



“Should I Buy a Cow or a TV?”

Reflections on the Conceptual Framework
of the NCCR North–South, Based on a
Comparative Study of International Labour
Migration in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan

Christine Bichsel, Silvia Hostettler, Balz Strasser

NCCR North–South Dialogue, no. 7

2007

dialogue



The present study was carried out at the following partner institutions of the NCCR North–South:

IP swisspeace of WP1 (Governance and Conflict), swisspeace Foundation, Bern



IP LaSUR of WP2 (Livelihoods and Globalisation), Laboratoire Sociologie Urbaine (LaSUR), Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)



IP DSGZ of WP2 (Livelihoods and Globalisation), Development Study Group Zurich (DSGZ), Department of geography, University of Zurich



The NCCR North-South (Research Partnerships for Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change) is one of twenty National Centres of Competence in Research established by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It is implemented by the SNSF and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the participating institutions in Switzerland. The NCCR North-South carries out disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on issues relating to sustainable development in developing and transition countries as well as in Switzerland.



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2007 [2005!]

Citation

Bichsel C, Hostettler S, Strasser B. (2007). *“Should I Buy a Cow or a TV?” Reflections on the Conceptual Framework of the NCCR North-South, Based on a Comparative Study of International Labour Migration in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan.* 2nd edition [2005¹]. NCCR North–South Dialogue, 7. Bern, Switzerland: NCCR North–South.

Note on earlier version

The first edition of this publication was entitled *“Should I Buy a Cow or a TV?”: Reflections on the Conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South Based on a Comparative Study of International Labour Migrations in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan* (NCCR North–South Dialogue. Bern: NCCR North–South).

Editing

Theodore Wachs, NCCR North–South

Cover photos

Left: Migrant family in Mexico (Photo by S. Hostettler); Middle: Teachers and wives of migrants in Kyrgyzstan (Photo by C. Bichsel); Right: Migrant family in India (Photo by B. Strasser)

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Summary

The relationship between international migration and its developmental impact in the country of origin has repeatedly been termed “unsettled” or “unresolved”. Despite considerable research in this area, the debate about whether migration is fostering or hindering development continues. In the NCCR North-South research programme, migration has been designated as a core problem of sustainable development, while recognising that it can also represent an opportunity for families trying to secure a livelihood. We argue that the debate about “migration as a problem” vs. “migration as an opportunity” deserves more research.

This paper has two main objectives: First, it attempts to contribute to the development of the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South programme by testing the main hypothesis of the syndrome mitigation concept with respect to international labour migration. This hypothesis states that international labour migration can be considered a mitigation strategy in terms of the investment of remittances. Second, the paper aims to contribute to the discussion about an NCCR North-South methodological approach by applying a specific comparative research design.

The paper is based on a comparative study focusing on three rural communities in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan. Following the geographical set-up of the NCCR North-South, research for this study addressed three different JACS regions, namely JACS Central America and Caribbean (CCA), JACS South Asia (SAS) and JACS Central Asia (CAS). The study draws on material from field research conducted in Mexico (Jalisco state), India (Kozhikode District, Kerala state), and Kyrgyzstan (Batken province) from March to May 2004.

Our findings confirm the general investment patterns for remittances found in many studies: the majority of remittances are used to cover subsistence needs such as food, clothing and medical costs. Once these needs are satisfied, households do indeed invest in house construction, agriculture, or business start-ups. Migration can be considered a mitigation strategy for rural households in the sense that remittances alleviate poverty in the community of origin of the migrants. The importance of migration as a livelihood strategy is expected to continue in the future. However, there appears to be little long-term developmental impact from remittances, such as creation of employment.

Within the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, this study has shown that the process of defining core problems of sustainable development still requires further thought, as some normativity, aggregation and scale issues remain problematic. Furthermore, it suggests that the ambiguous character of international labour migration as both a limitation (or core problem) and an opportunity (or mitigation strategy) results from underlying assumptions about development that need to be addressed in future.

1 Introduction

Migration connects places far away from each other, creating complex new social, economic and political dependencies over large distances. It links policy decisions in destination countries to local livelihoods in the distant community¹ of origin of migrants. It transgresses the boundaries of the nation and the nation-state, and requires new approaches to sovereignty and citizenship in “transnational” space (Bailey 2001; Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003; Wimmer and Schiller 2002). Migration also brings about confrontation and exchange of different societal and cultural visions which may be violently resisted or gradually adopted. It may be exemplary of the “increasingly (spatially and temporally) distanced consequences of everyday actions” that Backhaus (2003, p. 6) sees behind globalisation, such as the decision of the migrant to buy a cow or a TV² with remittances – a decision which is seemingly local, but on the other hand channels international finance, influences the national economy and, last but not least, may determine paths of development.

Much of the discussion on the development-migration nexus centres on the potential developmental role of remittances. Remittances from worldwide labour migration have doubled in value in the past decade and constitute the fastest growing and most stable capital flow to developing countries (Kapur 2004). Remittances are now a key macro-economic factor in the so-called Third World. For many developing countries, remittances are comparable to, or greater than, total export earnings, official development assistance, and foreign direct investment (Gammeltoft 2002) and have the potential to become their largest source of foreign exchange earnings (Glytsos 2002; Seddon 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that remittance flows are more equally distributed (Jennings and Clarke 2005) and have lower transaction costs than foreign aid (Kapur 2004; Nicholson 2004). The development impact of remittances is heavily debated (Massey et al. 1998). As McDowell and de Haan (1997) show, advocates of this impact suggest that by alleviating unemployment and providing strategic inputs such as remittances (Durand et al. 1996; León-Ledesma and Piracha 2004) and returning skills (Olesen 2002), migration spurs development, narrows regional disparities, and will eventually become unnecessary. Critics question whether migration, remittances and returns are indeed automatically converted into accelerated development (Seddon 2004). On the contrary, they may even create new dependencies, undermining development both at national and regional levels, and thus perpetuating the North-South divide (Ellerman 2005). A third position sees migration more as a symptom of development rather than a result of a lack of development (Martin 1994, in: Massey et al. 1998). A number of case studies at the micro-level have contested the view of uniform migration outcomes in developing countries, and have shown that these vary enormous-

¹ We use “community” to refer to small rural settlements (see also Ellerman 2005, p.621).

² The title “Should I Buy a Cow or a TV?” was chosen as a working title when this research was initiated in 2003. Despite the fact that very few migrant families actually use remittances to buy a cow or a TV, we decided to keep it. We did so because over time our study became known by this title, and because we were unable to come up with an equally descriptive one.

ly, even within communities (de Haan et al. 2002; de Haan and Rogaly 2002; Gundel 2002; Mosse et al. 2002; Thieme and Wyss 2005). Other case studies have shown the complex interdependencies between aid, conflict and migration (Gundel 2002; Jazayeri 2002; Sriskandarajah 2002). To date, the relationship between international migration and development in countries of origin remains ambiguous.

