

Making Connections: Concluding remarks at the GFMD 2013-14 third Thematic Meeting, *“Migration as an Enabler for Inclusive Social Development: Enhancing migrant empowerment and voluntary social and economic asset transfer”*

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Please let me offer my thanks to the government of Sweden for inviting me to participate in this thematic meeting. As always at these events, I have learned a lot and am heartened by the advance and exchange of knowledge here – and at the demonstration that we are indeed, as Gibril Faal said at the opening, “entering the era of practical action.”

I cannot begin to summarize this very substantive meeting, so what I am going to try to do is to touch on a very few themes, and make some connections among them. In fact, connections will be my major emphasis, with a view to orienting us toward the next steps in development of our thinking, policies and, above all, implementation.

The first general theme that emerged from this discussion is perhaps the most obvious one, and it lies in the emphasis that most of our speakers placed on health and education as the most powerful building blocs of human capital, which in turn is the foundation of development. This is true not only in the framework of human development, but also in the most conventional, hard-line econometric view of development. You have only to look at the poor development trajectory of resource rich but human-capital-poor countries to see it. The “curse of natural resources” is equally a curse of human-resource deficit – including, of course, political resources which are so very human.

The second general theme was empowerment -- which Ambassador Akerman Borje defined as the ability for individuals to claim and access their rights” -- and the connection to the transfer of economic and social assets to developing countries by migrants and members of the diaspora.

So this is the first of five connections that I want to highlight. Empowerment is founded on the protection and promotion of human rights, and goes beyond that. Empowerment also encompasses the ability to make meaningful choices about one’s life (including the choice to migrate). So it is about opportunity based on rights, and about opening opportunities through which migrants can pursue their goals. Very often, as we have heard from many delegates today, migrants’ goals include things such as better education and health for their families and communities that are fundamental to development. The greater migrants’ access to rights, and the more choices they have, the more active they are likely to be as agents of development.

Activating this potential, in my view, requires recognizing that *respect* for the choices that migrants make is an important element of empowerment, and recognizing that their lives (like the lives of most poor people) are full of hard choices, constrained by forces that are beyond their control.

So a second connection that needs to be made is between the implicit judgments we make about migrants’ choices and the policy implications of those judgments. Take, for example, the implicit criticism of migrants who leave their children “behind.” Who are we to second-guess a parent who

chooses the ability to pay school fees, provide better housing, and purchase medicines at the cost of family separation? Who are we to second guess her? Similarly, we often hear a tone of regret that migrant families are getting ahead of non-migrant families, increasing inequality. What is the policy implication of that? Surely, as Gibril suggested, it is to lift the whole community, not to suggest that migration is undesirable because its impact is not evenly felt. We often blame skilled migrants for leaving their countries, and even try to ban some professionals from certain job markets – rather than addressing the lack of choice that motivates them to leave. A focus on the policy responsibility – born by both countries of origin and countries of destination – for putting the right opportunity structures in place to make the most of what migrants choose to do is the best way to address skilled emigration. Respect is fundamental to empowerment.

The third connection I want to emphasize is the connection between evidence and policy. In the last two years or so, there has been a real explosion of research on migration and development, and it is becoming more systematic through projects like the World Bank's KNOMAD initiative. This presents a tremendous opportunity to policy makers, to rely less on guess-work and more on facts. In some cases, this requires abandoning some firmly held beliefs that are not supported by evidence. We have seen some of this today with the very polite controversy about international recruitment of health care workers. New empirical research in sub-Saharan African countries, by Michael Clemens of the Center for Global Development, and others, shows very little if any correlation between the number of physicians per capita in a country and health outcomes such as infant and under-five mortality. In fact, countries with the lowest number of physicians practicing (per capita) also had the lowest number of physicians who had emigrated. There is something else going on that accounts for poor health outcomes – such as low public investment in the health sector, and poor distribution of health care personnel that leaves rural areas underserved. But it is sometimes easier to blame migration for social problems than to dig into complex public policy issues. It had been very encouraging today to hear a number of delegates, including our co-chair from El Salvador, talk about initiatives that work with migrants to address problems in their communities.

The fourth connection I would like to emphasize is the connection between and among countries. Many regional and international programs, including prominently the GFMD and its Platform for Partnerships, created opportunities for countries to learn from each others' experiences, quite independently of donor relationships. For example, Moldova mentioned today that it is applying Mexico's model of 'health portals' (Ventanas de Salud) in consulates, to expand health care opportunities for migrants abroad.

The fifth and final set of connections is those within transnational communities -- among migrants, diasporas, their communities and their countries of origin. Transnational community is not just an academic phrase, but increasingly a living reality. These communities not only send economic and social remittances across borders, but they help to break the isolation of developing countries from global networks of knowledge, trade, technology and investment. This isolation is a cause, and one of the most damaging consequences, of lack of development. As a result of migrants' transnational connections, a virtuous circle is becoming evident – and I will close with this. *Empowered migrants empower others.* When migrants can exercise their rights and take advantage of opportunities, they share assets, create

associations, volunteer to share their skills in their countries of origin, and provide innumerable examples of positive action.

Of course, coming from a research institute, I firmly believe that we need more research. But we know a lot by now. We should never stop looking for evidence or questioning our assumptions. But we know enough to get started.

Thank you.