

Connecting the Dots – Beyond Remittances

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Abstract

The population of the world is expected to age much faster in the near future, for the same reasons of steadily declining birth rates and increased life expectancies. This projection includes less developed countries, but at present, the trend is more pronounced in developed countries. In order to mitigate the impact of immediate labour shortages in Canada, employers and provincial government have asked for new programs that would guarantee that new entrants have the desired skills. In 2008, the total number of temporary migrant workers in Canada outpaced the number of permanent residents that were admitted. Over the past four years, Canada's immigration policy experienced a major transformation. Once based on the principle of permanent residency and family reunification, from 2006, Canada's immigration system began shifting to a model of temporary migration as a potential path to permanent residency.

While the issues of human rights, workplace safety, and abuse have engendered public appeals for reform as well as more research or increased regulations for employers, to date, migration and development hasn't been a policy priority in Canada. What could this recent paradigm in temporary migration mean for developing countries and how can Canadian employers and communities feel engaged in the development agenda?

Background

In 2004 Canada admitted 235,000 permanent residents compared to 126,000 temporary foreign workers being present in Canada in December of that year. In 2008 Canada admitted 247,000 permanent residents and 252,000 temporary migrant workers were in Canada in December of 2008. If we add the numbers of TFWs present in 2008 to those temporary workers who had returned home for a visit, the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada during 2008 is closer to 350,000.

The issue of temporary foreign workers is one of the most important social issues changing Canada today. The Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) has changed over the years to meet the demand of Canadian employers for skilled labour in various industries. There is no doubt that in the past years, most of the economic growth in construction, agriculture and trades was supported by Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) but there is also a trend towards recruiting new entrants with higher skills.

The program requires the direct involvement of several government departments, both at the federal and provincial levels, and third parties who operate in Canada and in source countries. This situation

lends itself perfectly to potential problems because of mixed expectations from all stakeholders such as employers, workers, governments, unions, human rights groups, and recruiters. Because of its complexity and lack of organization between the stakeholders, the TFWP has been troubled by inefficiencies and adverse consequences.

In Canada, the term Temporary Foreign Worker is almost universally associated with farm workers, and very often with abused, impoverished, exploited farm workers. Our collective memory of this experiment with temporary labour has not aged well, and to this day, rightly or wrongly, they haunt proposals to bring more workers in agriculture or other sectors to Canada. Until now the Canadian ideal of an immigrant has been someone who comes here with the ambition to work harder, earn more, save more, perhaps start a business, and succeeds. TFW also come to earn and save, but we have to look beyond our expectations that “The Canadian ideal of an immigrant is someone who becomes a Canadian.”

Immigration & Development

Outside of accounting for remittances, temporary worker programs do not have an easy-to-measure impact on the development of sending countries. The outcome depends on many factors, foremost the intent of the schemes themselves. Including the development dimension in designing temporary worker program, which is not the case for Canada, it would require careful reconsideration of issues that, in some cases, fall beyond traditional concerns.

Studies of more recent temporary foreign workers schemes have also revealed positive results. For example, Tanya Basok's case study of Mexican seasonal migration to Canada found that Mexican migrant workers have actually invested in agricultural land and small businesses at home.

In Canada little research or programs exist to help collect data on the potential benefits of co-development projects that would focus on remittances, training, education and collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders. As part of a recent research conducted in 2008/2009 by Jenna Henneby of Sir Wilfrid Laurier University in Windsor, several questions on training needs for temporary foreign workers were incorporated in a survey of 1000 workers. This recent study provides valuable data on the expressed need for workers to have access to various form of training. There is an obvious gap on identifying delivery mechanisms for education and training as well as engaging human resources to help capture the newly acquired skills of migrant workers in their home community. Henneby's recent research also shows that close to 50% of training was provided to them by other workers.

Managing Expectations

The TFW program generates a lot of opposition from labour organizations and civil society because of the nature of the program and the increasing amount of employers using it. For professional associations and regulatory bodies some of their concerns reside on the impact of brain drains and the recognition of foreign credentials.

Employers and recruiters have little knowledge about the positive impact of development as part of migration and would normally prefer to retain the same workers for longer periods of time or repetitive visits.

There is not much pressure on governments at all levels to see the importance of development beyond remittances. The benefits are not clear and the linkages with other development programs are not obvious to policy makers. Their expectations rely on a balanced workforce so that social programs are well funded and that pressures on salaries are kept at the right level.

Despite encouraging efforts to frame temporary migration, the Canadian government recently put forward proposed changes to the Immigration Refugee and Protection Act, introducing restrictions on temporary foreign workers that would reduce mobility and access to the Canadian labour market.

Beyond Traditional Temporary Foreign Workers Program

In order to influence existing immigration programme and processes, it's imperative to better identify gaps and opportunities for linkages in migration. Engaging the education sectors in the host and sending countries to work collaboratively in foreign credential recognition and skills acquisition should be the cornerstone of the program. Post secondary education like Frontier College in Ontario has successfully engaged their students to provide training to migrant workers in agriculture. Canadian students work side by side with migrant workers in rural areas to deliver various courses such as ESL, computer literacy skills, health and safety as well as basic literacy skills, depending on the needs of the workers.