The NCCR North-South programme³ has a predominantly negative view of migration with regard to development. Migration was defined as a core problem of sustainable development during the first NCCR North-South workshop in Montézillon, Switzerland in 2001. The relevance of migration as a core problem was again confirmed during a series of workshops all over the world, when it was mentioned as such again in six of eight regions (Hurni et al. 2004b). Together with 29 other core problems, population pressure and multi-dimensional migration now figures on the consolidated core problem list of the NCCR North-South⁴. However, as the actual mainstream debate on migration suggests, and ongoing NCCR North-South research confirms (see for example Thieme et al. 2005), it may not only represent a problem, but also a core opportunity for many families in developing countries. The fact that core problems can also be considered core potentials was debated in two workshops in South Asia and Central America and the Caribbean. In the workshop in Central America and the Caribbean, it was recognised that remittances generated by international labour migration are a crucial source of income not only for migrant families but also for the economies of the region. For instance, in 1996, remittances to Mexico amounted to 14 times the total of net foreign aid received (The Economist 2002). And while the countries of origin benefit from remittances, recipient countries can more easily maintain their working-age population (Barrera et al. 2004). This discussion about migration as a problem vs. migration as an opportunity deserves further investigation. Thus, we decided to examine international labour migration as a livelihood strategy for rural, agricultural communities.

This paper has two main objectives. First, it aims to contribute to the debate on the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South programme by testing the main hypothesis of the syndrome mitigation concept for the case of international labour migration. For this analysis, the proposition is advanced that international labour migration represents such a mitigation strategy. The scope of the comparative analysis encompasses three different Joint Areas of Case Studies (JACS)⁵, and is situated in the high-

³ The National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South is one of 14 long-term research programmes implemented by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It is concerned with negative impacts of Global Change. The programme positions itself normatively by declaring a need to mitigate these negative manifestations of Global Change. It aims to contribute to sustainable development by mitigating these syndromes of Global Change (Hurni et al. 2004b).

⁴ See the list of core problems in Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419).

⁵ Joint Areas of Case Studies (JACS) are nine geographic regions around the world in which NCCR North – South field research takes place: South America, Caribbean and Central America, West Africa, Horn of Africa, East Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, South East Asia and Switzerland (adapted from NCCR North-South 2002, p.5).

land-lowland context⁶. Second, the paper aims to contribute to discussion about NCCR North-South methodology by applying a specific comparative research design for this analysis. It proposes case study research as a complementary strategy to the methodology applied in the *Global Overviews* ⁷. While the latter focuses on statistical generalisation by compiling indicators for quantitative analysis, case study research, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, gives weight to analytical generalisation.

This paper is based on a comparative study of international labour migration that we conducted from August 2003 until August 2005. As all three authors are carrying out research for PhD dissertations in the NCCR North-South programme, we began to discuss our research projects during the Integrated Training Course (ITC) in September 2002 and continued to exchange experiences and research results afterwards. In the course of these discussions, international labour migration emerged as a relevant aspect of our respective research, and caught our interest. Silvia Hostettler's research focuses on the driving forces of land use change in western Mexico. She investigates whether labour migration to the USA constitutes a potential driving force for land use changes through the investment of remittances. Balz Strasser's thesis is concerned with the livelihood strategies of natural rubber producers in Kottayam, central Kerala. In the communities under investigation, remittances from labour migration to the Gulf States appear to be an important component of the income portfolio of these households. Christine Bichsel's thesis focuses on the transformation of water conflicts in Batken, Kyrgyzstan. In her study area, labour migration to Russia is an increasingly important strategy to sustain livelihoods in the region and cope with widespread unemployment.

For this paper, we make use of material from three case studies conducted in Mexico (Jalisco state), India (Kozhidoke District, Kerala state), and Kyrgyzstan (Batken province) from March to May 2004. Empirical data used for this paper stems from questionnaires, focused interviews, direct observation, and various documentation. Each researcher spent 8 to 14 months in their respective case study regions before and after conducting the specific case studies on migration and remittances. As the present study is an integral part of our extensive field research in the same regions, it benefits from the sound understanding of the regions' cultural, political and economic particularities that all researchers were able to develop. It also benefits from an interdisciplinary perspective, as the research team consisted of an agricultural socio-economist, an environmental scientist and a human geographer.

The present paper is divided into seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, we briefly summarise the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South in Chapter 2.

⁶ Syndrome context: "The NCCR North-South is active in three contexts which each present an extreme situation: the highland-lowland context in terms of terrain, the arid and semi-arid context in terms of climate, and the urban and peri-urban context in terms of population density. The working hypothesis of the NCCR North-South is that these contexts are particularly vulnerable to the emergence of syndromes. The researchers started from the premise that the problems, at least within an individual syndrome context, are similar all over the world and hence that it is possible to transfer know-how" (NCCR North-South 2002, p.5).

⁷ For the definition of the Global Overviews, please refer to the Glossary.

Based on this framework, we develop the main hypothesis that guided our research. Next, we introduce its “operationalisation” for the study of international labour migration. Chapter 3 focuses on the research strategy by presenting the multiple case study design. We also discuss the methodology applied for the collection and analysis of empirical data. Chapter 4 presents the research results from the case studies. In a first step, we give a case-based description of international labour migration in the Mexican, Indian and Kyrgyz communities. Next, we present a synopsis of the results of all three case studies. In Chapter 5 we focus on the analysis of the described data and discuss our hypotheses. Chapter 6 discusses the findings with regard to the overall conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South. Finally, in Chapter 7, we present the main conclusions and reflect on the need for further research.

2 Concept, Hypotheses and Operationalisation

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South programme. Based on this framework, we develop the main hypothesis that guided our research on international labour migration. Finally, we introduce the operationalisation of the study.

2.1 The NCCR North–South conceptual framework

The starting point for the conceptual framework is the “problematisation” of processes of Global Change. Global Change is understood as “global-scale human, human-induced and natural changes that modify the functionality of the natural, social, economic and cultural dimensions of the Earth system” (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.13). These changes have accelerated tremendously in frequency and acuteness during the 20th century (p.15). The appearance of a multitude of environmental, political, economic, socio-cultural and technical problems and disparities is symptomatic of these changes; these, in turn, may be interpreted as problems of non-sustainable development (Hurni and Wiesmann 2004, p.37). It is understood that these problems are closely related to one another and appear in similar combinations or clusters in specific spatial and social contexts. Such *clusters of core problems* is designated as *syndromes of global change* (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.15). This builds on previous research (Petschel-Held et al. 1995; WBGU 1997) and adopts the syndrome concept that emerged from it. However, the NCCR North-South programme seeks to take the concept further by challenging its exclusive focus on problems and suggesting the need for research on potentials and innovations. It also challenges the purely analytical approach, insisting on the need for solution-oriented research (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.16). These challenges should be met by the programme’s focus both on analysing problems and potentials as well as on the negative effects of single or clustered problems, and hence its focus on syndrome mitigation (p.14). Moreover, it is expected that the conceptual framework will not be limited to the syndrome concept, but will be expanded beyond this stage (p.16).

The conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South has its foundations in system theory. It perceives the world as the “Earth system” (p.14) that is in the process of losing its equilibrium due to global changes. Drawing from a structural-functionalist perspective, it seeks to apprehend and correct the system’s negative dynamics by understanding the regularities and processes of its specific sub-systems with the help of uniform concepts and tools. Originally, three sub-systems or syndrome contexts were defined: the highland-lowland, semi-arid and urban/peri-urban syndrome contexts.⁸ These syndrome contexts transcend national or regional boundaries, and do not have

⁸ The *highland-lowland context* is currently under discussion and might be split up into two sub-contexts, the *highland and mountain* and the *highland-lowland interactions sub-contexts* (Messerli and Wiesmann 2004).

clear-cut spatial or social limits, but "broad societal, economic, political and ecological characteristics"⁹. It is important to note that, despite the fact that the programme acknowledges the global existence of *syndromes of global change* and, obviously, syndrome contexts, it assumes that transition and developing countries (the "South") share a common disposition towards their problematic effects. Furthermore, it stresses the limited economic and institutional capacity of the South to cope with these negative effects, and thus to mitigate these syndromes (p.15). As a consequence of both the high disposition towards and the limited capacity to cope with these problems in transition and developing countries, and the normative obligation for mitigation of these problems (Hurni et al. 2004b; Wiesmann and Hurni 2004), the JACS, where research takes place, are almost exclusively located in the South¹⁰.

Following the conceptual framework, the description and selection of core problems that constitute syndromes is an essentially normative process. This results from their definition as problems of non-sustainable development (Hurni and Wiesmann 2004, p.38) – with *sustainable development* itself a normative and context-bound concept (Wiesmann and Hurni 2004, p.49). Sustainable development is recognised by the NCCR North-South, according to its currently used definition, as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987). In a conceptual framework, it encompasses three dimensions: ecological sustainability, socio-cultural and socio-political sustainability, and economic sustainability (Wiesmann and Hurni 2004, p.49). These dimensions of sustainability are not universal values, but are only meaningful for "members of a society concretely affected by the issues at stake," i.e. in a concrete social context (p.49). Therefore, defining these values and setting goals to reach them in a social negotiation process are preconditions for sustainable development. This negotiation process needs to include all relevant types of actors and knowledge, until a consensus based on common values and norms is reached (Hurni and Wiesmann 2004, p.36). Consequently, a similar process for scientifically addressing syndromes is proposed. Within a specific context, it requires the integration of the main actors and social groups concerned, the integration of different scientific perspectives (natural and social sciences), and knowledge and capacity outside the realm of science. This leads to the adoption of a *transdisciplinary* research perspective to define the core problems of non-sustainable development and find solutions for their mitigation (p.37). The next chapter defines the leading assumptions of the NCCR North-South programme.

⁹ NCCR North-South homepage, <http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/syndromeliste.asp>, accessed: August 2005.

¹⁰ With the exception of the Joint Area of Case Studies (JACS) Alps.

2.2 Formulation of research hypothesis

As our research is based on the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, we derive our hypotheses from its core assumptions. Our first step is thus to present the programme's core assumptions. We will then derive the main hypothesis and the two sub-hypotheses from these assumptions.

The NCCR North-South conceptual framework is based on three core assumptions. The first assumption is that problems of non-sustainable development, i.e. core problems, occur in similar and comparable combinations in several locations and in the same context. Such clusters of core problems are then termed “syndromes”. The second assumption states that syndromes not only display similar patterns in different local situations, but also comparable underlying causes, dynamics and processes. The third assumption states that it is possible to reduce the negative effects of certain combinations of core problems, and thereby to mitigate syndromes. This mitigation might be induced through scientific and development processes, where the application of the syndrome approach results in an analytical reduction and structuring of complex interconnections. This should allow for the identification of potential solutions (Hurni and Wiesmann 2004, p.38).

The focus of our analysis – international labour migration – is on a strategy that does not result from external intervention, but rather falls under the “self-regulating” functioning of the system. Based on literature and empirical observations, we hypothesise that international labour migration may be considered an endogenous mitigation strategy as understood by the NCCR North-South. Following these core assumptions of the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, we postulate one main hypothesis and two sub-hypotheses for this research.

Main hypothesis: International labour migration is a mitigation strategy

Our main hypothesis postulates that international labour migration mitigates a specific combination of core problems that occur in three case study areas. The three case study areas are situated in three different JACS, namely JACS Central America and Caribbean (CCA), JACS South Asia (SAS), and JACS Central Asia (CAS), and share the same highland-lowland context. Following the conceptual framework, mitigation of core problems is defined as “*measures taken by individuals or institutions in one or more areas of intervention, which help reduce the effects of single, or combinations of several core problems, thereby actually or potentially reducing negative impacts of global change, and contributing to sustainable development*” (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.14). This definition requires four conditions for a strategy to contribute to syndrome mitigation: (1) the strategy needs to be adopted by individuals or institutions, (2) it needs to help reduce the effects of single or combinations of core problems, (3) in this way, the strategy should reduce negative impacts of global change, and (4) the strategy should thus contribute to sustainable development. To test this main hypothesis, a division into two sub-hypotheses proves useful. These sub-hypotheses are shown in Figure 1.

Sub-hypothesis 1: International labour migration results from a similar combination of core problems

This hypothesis focuses on the core problems driving international labour migration. It derives from the first and the second assumptions of the conceptual framework. Based on these assumptions, we postulate that, in all communities within the three JACS, a similar combination of core problems is responsible for international labour migration.

Sub-hypothesis 2: International labour migration reduces the negative effects of core problems

This hypothesis focuses on the mitigating potential of international labour migration. It derives from the third assumption of the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, which states that syndrome mitigation results from alleviating single or combinations of several core problems. Thus this hypothesis postulates that, for the three case study communities, international labour migration alleviates the same core problems that led to migration.

