



Nezahualc6yotl, 23 de Junio 2012

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About the Researcher and Facilitator:

Nuno Solano de Almeida (Lisbon, Portugal)- Almeida completed his graduate studies in Portugal, Italy and Belgium, including a post-graduate degree in International Relations. His previous experience in the U.S. includes fundraising with Johns Hopkins University and advocacy on racial justice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Almeida's passions include development and international cooperation.

About ACORN INTERNATIONAL:

According to their website, ACORN International is a "federation of member-based community organizations that is active in Canada, Peru, Argentine, Mexico, India, Kenya, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, South Korea, Czech Republic and Italy with partners in the Philippines and emerging affiliates in Trinidad & Tobago. The membership currently numbers approximately 55,000 families" (<http://acorninternational.org>).

The Importance of Nezahualcóyotl in the Migration and Remittances Phenomenon.

With a total surface of 63,74 Km² and a 17 years long demographic density of 539,6 hab./ km² (*Censo 2010*: <http://www.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/default.aspx?e=15>), Nezahualcóyotl stands as a case study for the study of migration(s) (and therefore remittances). It is one of the smallest *Municipios* in the State, but has also one of the highest occupation and population density rates per square kilometer in the whole country. Its demographic pressure as well as its diversity (Nezahualcóyotl that celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2013), inhabited since its beginning by migrants coming from all the States, justifies by itself this mobilization of resources to implement this project about remittances and its impact on the population of Nezahualcóyotl.

Workshop: "Impacto Socio Económico de las Remesas de Estados Unidos en Nezahualcóyotl".

NEZAHUALCOYOTL, State of Mexico- Nuno Solano de Almeida, a graduate student from the University of Arkansas, Clinton School of Public Service, came to Nezahualcóyotl, State of Mexico, to conduct a series of interviews, with local residents in Nezahualcóyotl. Only those who depend and survive on remittances sent from their families immigrated in the US were interviewed.

On June 23rd, Solano de Almeida organized and conducted a workshop that took place in Nezahualcóyotl, gathering several members from the community and DF to debate and draft a manifesto, based on those same results from the interviews.

The workshop gathered many notable and distinct members of the academia, political parties, newspapers, civil associations and Federal employees.

The panel was composed by Prof. Laura Juarez, Investigator at *Universidad Obrera de Mexico*, Prof Diaz Rodriguez, Economist and Professor in Nezahualcóyotl and Nuno Solano de Almeida, graduate researcher at the Clinton School of Public Service, University of Arkansas.

Participants came from Nezahualcóyotl and D.F., including Esther Badillo, member of ACORN International in Nezahualcóyotl, Nadia Nehls, *Asesora Parlamentaria* to Senator Ruben Velasquez Lopez, from *Senado de La Republica*, and Humberto Olguin, community organizer at Valle de Aragon.

Other participants included families of immigrants in the US and members of the local community, including journalists from “La Jornada” and “Nuevo Semanario24”.

The second part of the workshop was exclusively dedicated to small group discussions among the participants, each facilitated by one of the members of the panel. Before closure, a civic manifesto based on the findings of the research, was drafted by the facilitators in collaboration with all the participants.

ACORN International, the co-sponsor of this initiative, plans to consign the final version of that manifesto, drafted by all the participants in this workshop, to a few selected elected representatives in the *Municipio* and *Senado de La Republica*. ACORN also plans to circulate this manifesto to more stakeholders, in collaboration with migrant supporting networks across the State of Mexico and beyond.

Results from this research study and any subsequent actions will eventually be announced by ACORN International in the United States.

Workshop about the impact of US based remittances in Nezahualcóyotl.

The workshop was both formative and informative. It’s primary purpose was to present the results from the data collected from the interviews, conducted by the Clinton School visiting researcher Nuno Solano de Almeida in Nezahualcóyotl. But it also served to invite the people to come together and give their opinion as citizens and active members of the community. At the end the panel and participants met and drafted a manifesto about the fees collected by currency transfer agencies.