At the onset of the recruitment process, workers and their communities will be engaged in orientation sessions that will centre on the development of personal plan for training and education, entrepreneurship and small business start-ups, social ventures and social development of their communities. For some of the workers, repetitive visits to Canada in seasonal employment could become a stepping stone to better employment.

Several of the workers coming to Canada to work in agriculture have skills and talents that are not utilized because of the nature of the work. Profile of several workers in low skills employment reveals that they have knowledge and expertise in information technology, the arts, music, and other talents that are not captured. Opportunities to showcase their talents and connect with local organizations can bring new opportunities for cooperation and increased earnings.

The program in place would utilize the past experience of migrant workers to deliver training in sending countries. Their experience with human rights, workplace safety, and specific skills provide a valuable source of information that could be part of pre-departure orientation.

Increasing workers productivity, reducing accident in the workplace, and having access to a flexible and available workforce are the main concerns for employers. Is it possible to leverage the existing process so that employers see the benefits in increased training and skills acquisition? Several producers in Quebec have purchased land in partnerships with their workers. Workers in greenhouses learned about new crops and technologies where they later applied this learning back in their home countries. As part of the pilot and research project, Quebec's largest recruiters of Temporary Foreign Workers will collaborate in developing relationships with employers to assess better methods to identify needs in training and delivery mechanisms.

The cost to manage and leverage a multitude of stakeholders can be prohibitive for a large scale initiative. In this pilot project, some of the cost will be offset by leveraging international volunteering programs abroad and in Canada. Volunteer sending organizations in Canada see mutual benefits to help in the delivery of training and capacity building opportunities for migrant workers. For those migrants

who have opted to stay in Canada, voluntourism programs and projects can help bring newly acquired skills to remote and rural communities.

Identifying potential synergies and collaboration with other Canadian development initiatives will provide new mechanisms to support the process. Cooperation with NGOs abroad will help leverage existing network and resources available to migrant workers and their families.

For the first time in Canada, a project will bring together recruiters, employers, migrant workers, micro-credit agencies, international volunteer organizations, and community stakeholders in both sending and hosting community. Leveraging existing resources and each phases of the immigration process and all stakeholders will provide a unique occasion to identify opportunities and gaps in the process.

Conclusion

Canadian and global economic, social, political and demographic trends indicate clearly that international labour migration is likely to increase in the future, and not decrease. Therefore the challenge is how to leverage migration in such a way that the positive effects are maximized, making it a win-win phenomenon for all concerned.

While the global financial crisis and higher unemployment rate have slowed down the rate of immigration, this is a unique opportunity to put in place a holistic and integrated approach to Migration and Development that includes the engagement of all stakeholders to help define expectations.