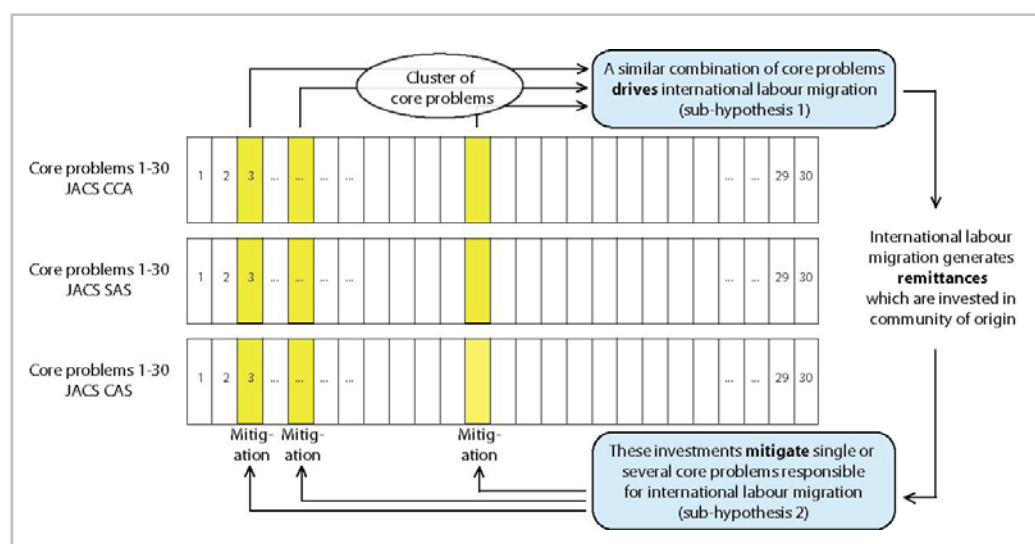


Figure 1: Sub-hypotheses for the highland-lowland context

Source: authors' illustration

2.3 Operationalisation and definitions

The above hypotheses were operationalised in order to test them in the case study. The study looks exclusively at international rather than internal labour migration. An international labour migrant is "a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national" ¹¹. In order to test the first sub-hypothesis, we chose the driving forces of international labour migration as a vari-

¹¹ UN-Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, Article 2, 1990 (cited in: Thieme 2005).

able. Driving forces are understood here as the motivations that lead people to adopt migration as a strategy. According to this first sub-hypothesis, we propose that the driving forces for international labour migration emerge from one or several core problems.

In order to test the second sub-hypothesis, we chose remittances from international labour migration as a variable. These are defined for the purpose of this paper as *“transfers of assets by members of immigrant communities or foreign nationals from the country where they live and work back to relatives or other individuals in their country of origin”* (adapted from Seddon 2004, p.405). Remittances can take the form of cash or monetary transfers, or remittances in kind. They can be private or communal remittances (Goldring 2004; Taylor 1999). Private investment first and foremost benefits the migrant’s household in his/her country of origin, while communal spending benefits a wider community of which the migrant is a member. According to this second hypothesis, we assume that the investment of remittances should alleviate the core problems that lead to international labour migration. This investment has traditionally been divided into “consumptive” and “productive” spending, although these categories have been widely criticised as the distinction between consumptive and productive spending is not always easily made (Goldring 2004; Kapur 2004).

3 Research Strategy and Methodology

A central challenge for the proposed comparative research consisted in the choice of an appropriate research design and methodology. In the following section, the comparative framework, the research design, and the applied methodology will be explained.

3.1 Research strategy

To date, conceptual and methodological advancement for integration and synthesis of NCCR North-South research results has mainly taken place in the field of *Global Overviews*. On the one hand, a global indicator database for core problems has been developed, using both the expertise of the *Individual Projects* (IPs) and publicly available data. This database facilitates further analysis by enabling an interactive selection and valuation of indicators of core problems.¹² On the other hand, approaches have been developed to analyse globally valid functional patterns with non-sustainable dynamics. These apprehend clusters and patterns of core problems with a systemic approach and examine their structures and dynamics in specific contexts and different regions at meso-level. These meso-scale systems are then generalised with reference to a more global, macro-scale system valid for all the regions examined.¹³ While the comparative framework of this study is based on the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, we have adopted case study research as a strategy to investigate international labour migration and remittances in the comparative context. The selected case study areas are located in three different JACS, namely the JACS CCA (Mexico), the JACS SAS (India) and the JACS CAS (Kyrgyzstan). Furthermore, the case study areas are located within one syndrome context, namely the *highland-lowland context*.

The choice of case study research has two major advantages. First, this research strategy makes it possible to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, such as international labour migration, embedded in a specific political, cultural and socio-economic context. Thus, it does not seek to separate phenomenon and context — the boundaries between the two often not being clearly evident. Each individual case study is thus primarily holistic, consisting of facts gathered from various sources and conclusions drawn from these facts (Tellis 1997). Second, case study research enabled a methodologically sound conceptualisation of the comparative framework. According to Yin (1994), case studies do not represent “samples” that can be generalised with reference to larger populations. However, they aim to expand theoretical propositions, and can thus be analyt-

¹² Schichler, B., Hett, C., Gräub, A., Hergarten, C., Lüthi, D., Hoppler, J. (2004) “Global Overviews: Searching for Indicators of Core Problems”, NCCR North-South Poster, http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/publications/Infosystem/On-line%20Dokumente/Upload/Poster_04_IP1_Schichler.pdf, accessed: August 2005.

¹³ Cassel-Ginz, M. (2004) “Comparative Analysis of Meso-Scale Systems in a Semi-Arid Syndrome Context”, http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/publications/Infosystem/Online%20Dokumente/Upload/05_cassel_2.qxp_s.pdf, accessed: August 2005.

ically rather than statistically generalised (p.10). Hence the *multiple case* study design does not follow a sampling logic where a selection of a certain population is made to include in the study. On the contrary, multiple case studies respond to the logic of replication. Case studies are selected based on a theoretical framework that sets the conditions under which a particular phenomenon is likely to be found, as well as the conditions under which it is not likely to be found. Yin (1994, p.46-48) consequently distinguishes two kinds of replication: literal – predicting similar results from singular case studies, and theoretical – predicting contrasting results, but for predicted reasons. Following our main hypotheses, we chose our case studies in accordance with literal replication logic. In the intercultural context, this case study design provides a meaningful comparative approach, avoiding the traps of generating mere anecdotal singular cases that strive for statistical generalisation, or overly generalised results that are not embedded in the local context. Following these considerations, we based our research on a multiple case study design.