Esther Badillo, ACORN International, has announced that it plans to send copies of the manifesto to several Municipal and Federal elected representatives.

The results from the study (Nuno Solano de Almeida)

Were announced and divulged at the workshop, on June 23 2012.

Researcher Nuno Solano de Almeida shared some of the findings with an audience composed by several and diverse stakeholders on the issue of Immigration and the local economy in Nezahualcóyotl (“Neza”) and the State of Mexico.

Solano de Almeida revealed that interviews were conducted in seventeen selected colonies in the *Municipio* of Neza, with a 30% rate of success, in a total of 231 interviews.

Amongst other statistical results, demographics were symptomatic of the fear and suspicion that emanates from the *Municipio*, when it comes to interview anonymous people in the communities.

118 people did not justify their refusal and 51 declared having no experience with remittances.

The most recalcitrant age group was between 46-65 years old, constituting 79 out of 176 refusals in total. More men than women refused the interviews in a total of 159 men to 71 women.

According to the researcher, Nuno Solano de Almeida, this is to his knowledge the first ever systematic group of interviews conducted in the *Municipio* of Neza about this topic: the socio economic impact of US based remittances.

The most important findings of the study

The researcher Nuno Solano de Almeida of the Clinton School of Public Service, University of Arkansas, divided the findings from the research in two parts: social and economic.

Immigration is a noticeable factor to cause families to break-up, making them more vulnerable to external problems in society. This phenomenon plays against a backdrop of “personal insecurity” in this local community, as 69% of respondents stated. 71% of the respondents declared having dependents at their responsibility, which makes the separation factor extend to at least one minor or others, besides the head of household.

Of all the interviewed, 28% were spouses or father/child, which means those represented the group suffering this impact of separation at the most intimate level, among all those involved with the process of sending and collecting remittances from the US in Nezahualc6yotl.

According to the results of this study, only 18% of those interviewed no longer receive any remittances, which means 82% are still impacted by this real or eminent separation issue. Amongst those 18%, half stopped depending on remittance money more than 5 and less than 30 years ago, which is statistically relevant but not conclusive since it is not recent. What is relevant is that only 38% of those who no longer depend on remittances also did not get their family back together: The immigrant who was providing for the family abroad did not return.

The research showed that, while risking their lives to cross the border (35% reported undocumented), and risking their health (8% suffered work related accidents in the US that forced their return to Neza), 52% of all the respondents declared using remittance money to cover only for basic expenses (food, rent, utilities) and 19% to cover for medical expenses at home. This proves the futility of this endeavor, since it does not solve any problems of structural poverty.

The corollary is that 17% of the respondents declared that were once the remittance sender in the US and now are the remittance collector at home. This suggests there may be a vicious cycle extending from heads of household to dependents, to follow their example and footsteps, by immigrating and extending the issue of family separation to subsequent generations in those families.

Former immigrants interviewed in Neza, despite all this and their hard experience, 20% still say they would go back to the US (many undocumented) again because it pays off.

From the economic impact point of view, the most important conclusion was that immigrants retard their transfers (31% send each three months) because the agencies that charge fees over transaction or amount turn out to cost too much (48% uses Western Union/Electra). 18% of the families depend 100% on those remittances, an average of 1000 to 5000 pesos per transfer, but they still have to conform with those charges that limit their income, and sometimes wait longer for the money to come. These are 71% families with dependents at their responsibility.

Undocumented immigrants are often barred from opening bank accounts and transfer their remittances through banks, which leaves them no other option but use those agencies, like Western Union and because of those high fees, sometimes (55% of the interviewed) retard the transfer.

Finally, 35% of the respondents declared not having profited/ benefited in a long run from immigrating and sending home remittances. Throughout the process, 60% lowered their expectations as to how much money they could send. 45% attributes that to the “unexpected agencies commissions or high bank fees charged per transfer or per value of transfer” and 27% declared they had to retard their transactions to their families in Neza.

