

Challenges To Agriculture and Local Development

Saturday, 12th of May



Subjects Touched Upon in the Presentations:

- There has been a great shift in rural economies as neo-liberal policy has promoted the privatization of lands and production with the goal of exporting.
- Rural communities need agriculture and sustainable development.
- Remittances cannot play the same role as effective governmental policy.
- These communities need to be principal actors in local development focused on the needs that these same communities identify.

Principal Points of Agreement and Recurring Themes:

- There has been a large-scale privatization of land and resources in the name of free trade. The demise of the rural sector has resulted in internal and external migration. This, in turn, has provoked resistance among the rural population in Mexico.
- It seems the government has abandoned the countryside. A certain form of investment can give new life to rural villages. However, it cannot substitute for good government policy.
- It is important to look beyond remittances when looking at transnational flows. Narco-traffic, itself transnational, also has an impact on rural development. For example, in certain parts of Mexico, there are communities that cultivate crops for drug production, who come in direct competition with producers from, say, Thailand.
- Rural communities are facing many problems with water source and environmental erosion. There is a need to focus on sustainable production. There are new markets in which rural communities can focus- bio-combustible, local organic farming.
- In various parts of Latin America, as in Michoacán, there is much investment in products made of wood, but this investment does not consider environmental consequences such as woodland conservation. Industries such as herbal medicine can be made environmentally friendly.
- Globalization is not meeting the needs nor providing services to rural, especially indigenous, communities.
- There is a need to organize rural migrants. In Bolivia, a successful family to family network exists that allows for more democratic decision-making in local business matters.
- We have to be clear that donating capital is different from investing capital. Remittances need to be invested. However, with these remittances there has to be transparency, technical assistance and business plans to be successful.
- Migrants feel a lot of pride towards the projects funded by their remittances. It is important to consider this emotional aspect as well as a religious aspect when engaging in development projects.
- Those that have left indigenous communities in Mexico often do not want to change their style of living. They emigrate to earn money and, in the future, to be able to return to their indigenous style of living.
- In rural communities, they are facing the problem of stagnant prices of corn. In indigenous communities, there are governments projects seeking to develop a livestock industry and genetically modified food industry, but are facing a discontented community. Examples such as these prove that there needs to be cooperation between the government and the local community.
- The disparity between those who receive remittances and those who do not is growing.

Points of Disagreement:

- Remittances are not going to solve the problems of rural communities, i.e. problems with the water source or with environmental degradation. In these cases, governmental policy would be far more effective.
- It is very important to recognize that indigenous immigrants are often politically poorly represented and are entitled to cultural rights.

Measures Proposed:

- Create specific funds for development in communities of origin.
- Develop more employment opportunities in the service sector, so that migrants may return their communities of origin for employment.
- Focus on models to convert remittances into both effective investment and political pressure, with the goal of more effective services in communities of origin.