3.2 Methodology

According to the research questions, the unit of analysis is represented by a social unit: a household in a rural agricultural or pastoral community that includes members having migrated or migrating to a foreign country for income-generating purposes. We define households as a social group which makes joint or coordinated decisions over resource allocation and income (adapted from Meillassoux 1981 and Ellis 1993, in: Ellis 1998). The communities should have a minimum of 10 years' history of international labour migration in order to allow for a temporal analysis of the phenomenon. Again, we did not seek "typical" communities that represented the region, but communities that allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

To enhance the quality of the case studies we used multiple sources of evidence in all three cases, both quantitative and qualitative. The central part of the case study evidence derives from (1) a survey conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire reflects the research questions and provides information on international labour migration and remittances from each household. It was carefully developed and pre-tested twice to ensure its applicability in the three different cultural contexts. In selecting the households, proportionate stratified random sampling was used. In order to complement these interviews, (2) focused key-informant interviews were done. Key informants are knowledgeable persons in their respective communities, such as formal and informal village authorities, teachers, elders, etc. The focused interviews aimed to provide a more holistic picture of labour migration and remittances in the community. Snowball sampling was used as a sampling strategy. During village visits, (3) direct observation was used in all three case studies; these observations provided an important source of evidence and served to clarify and cross-check oral information. The study also draws on (4) secondary data from scientific reports, policy papers, newspaper articles, administrative information and internet sites.

The procedure described above generated a total of 77 semi-structured interviews with households and a total of 19 focused interviews with key informants. Additionally, each researcher put down his or her direct observations in case study notes. Documentary information was available for every case study. To process this data, firstly a quantitative analysis of the questionnaires was done using both a spreadsheet application and the CSPro software ¹⁴. Secondly, every researcher composed a case study report that outlined the setting and preliminary results. These reports mainly drew on data from focused interviews and from observations. They allowed for contextualisation of the quantitative analysis, entailed first interpretations, and provided entry points for further comparative steps.

¹⁴ CSPro (Census and Survey Processing System) is a public-domain software package for entering, editing, tabulating and mapping census and survey data. It can be downloaded under <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/cspro/>.

4 Results from the Case Studies

This chapter presents the results of the three case studies. Chapter 4.1 introduces the case study areas and gives an overview of the migration patterns that exist for the respective communities. The following chapters present the results of the four main fields of inquiry. First, chapter 4.2 describes the core problems which were identified by the three communities, while chapter 4.3 details which driving forces lead to international labour migration. Then, chapter 4.4 describes the remittances and their investment. Finally, chapter 4.5 shows which changes occur in these communities due to migration.

4.1 Case study settings and migration patterns

Autlán municipality, Mexico (State of Jalisco)

The study area is located in the State of Jalisco in western Mexico which is characterised by high rates of migration. Research was conducted in two agrarian communities in the municipality of Autlán: El Jalocote (179 inhabitants) and Chiquihuitlán (178 inhabitants).¹⁵

Chiquihuitlán is located at 1000 m at the end of a valley. The hills around the village are covered with grass, patches of tropical deciduous forest and cacti, and are mainly used for pasture. An important source of income in Chiquihuitlán is the seasonal collection and selling of the prickly pear, which is the fruit of the *nopal*, a typical cactus in Mexico. The fruits are considered a delicacy and bring a relatively good price. El Jalocote is located at 1500 m on a hilly terrain at the end of a dirt road leading up a valley. Most families own a field of irrigated agriculture close to the village and another piece of land in the hills that they use or rent out as pasture. Both communities are very similar; the main difference is the presence of irrigation water in El Jalocote which allows cultivation of maize, tomatoes, onions, chili peppers, melons etc, whereas Chiquihuitlán has no irrigation water. However, other crops such as beans, sorghum, millet and maize are also grown without irrigation in both communities. In Chiquihuitlán, a recent option has been to rent out land to tequila companies that cultivate agave for the production of tequila. Since 1996, approximately 90 percent of all landowners in Chiquihuitlán have taken advantage of this option, which has led to a large-scale land use change in the valley from rain-fed maize to agave cultivation.

In these study areas, with the exception of a few families, poverty, high illiteracy, minimal education, poor sewage systems, intra-familial violence and omnipresent corruption ¹⁶ prevail. The two communities consist mainly of smallholder agriculturists who

¹⁵ All statistics for Mexico are from INEGI (2000).

¹⁶ The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) calculated by Transparency International lists Mexico in 64th place out of 145 countries rated. http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University_Press_Release_04.pdf, accessed: January 2005.

own a relatively minor amount of land and typically engage in mixed subsistence and market strategies of production. Their main sources of income stem from agriculture, subsidies from the PROCAMPO programme ¹⁷ and remittances. A few families also engage in small businesses or have temporary part-time jobs in the horticulture or construction sector.

The great majority of migrants are young men 18-30 years old who all migrate to the USA. Women rarely migrate; if they do, it is for the most part to join their husbands abroad. Since controls at the US-Mexican border have intensified, illegal crossing of the border is becoming even more dangerous; many people have died in attempting to walk across the desert or cross rivers. As a consequence, the periods of migration are becoming longer, as it is dangerous and expensive to risk frequent border crossings. Hence, many men do not come home for periods of 3 to 5 years or longer.

A considerable amount of money is needed in order to migrate. Currently, approximately USD 2,500 is paid to people (known as "coyotes") who transport migrants illegally across the border. The necessary funds are often borrowed from relatives or friends who have already migrated to the USA. Another important factor in successful migration is access to a network of people – a first "stepping stone" upon arrival in the USA. Often this involves staying with relatives or friends before earning some money. Furthermore, a network of relatives or friends often helps newly arrived migrants to find a job. Migrants find work primarily in the agricultural and horticultural sectors, on construction sites, in factories, or in restaurants. In California, for instance, which is the largest agricultural producer among states in the United States, 65 percent of the seasonal agricultural workforce is composed of Mexican migrants from rural households (Bruinsma 2003).

Kizhakothe Panchayat, India (Kozhikode district, Kerala State)

Kizhakothe Panchayat ¹⁸ is situated in Kozhikode district (previously known as Calicut), one of the northern districts of Kerala. It is well known for its high percentage of migrants. Kizhakothe Panchayat is located on the main road from Kozhikode to Wayanad district, ca. 20 km from the city of Kozhikode, the third largest urban centre in Kerala (1.1 million inhabitants according to the 2001 census ¹⁹). Kizhakothe can be reached in one hour by bus from Kozhikode. Kizhakothe is situated in the lower midlands at an altitude of ca. 300 m. Hilly areas appear towards the Western Ghats, situated eastwards. The landscape in the village is dominated by homestead gardens with coconut, areca nut and other trees as well as annual crops such as banana and tapioca.

¹⁷ PROCAMPO is a government programme that started in 1994. It can be translated as Programme for Direct Assistance in Agriculture whose main characteristics are the disbursement of payments to eligible farmers, based on the area planted, on the condition that farmers use their land for legal agriculture or livestock production, or for an environmental programme.

¹⁸ Panchayat refers to the local administrative unit (local government).