Meanwhile, as a consequence, 58% of the families back home in Neza declared they had to find a job and work (this undermines the main purpose of immigration to begin with).

Others declared they tried to change money transfer agency seeking lesser “bank” charges and agency fees (39%). 44% who did change their agency, afterwards and now still complaint about the same problem (expensive fees charged per amount/transaction).

The economic impact conclusion was that after changing agency, those who changed (sometimes continually), did not find comfort. The difference is that before changing, only 3% said there was no alternative, but after changing the pessimism is greater with 14% claiming there’s no alternative.

The focus groups in the Workshop (Nezahualc6yotl, June 23 2012)

1. Small Group Discussion “Political” (facilitator Prof. Laura Juarez, Univ. Obrera)

Federal political competences on the issues of support to the migrant families should be decentralized to the level of the *Municipio*, where those families live and work. Families of immigrants, residing in the *Municipio*, can be involved as stakeholders in the

discussions with the authorities to empower Municipal departments working with remittances and migration issues.

Immigrants cannot be used as tools for public policy development. Remittances are not political tools for the purpose of public policy. Remittances are means of survival.

Conversations should start between the Bank of Mexico and commercial banks, international money transfer agencies to sensitize decision makers and public opinion leaders towards the need to start negotiating lower fees per remittance transaction and per transfer. Moreover this should set the bar for the Federal Government to push for public policy and regulation over remittance transfers.

Case study "Tigra" in Philippines ("Remesas por lo Desarrollo") must be investigated by the authorities in Mexico, as best practices, with a proven track record as a successful policy that involves the government as a regulator and an active presence, steering remittances transfers towards "productive projects" with social responsibility. Ex: of "NEXUS" a money transfer agency that donates a certain amount to a non lucrative association per each remittance transaction, which promotes investment in local businesses and jobs.

The problem of the immigrant, remittance sender, is a problem of internal conflict between where he belongs and where he is presently (USA and Mexico). It is urgent to create structures that create value. Turn remittances into means of production, trade the profits created by remittances and generate jobs at the local level for migrant families. For that process, the authorities should consult with "Centro de Atencion a La Familia de Migrantes Indigenas".

Government should legislate a fix fee or commission applicable to all banking institutions that facilitate the transfer of remittances. Banks should no have to subsidize those intermediary agencies, that process and charge remittance transactions, in order to benefit the migrants that send remittances from the US to their families in Nezahualcoyotl.

The Laws "(para) Proteccion a Imigrantes " (Project of Law for the protection and development of the migrant and their families) and "Ley de Proteccion para las Remesas Familiares", against financial exploitation of the remittance senders (Dec. 13 2011), both rejected in the Senate, need to pass and ensure the sensitization of the general population and protection of the migrant families. Some officials declarations that "we cannot act on behalf of those who are already abroad" are vehemently rejected and repudiated by us.

2. Small Group Discussion “Social” (facilitator Nuno Solano de Almeida)

Immigrants should receive information about the real risks of immigrating and abuses perpetrated by the remittance transfer agencies, related to excessive and constantly changing fees. The Federal government has that responsibility first.

Migrants, remittance senders and respective families who collect remittances must be informed by electronic correspondence, airwaves and TV, as well as directly.

SRE must be operational and promote awareness about the work done by the Consulates in the matters of supporting and protecting the interests of the migrants and remittance senders.

The Federal Government should not support directly the families that collect remittances because that could generate a situation of clientele.

Notwithstanding, public policies should be implemented to generate jobs, productive systems, social programs also extended to the migrants who are abroad in the US, through The Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Instituto de Mexicanos a Lo Exterior.

The Programs “Bienvenido a Casa Paisano” e “Compromiso con los Migrantes Mexiquenses” have not accomplished the desired goals. They need to be reformed and re implemented accordingly.

There needs to be an itinerary agency that frequently parks in Nezahualc6yotl to issue Passports to Nezahualc6yotl habitants.

