79; Schmalzbauer, *Global Networks*, pp. 329–46.

school. When children are left with grandparents, these dynamics can be particularly evident.

According to many school administrators and parents, grandparent caregivers do not see their role as disciplinarians. Rather, they have accepted the role as caregiver but lack the willingness to wield a heavy hand and compel left-behind children to attend school. Such dynamics have been reported elsewhere. Dreby reported that grandparental caregivers chose to 'spoil' grandchildren rather than force them to do something that was unpleasant.[42] Moran-Taylor used the term *encargados* (guardians) when referring to non-parent caregivers in Guatemala.[43] This term encargados gives the impression that these caregivers are in a non-monetary contractual relationship to make sure left-behind children are properly nurtured. But beyond proper nutrition, shelter and safety, these guardians were not compelled to help left-behind children do well at school. Some of this reluctance may be due to a lack of education. Dreby stated that many grandparent caregivers in Mexico rarely get involved in school activities because they lacked a familiarity with the school system and could not read or write.[44] This seems applicable to the project's study sites given that overall adult literacy in Guatemala was three in four in the mid-2000s, with 72 per cent of all illiterate adults concentrated in rural areas.[45]

While many informants expressed the view that there was a general lack of discipline in households with absent fathers, only a few participants described potential underlying reasons for these disciplinary problems. Such underlying reasons, which are more likely to affect older children, include depression and feelings of abandonment. It was not uncommon for depressed children to act out in school or in other situations when they felt ignored or forgotten.[46] Parental absences in combination with the financial security that remittances provided created a toxic combination for some children. When remittances freed children from having to assist with household chores, they would act on their feelings of abandonment by disrupting class, disrespecting teachers and caregivers, joining gangs, and getting into trouble. The situation is exacerbated when migrant parents felt guilt. As reflected in the account of Santa Rita's primary school principal, a father will send clothes, toys and other requests but a child still desires his affection and wants to know when he is coming home.

[42] Dreby, 'Honor and Virtue', p. 48.
[43] Moran-Taylor, 'When Mothers and Fathers Migrate', p. 83.
[44] Dreby, 'Children and Power', p. 1050.
[45] UNESCO, Building Skills in the Informal Sector. Richard Walther, background paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012, 2011.
[46] Suárez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie, 'Making Up for Lost Time', p. 625; Dreby, 'Children and Power', p. 1050; Celia J. Falicov, 'Working with Transnational Immigrants: Expanding Meanings of Family, Community, and Culture', *Family Process*, 46: 2 (2007), pp. 157–71.

Dreby discusses the power/powerless dynamic that left-behind children feel when coping with migration and parental absences.[47] On the one hand, children are often the least influential when households make decisions regarding migration. However, due to an improved financial situation and weakening authority, many left-behind children possess distinct advantages over children from non-migrant households. They now have the resources to excel in school as household finances do not hold them back. However, when left-behind children are resentful of their parent's absences, this increased freedom leads to many of the disciplinary problems mentioned above including class disruption, truancy and involvement with other 'problem' members of local communities.

Culture of migration, education and gender

The 'culture of migration' as described by Kandel and Massey was alive and well in the communities analysed in this investigation.[48] As reflected in many interviews reported above, it is not uncommon for children, mainly boys, to discount the value of education in a poorly funded public school system when they saw neighbours and relatives who have achieved economic success through other avenues, namely international migration. With few examples of community members that transformed local school attendance into financial success, combined with the fact that a child's environment is besieged with constant reminders of what international migration can produce, multi-storied homes, automobiles, modern appliances, electronics, and other amenities, it is difficult to imagine a male child appreciating the value of education and not wishing to follow in a migrant parent's footsteps.

This phenomenon was reported by Kandel and Kao in their comparison of Mexican migrant and non-migrant households and their children's propensity to choose higher education or international migration.[49] A counterintuitive dynamic was found where children in remittance-receiving households generally performed better and were more apt to attend primary and secondary school but less likely to pursue a university education than children from non-migrant households. These authors argued that the mind-set of children from migrant households was vastly different from their non-migrant household counterparts for a multitude of reasons. First, the children of migrant-sending households had an existing system of US social networks that were established by earlier migrating parents and relatives, from which to ease their transition into a new community and find gainful employment. Additionally, economic opportunities in the United States were much more

[47] Dreby, 'Children and Power', p. 1050.
[48] Kandel and Massey, 'The Culture of Mexican Migration', p. 981.
[49] Kandel and Kao, 'The Impact of Temporary Labor Migration', p. 1205.

lucrative than those available to college graduates remaining in Mexico. Compounding these factors, because most skills acquired in Mexican schools were not rewarded in the US economy, it made little economic sense to continue to pursue a Mexican education when the prospect of a better paying job comes calling from the United States.

While it is much easier for an undocumented Mexican national to successfully migrate to the United States given numerous factors (e.g. only one international border to cross, lower travel cost and risk, and longer history of migration and associated migration networks), the economic opportunities that pull Guatemalans northward are similar and perhaps stronger in some respects. For instance, per capita GDP in Mexico (US$ 10,047) was over three times greater than in Guatemala (US$ 3,178) and one-fifteenth of the United States (US$ 48,112) in 2008–2012.[50] Although it cannot be argued that Guatemalan migrants are competing for jobs that pay average US wages, a full time, minimum wage job (2013 minimum wage in the United States equals US$ 7.25/hour) would gross about US $15,000, a vast improvement over the subsistence existences that many Guatemalan migrants lived prior to migrating. Therefore, it is likely that some children of migrants have and will continue to discount a local education and avail themselves of the migration networks established by their parents to pursue better economic opportunities in the United States.