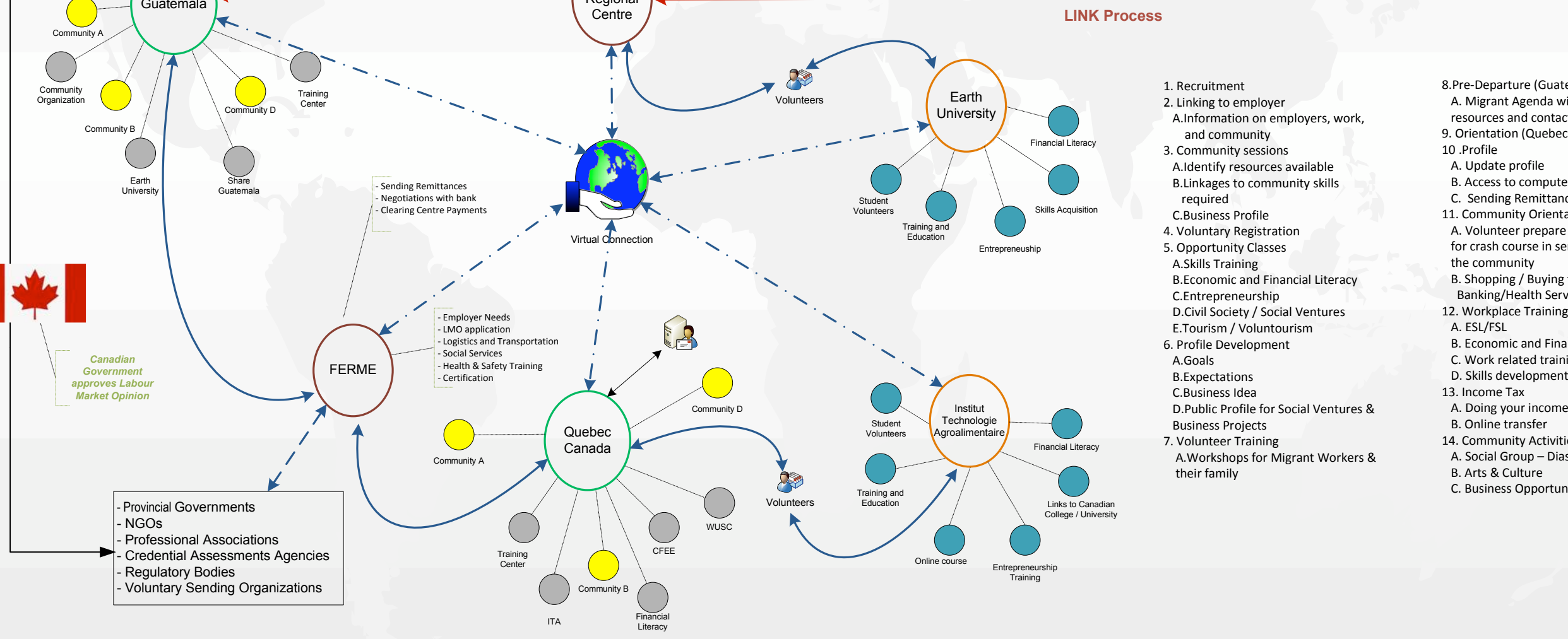
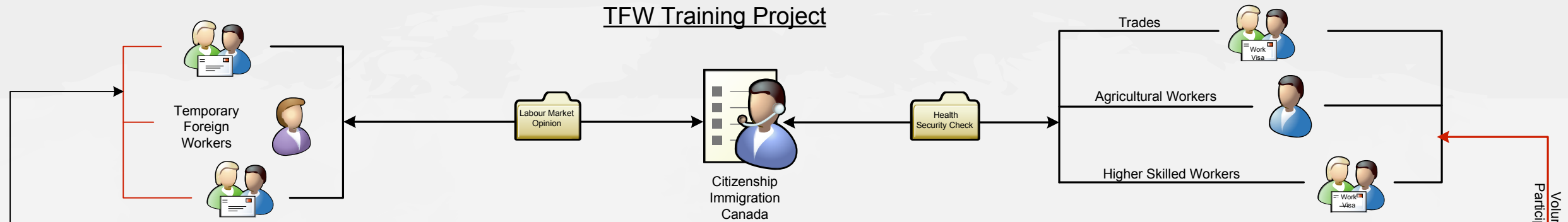
With increase transparency the Canadian Temporary Foreign Workers and the Seasonal Agricultural Workers programme provide unique venues that could foster development beyond sending of remittances. A collaborative approach to immigration between Canadian communities and sending countries can take place outside of government's supports. Payments to social security programs like Employment Insurance and Canadian Pension Plan could be channelled to support access to post secondary education and training for better employment.

The agricultural sector could be, once again, a catalyst for change in immigration. The dynamic of mobility alone has profound implications for immigrants and for Canada's healthy labour market growth. Some Canadian NGOs and analysts do not see a benefit to temporary migration; their single greatest objection to a TFWP may have nothing to do with the well-being of migrant workers.

Therefore, the TFWP and SAWP could be based on the concept that education and training is at the heart of immigration efforts. Without human resources training and capacity-building, these programs run the risk of limiting the intended results of our development programs in developing countries. A renewed TFWP could focus on a series of actions directed at helping migrants become important development actors by increasing their knowledge and skills to bring about the desired changes in their home country.

Of course, the moral calculus for increased co-operation should take into account both the well-being of temporary foreign workers and the need for an immigration scheme that respects the preferences of Canadians. But Canada's role in development co-operation cannot be defined exclusively on the basis of self-interest. Increased opportunity for circular migration, capacity-building and training would bring immediate benefits to producers, migrant workers and developing countries.

TFW Training Project



1. Recruitment
2. Linking to employer
 - A. Information on employers, work, and community
3. Community sessions
 - A. Identify resources available
 - B. Linkages to community skills required
 - C. Business Profile
4. Voluntary Registration
 - A. Skills Training
 - B. Economic and Financial Literacy
 - C. Entrepreneurship
 - D. Civil Society / Social Ventures
 - E. Tourism / Volunteering
5. Opportunity Classes
 - A. Skills Training
 - B. Economic and Financial Literacy
 - C. Entrepreneurship
 - D. Public Profile for Social Ventures & Business Projects
 - E. Tourism / Volunteering
6. Profile Development
 - A. Goals
 - B. Expectations
 - C. Business Idea
 - D. Public Profile for Social Ventures & Business Projects
7. Volunteer Training
 - A. Workshops for Migrant Workers & their family
8. Pre-Departure (Guatemala)
 - A. Migrant Agenda with list of resources and contact information
9. Orientation (Quebec)
 - A. Update profile
 - B. Access to computers
 - C. Sending Remittances
10. Profile
 - A. Update profile
 - B. Access to computers
 - C. Sending Remittances
11. Community Orientation
 - A. Volunteer prepare workers for crash course in services in the community
 - B. Shopping / Buying foods/ Banking/Health Services
12. Workplace Training (Volunteer)
 - A. ESL/FSL
 - B. Economic and Financial Literacy
 - C. Work related training
 - D. Skills development
13. Income Tax
 - A. Doing your income tax workshop?
 - B. Online transfer
14. Community Activities
 - A. Social Group – Diaspora
 - B. Arts & Culture
 - C. Business Opportunities