3. Small Group Discussion “Citizenship” (facilitator Esther Badillo, ACORN)

A Federal campaign in defense of the Mexican (Nezahualc6yotense) migrant (to the US) should be a priority of the Federal Government. This should be publicized regularly in the mass media. Since there are no means to secure and protect their physical and moral rights abroad, there should be a campaign to defend their image before the general public, not to mention to protect their money.

Sensitization campaigns should be promoted and enforced by the Consulates overseas and the communities, particularly those living in the US.

The stigma of “illegal” must be vehemently repudiated to avoid immoral psychological pressure hanging over the migrant families human dignity and reputations.

Sensitization campaigns on behalf of the migrant should involve protocols celebrated with TV networks overseas, particularly those that broadcast in Spanish.

Priority should be given to the wording. “Illegal” should be repudiated at all times and debates among community leaders abroad, and communities in general, should be sponsored and promoted by the Federal authorities and Consulates to secure the portability of the immigrants rights abroad. By ensuring basic rights protection and namely the right to human dignity, is the job of the foreign service, according to the Vienna Convention and that starts at home.

The government should talk to the communities regularly to understand and update the immigrants needs. The real experts are the immigrants and no one better than them to say and claim what they really need.

Initiatives like “Clubes Ciudadanos” should be brought to Nezhualc6yotl or “Rede Mexicana de Lideres e Organizaciones Migrantes”, that work already in States like Michoacan and Vera Cruz, seating together with Senators and representing the voice of their compatriots in the US.

4. Small Group Discussion “Economics” (facilitator Prof. Roberto Diaz Rodriguez)

Sign a bilateral agreement between US and Mexico (not only for Mexican temporary workers but all) that facilitate those migrants money transfers from abroad. The reality is that many undocumented workers cross the border daily. To deny those the opportunity to be acknowledged, for all the risks and hardships they endure, is the same as denying that there is a problem and that by itself only perpetuates the issue of undocumented migration to the US.

It is imperative that remittance transfer agencies in the US lower down the costs weighting down on the remittance senders originally from Mexico. These financial operations are benefitting the private sector and Federal policies of currency appreciation, at the expenses of structural poverty in Mexico and particularly in Nezhualc6yotl.

This requires two things: more Federal legislation and more decentralization and empowerment of Municipal government structures at the local level.

The Bank of Mexico should have oversight and accountability over the remittance transfer operators.

Local and Federal initiatives involving the remittance transfer agencies in the process of corporate social responsibility by enforcing initiatives such as sacrificing “one dollar” in each transfer fee per remittance transaction and donating that dollar to social development. Promote the civic and political debate for that.

The authorities when promoting sensitization campaigns and legislation initiatives should be mindful that many immigrants and their families, home or abroad, are vulnerable, illiterate and many live afraid of those surrounding them.

The Federal authorities should sensitize the International Organizations, such as the Inter-American Bank for the need to facilitate and simplify the opening and movement of individual bank accounts in the US and Mexico, through more information to the potential users, simplification of banking procedures, waving unnecessary documentation (The purpose for “Carta de elector” to collect money with remittance agencies should be seriously questioned as to its actual worth).

Migrants need constant diplomatic, consular and juridical protection. This is their right according to the Vienna Convention of Consular Relations.

Participants:

Nuno Solano de Almeida, Clinton School of Public Service, UALR.

Esther Badillo, ACORN International

Lic. Laura Juarez, Universidad Obrera de Mexico

Roberto Dias Rodriguez, Prof. of Economics in Nezahualcóyotl

Nadia Nehls, *Asesora del Senado de la Republica*

Humberto Morales, Assoc. Civil Valle de Aragon, Neza.

Lorena Rosario Aguilar

Magdalena Hernandez

Edgar Espinoza Assoc. Civil a Nezahualcóyotl

Micaela Perez (Semanao24)

Alejandro Estrada

Angelica Gay Arellano (Centro de Derechos Humanos: Una Mirada Desde la Sociedad Civil- participating as independent)

Evangelina Osorio Oxaca

Ramon Lujan (PRD)

Ariane Diaz (La Jornada)

Martin Hernandez