¹⁹ From the website of the Kozhikode District, <http://kozhikode.nic.in/kzk/census.htm>, accessed: March 2005.

People in Kizhakothe engage largely in part-time homestead farming, cultivating annual and perennial crops. Part-time income is derived from daily labour in both the agricultural and construction sectors. Land shares are small, with an average of 0.36 ha per household in Kerala (Véron 1999, p.96). Many household members earn secondary income from small trade and business activities, involving both agricultural and non-agricultural products. In Koduvalli, the nearby town, trade and business are the main activities; many shops situated along the main road sell a variety of mostly imported goods. Almost all families in the village belong to the Muslim community.

Migrants can be broadly subdivided into two groups, almost all migrating to the Gulf States (mainly to Saudi Arabia). Young jobless men with elementary education constitute the first group. They are a new generation of Keralites who refuse to work in sectors such as agriculture or construction, and opt for a modern lifestyle that starts with a well remunerated job in the trade or service sector. They want access to the same consumer commodities as their elder brothers, who have returned after migrating or are still migrants. Furthermore, once they have been abroad, they obtain “migrant” status which is highly valued in the village. The second group of migrants consists of middle-aged men (and less frequently women) who have no other means of income except remittances from migration. Often they have already been to the Gulf and are reluctant to migrate again. They prefer to secure a job with adequate income in Kerala if possible. Migrants in the Gulf States work mostly in the construction or service sectors. Work is harsh and demanding, and usually consists of very long working days. Additionally, there are many cases of migrants who return earlier than expected (sometimes expelled by the local authorities) because they did not manage to find a job in the Gulf within the first three months (the time for which their visas are valid). For the ones who stay, low-paid and irregular jobs are frequent and lead to greater livelihood insecurity. Successful migrants who have obtained a good job return home every 3-4 years for several months if their financial situation allows it. Hence migration is more long-term than seasonal.

Sai village, Kyrgyzstan (Batken province)

Sai village is located approximately 50 km south-east of Batken town, the province centre, at an altitude of 1125 m, in a hilly area at the foothills of the Alai mountain range which borders the Ferghana valley. While some of the oldest parts of Sai are located along a small river, newer parts spread over the surrounding hills. The landscape is dominated by grassy hills with deep gorges. At higher elevations, fir trees grow sparsely. Sai has 1979 inhabitants.²⁰ The village is divided into two sections: Upper Sai and Lower Sai, with the school marking the boundary between them. This boundary separates the village according to clan affiliation. Our research was limited to Upper Sai, which has a total of 130 households.

²⁰ Personal communication from the head of the village, April 2004.

Almost all households in Sai derive income from agriculture (potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic) and horticulture (apples and apricots). After Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, the arable land was privatised, and each family received a garden share and a land share. These shares are very small, however, estimated at approximately 0.5 ha per household. Many villagers also have livestock, as the village owns communal pastures in the surrounding hills. Villagers produce both for subsistence and for the market. Apples in particular are a cash crop. Before privatisation in the mid-1990s, the land in the village belonged to a collective and later to a state farm. In addition to the agricultural sector, a small percentage of villagers are employed in village administration, in the local school and in the medical centre, and thus receive a salary. Furthermore, a number of villagers are entitled to pensions and social subsidies for children. A few villagers have small businesses such as trading or running a taxi service.

Villagers in Sai began to migrate seasonally to Russia during the mid-1990s. The main destinations are the cities of Tjumen, Irkutsk, Krasnojarsk and Moscow. Most migrants, largely young or middle-aged males, work without official permission. In a few cases their wives accompany them. Usually, migrants leave in spring and stay for 6 to 8 months. The type of work migrants do is gender-specific. Men almost exclusively work on construction sites. This accounts for the seasonality of migration, as the summer season offers the most opportunities for work in this sector. Women, however, do cleaning and washing jobs. As they are bound to their husbands, they also leave during the summer season. Working on construction sites is physically very demanding, potentially dangerous, and harmful to health. Often it is combined with very basic living conditions. Furthermore, due to their illegal status, migrants are frequently subject to extortion by the police, and many face deportation from Russia (Jumagulov 2005).

Table 1 gives an overview of migration patterns of the three communities.

Table 1: Migration patterns in Autlán municipality, Sai village and Kizhakoth Panchayat

	Autlán municipality	Sai village	Kizhakoth Panchayat
Migrant profile	Usually young men between 18 and 30 years. Sometimes wives join them later.	Mostly young or middle-aged men; very few women accompany husbands.	Two main groups: jobless young men and middle-aged men.
Form and duration of migration	Duration: A minority engages in seasonal migration of 6–8 months per year. However, the great majority leaves for several periods of 3–5 years on average or migrates permanently.	Seasonal migration of 6–8 months per year. If not enough money is earned, migrants do not come back for winter and might stay several years.	Duration: 2–3 months if no job is obtained. If job can be secured, long-term cyclical migration for several migration periods of 2–3 years, or permanent migration.
% of migrant households in community	54	45	50
Country/Places of destination	United States	Several cities in Russia (Tjumen, Irkutsk, Krasnojarsk and Moscow).	Gulf States (mostly Saudi Arabia).
Average monthly income for unskilled work in destination country (in USD)	960–3200	200–250	50–100
Average monthly income for unskilled work in place of origin (in USD)	200–600	10–30	35–70
Initial capital required to migrate (in USD)	960–3200	50–120	2800
Type of work	Agriculture, construction, factories and restaurants	Construction and service sector.	Construction and service sector (trade, catering, and other businesses).

Source: own data.

Based on the following exchange rates from May 2004:

1 USD = 45 INR (Indian Rupee); 1 USD = 11 MXN (Mexican pesos); 1 USD = 43 KGS (Kyrgyz Som)

4.2 Core problems identified by respondents

The 30 core problems stated in Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419, see also Figure 2) were “translated” for operationalisation into more easily understandable questions that could be used for interviews in the field. These adapted questions were pre-tested twice and translated into the local language. The following sub-chapters summarise the weighting of the core problems in the three communities. The results are presented according to scientific realm, namely *political & institutional*, *socio-cultural & economic*, *population & livelihood*, *infrastructure & land use*, and *bio-physical & ecological* realm. A core problem was defined as an important one by the community if more than 50 percent of the respondents perceived it as either “a small problem” or “a

big problem". The distinction between "small" and "big" helps in understanding the acuteness of the core problem. Figure 2 graphically summarises the responses.