There is also a gender component to the 'culture of migration' dynamic to consider. According to the International Office of Migration and corroborated by this study, approximately nine in ten Guatemala migrants are male.[51] Thus, it is boys, more so than girls, who are actively weighing the potential economic benefits of migrating abroad versus devoting their attention to educational pursuits. In contrast, girls are more apt to receive a boost to their education from this dynamic. Unlike boys, girls are less enticed by the allure of visible signs of migration success or pushed to fulfil a rite of passage inculcated by this dynamic. Furthermore, as evidenced by Sara's daughter's experiences, girls are more likely to benefit from remittances sent homeward compared with boys. This is due to the fact that decisions to invest remittances in the human capital of children will be largely made by remittance receivers, often mothers, who are more likely than fathers to invest income increases on their children's wellbeing and in a gender-neutral fashion.[52] Thus, discrimination targeted at girls, and in particular decisions to take them out of school

[50] The World Bank, International Comparison Program database.

[51] International Office of Migration, *Encuesta sobre remesas 2010 niñez y adolescencia* (Geneva, 2011).

[52] Antman, 'International Migration and Gender Discrimination', p. 645; Thomas, 'Like Father, Like Son', p. 950; Thomas, 'Intra-household Resource Allocation: An Inferential Approach', p. 635.

earlier than their brothers, is likely to erode when mothers hold the power to make remittance-spending decisions.

Conclusion

An important contribution of this article is its thorough description of the factors related to economic migration that conspire to both assist and harm the educational attainment of left-behind children in rural Guatemala. One theme conveyed is poor rural households utilising international migration as a means to, among other purposes, provide income to free their children from the toil of subsistence living in order to access a more complete and accessible education. This story is laced with a bittersweet irony where the very act of migration and the concomitant lack of discipline in the household combined with the resentment and depression that parental absences evoke prevents older boys from appreciating the educational opportunities that remittances afford them. Furthermore, this story also describes a 'brain waste' that differs from the more common narrative of a 'brain drain' where communities lose their best educated. The 'brain waste' phenomenon results when the most determined and strongest characters within a community, assuming that migrants are the more ambitious members of a community, see education as a waste of time when the lure of remittances from abroad hold the key to their economic success. Instead of thriving at school, boys opt to bide their time until they reach the age where they can travel abroad to seek low-skilled jobs with high pay relative to local alternatives.

A second theme captured by this investigation largely applies to girls. The story for girls and their educational opportunities/outcomes in these communities can be strikingly different from boys. While girls may also experience feelings of abandonment due to the long-term absence of their fathers, the remittance aspect of the economic migration equation has the potential to greatly increase educational opportunities for them. Since girls are much less influenced by thoughts of travelling to the United States, the channelling of remittances to mothers, who are more apt to invest equally in all their children's education, can go a long way toward erasing many of the structural (discriminatory) barriers that limit girls' educational attainment in rural Guatemalan communities.

Similar in many respects to the arguments proffered in the 1980s concerning the power of remittances to effect emergent nation development, remittances have led to outstanding improvements in human capital development for some. However, the act of international migration has resulted in disruptive effects for others. Many use remittances as a short-term catalyst to jumpstart a household's wellbeing and to allow their children to access basic and more advanced education. There are also instances where children are

negatively impacted by the absence of parents leading to poor academic attendance and performance. Therefore, just as the Zunil school director's reflection that much of student achievement lies within the students themselves, remittances can make it easier for students to access advanced educational opportunities. But, if they do not have local educational options or role models to push them to pursue such opportunities, no amount of money from the United States is going to make a difference in their educational achievement.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Muchos padres guatemaltecos migran a los Estados Unidos con la intención de enviar remesas a sus países para mejorar el capital humano de sus hijos dejados atrás. Esta meta noble es lograda por muchos (las niñas se benefician más que los niños). Sin embargo, algunos factores negativos de la migración internacional necesitan ser considerados, como no llegar a cruzar a los EEUU, el abandono familiar, los daños sicológicos y una cultura de migración que limita desproporcionadamente las posibilidades educativas de los jóvenes varones. Basado en entrevistas de campo cualitativas de padres y educadores del occidente guatemalteco, este artículo presenta una visión matizada de la migración económica y la educación de los hijos dejados atrás, mostrando tanto los beneficios relacionados con las remesas así como los daños de la ausencia de los padres.

Spanish keywords: Guatemala, migración internacional, remesas, educación, cultura de migración, género

Portuguese abstract. Muitos pais guatemaltecos migram para os Estados Unidos com a intenção de enviar de volta os rendimentos recebidos visando melhorar as perspectivas de capital humano dos filhos que deixaram para trás. Este louvável objetivo é alcançado por muitos – possivelmente beneficiando mais meninas que meninos. Todavia, externalidades negativas ligadas à migração internacional devem ser consideradas; estas incluem, insucesso na migração, abandono familiar, danos psicossociais e uma cultura de migração que limita desproporcionalmente as possibilidades educacionais de meninos. Baseado em entrevistas de campo qualitativas com pais e educadores no oeste da Guatemala, este artigo apresenta uma perspectiva matizada da migração por motivos econômicos e da educação das crianças que permanecem no país, levando em consideração tanto os benefícios das remessas quanto os danos da ausência dos pais.

Portuguese keywords: Guatemala, migração internacional, remessas, educação, cultura de migração, gênero