Figure 2: List of 30 core problems of non-sustainable development defined by the NCCR North-South

Political & institutional realm	16. Health risks and vulnerability to ill health
1. Weak international geopolitical position and negotiation power	17. Population pressure and multidimensional migration
2. Dominating and conflicting world views and ethical values	18. Unfavourable dynamics and imbalances in socio-demographic structures
3. Contradictory policies and weak formal institutions at different levels	Infrastructure, services & land use realm
4. Inadequate legal framework and regulations, lack of enforcement and means	19. Poor water supply and environmental sanitation
5. Erosion of traditional and/or indigenous institutions	20. Lack of adequate infrastructure and management such as transport, energy and irrigation
6. Governance failures, insufficient empowerment and decentralisation	21. Limited and inadequate socio-economic services such as education, health, markets
7. Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption	22. Discrimination in information and communication flows and technologies
Socio-cultural & economic realm	23. Inequality of ownership and access to land, natural and common property resources
8. Social, cultural and ethnic tensions and insecurity	24. Inadequate and conflicting land use systems and technologies
9. Prevalence of crime, violence and violent conflicts	Bio-physical & ecological realm
10. Unused or restricted innovative capacities and knowledge	25. Inadequate availability of freshwater
11. Great socio-economic and gender disparities	26. Degradation of land, soil and vegetation cover
12. Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities	27. Degradation of forests and other natural habitats
13. Dominance of the global economy over national development	28. Pollution and overuse of renewable and non-renewable natural resources
Population & livelihood realm	29. Loss of biological and agro-biological diversity
14. Restrictions on human rights and individual development potential	30. Risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change
15. Poverty and livelihood insecurity	

Source: Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419)

Political & institutional realm

These problems are perceived very differently in the three communities. For the interviewees in Kizhakoth Panchayat, only core problem number [7]²¹ *Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption* was perceived as important. For interviewees from Sai village and Autlán municipality, however, many more problems are of concern. In Autlán, there is a specifically high concern for core problems [7], [2] *Dominating and conflicting world views and ethical values*, and [5] *Erosion of traditional and/or indigenous institutions*, but there is also concern for [4] *Inadequate legal framework and regulations, lack of enforcement and means*. In Sai village, core problems [3] *Contradictory policies and weak formal institutions at different levels*, [5] and [7] are of concern. The fact that core problem [7] is of concern for the interviewees in Sai and Autlán can be explained by the fact that corruption is virtually an everyday experience for people in Kyrgyzstan²² and Mexico²³. The importance of core problem [7] for Kizhakoth can be understood in the context of the perceived marginalisation of the Muslim community living in Kizhakoth, as well as their political under-representation.

Socio-cultural & economic realm

Here too, there are great differences between the three communities in terms of perceiving socio-cultural and economic problems. While interviewees from Autlán were very concerned about them – in Autlán, almost all core problems in this realm are perceived to be important except core problem [13] *Dominance of the global economy over national development* – those from Kizhakoth and Sai attributed less importance to them. Exceptions are core problems [10] *Unused or restricted innovative capacities and knowledge* and [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities*, where, in all three communities, the lack of employment opportunities is of great concern. For Kizhakoth, this can be explained by heavy unemployment within Kerala, especially in rural areas. In fact, the unemployment rate grew from 11.2 percent in 1999 to 19.2 percent in 2004 (Zachariah and Rajan 2004, p.24). For Sai, core problem [10] refers to the particularities of the economic situation in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, industrial production in the country almost totally collapsed, and collective and state farms were dissolved. Therefore, many people who formerly practiced a profession had no option other than to become farmers or work in the bazaar. Villagers see this as a very problematic development. The high ranking of socio-economic problems in Autlán is linked to a general absence of employment opportunities and a worsening of the economic situation. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) took effect and Mexico opened up its markets to imports from the United States. As a con-

²¹ See the list of numbered core problems in Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419), and Table 2 above.

²² The „Corruption Perception Index“ (CPI) of the organisation „Transparency International“ lists Kyrgyzstan on the 122nd position out of 145, see http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University_Press_Release_04.pdf, accessed: January 2005.

²³ See footnote 16 page 25.

sequence, prices for agricultural products in Mexico have steadily decreased. For instance, the real price of corn in Mexico has fallen by more than 70 percent between 1994 and 2002 (Oxfam International 2003, p.17).

Population & livelihood realm

In this realm, core problem [15] *Poverty and livelihood* insecurity was perceived to be important in all three communities. Core problem [17] *Population pressure and multi-dimensional migration* was perceived as important both in Kizhakothe Panchayat and Sai village, but also in Autlán, where almost 50 percent of the interviewees considered it important. In Autlán, although "*multidimensional migration*" was considered a big problem, "*population pressure*" was not, thus weakening the overall weighting for core problem [17]. This example illustrates the dilemma of the aggregation of several problems into one core problem. This issue will be treated in greater detail in Chapter 5.2. In Kizhakothe Panchayat, the possibility of migration is not seen as a problem per se. The response can be explained better by analysing the negative experience that many people have had with the process of migrating: high and sometimes prohibitive costs (and the associated debts) as well as a relatively high amount of failed attempts. Interviewees in Autlán stated that [16] *Health risks and vulnerability to ill health* is an important core problem, mainly due to a general concern over the intensive use of fertilisers and pesticides by large agricultural businesses.

Infrastructure & land use realm

This realm is essentially characterised by problems relating to access to natural resources and lack of services. Core problems in this realm are especially of concern in Autlán, and less in Kizhakothe and Sai. In Autlán, all the core problems in this realm except core problem [22] *Discrimination in information and communication flows and technologies* are perceived to exist, with [19] *Poor water supply and environmental sanitation* being particularly important. This can be explained by the fact that in one community there is no irrigation water; this seriously reduces cultivation opportunities. In Kizhakothe, Sai and Autlán, [20] *Lack of adequate infrastructure and management (e.g. transport, energy and irrigation)*, [21] *Limited and inadequate socio-economic services such as education, health and markets*, and [23] *Inequality of ownership and access to land, natural and common property resources* were cited as important. For Sai, this can be explained by the lack of infrastructure (lack of gas, transportation and absence of good roads) and the lack of services (lack of market or shop for daily products, difficulty in finding qualified school teachers, and distant health services for elderly people) in the village. Cultivable land is scarce in Sai and Kizhakothe, and the land shares are very small indeed. This seems to be a major constraint for extending agricultural activities. In Autlán, some families consider access to common land a more

important problem than the size of the plots²⁴ Water is not considered to be an important core problem in Kizhakoth because a new drinking water supply scheme opened just prior to the researcher's visit. Before that, however, water supply was a major concern for many households.

Bio-physical & ecological realm

Core problems in the bio-physical & ecological realm were ranked very high in Autlán. In fact, all were considered important. This can be explained by the fact that people in the region are generally well aware of ecological concerns, such as deforestation and the loss of biodiversity, and accordingly rated them as big problems. Furthermore, the region is prone to earthquakes and hurricanes, which led to a high ranking for risks of natural hazards. Certainly another reason is that people are more directly concerned by issues linked to their livelihood; since they are mostly farmers, the problems they consider important are closely linked to the bio-physical realm. In Kizhakoth and Sai, the responses were similar, even though the situation appears less acute than in Autlán. In fact, the following three core problems were of concern in Kizhakoth and Sai: [26] *Degradation of land, soil and vegetation cover*, [29] *Loss of biological and agro-biological diversity* and [30] *Risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change*. For Sai, the importance of the risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change could relate to the vulnerable geographic location of the village, which experienced a serious mudflow in 1998. Core problem [28] *Pollution and overuse of renewable and non-renewable natural resources* was not perceived as worsening, as some people maintained it even improved since the collapse and closure of the nearby industry following independence.

Figure 3 graphically summarises the relevance of the core problems in each scientific realm.

²⁴ Land tenure and access to common resources is a very complex issue in Mexico and cannot be discussed in the framework of this study. In the Ejido and the Comunidad Indígena (both are a form of agrarian community) included in the study, most households own land. A majority own approximately 1-3 ha, some own 4-9 ha, and very few own 10 ha and more.

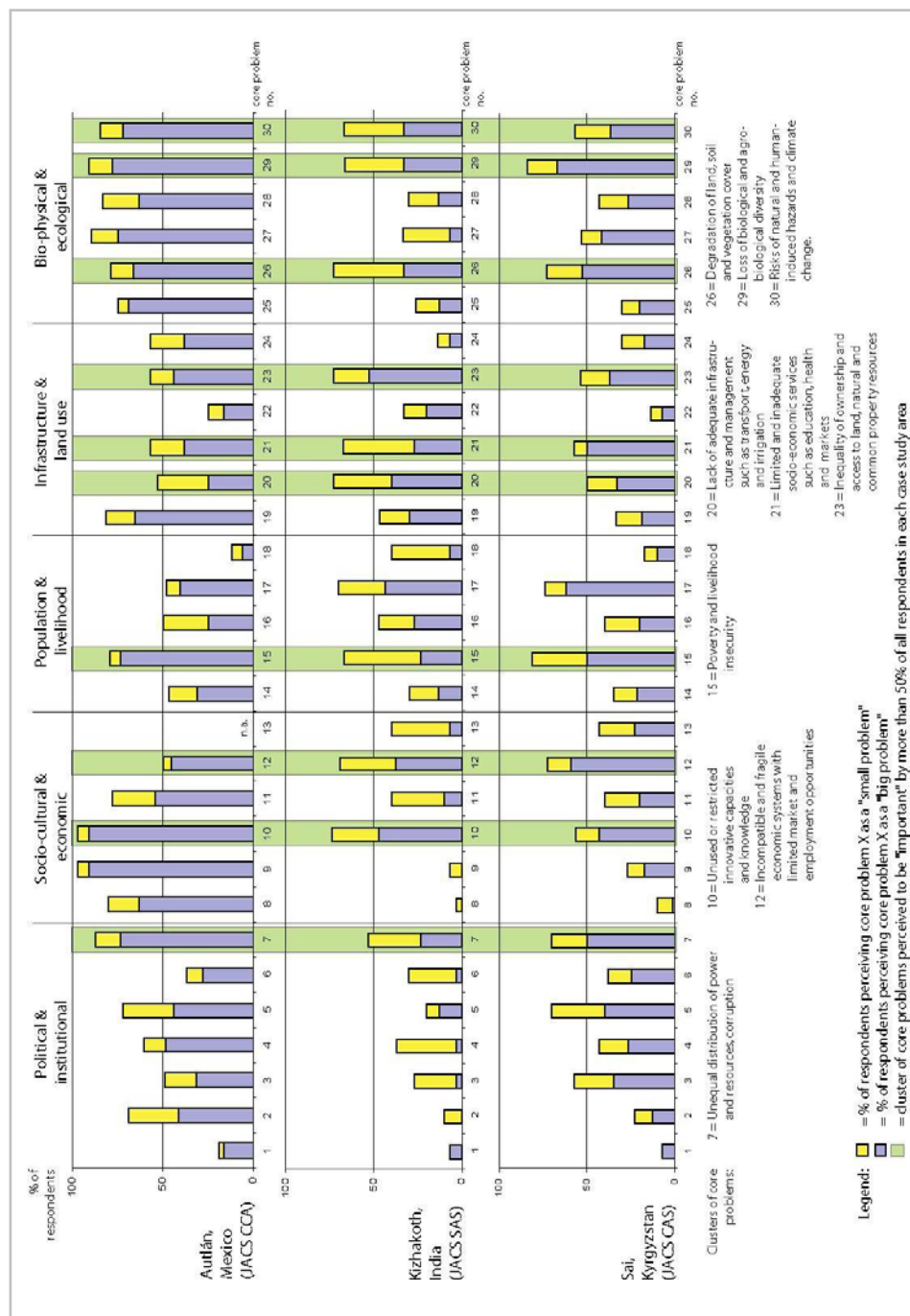


Figure 3: Relevance of the core problems in Autlán municipality, Sai village and Kizhakoth Panchayat (n=77)

Note: Questions with more than 50 percent "no answer" responses were not included in the analysis

Summarising these results, we can state the following:

As a first indicator, the total number of core problems considered important in each community can be used. Autlán has the largest number of important core problems (22 out of a total of 30 core problems), followed by Sai (14) and Kizhakoth (11). Secondly, each community has its own, distinct profile of important core problems. While for Autlán it is mainly the socio-cultural & economic and the biophysical & ecological

realms that appear to be important, for Kizhakothe and Sai both the infrastructure & land-use and biophysical & ecological realms matter. When looking for similarities, we observed that the following 10 core problems appeared to be important in all three communities:

- Political & institutional realm: [7] *Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption.*
- Socio-cultural & economic realm: [10] *Unused or restricted innovative capacities and knowledge*; [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities.*
- Population & livelihood realm: [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity.*
- Infrastructure & land use realm: [20] *Lack of adequate infrastructure and management* (e.g. transport, energy and irrigation); [21] *Limited and inadequate socio-economic services such as education, health and markets*; [23] *Inequality of ownership and access to land, natural and common property resources.*
- Bio-physical & ecological realm: [26] *Degradation of land, soil and vegetation cover*; [29] *Loss of biological and agro-biological diversity*; [30] *Risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change.*

A cluster is defined as those individual core problems that are considered to be important by more than 50 percent of the respondents in *each* case study area. According to this definition, 10 core problems do cluster since they appear to be important in all 3 JACS.

4.3 Driving forces

Analysis of the interviews in the three communities yielded the results described below concerned with driving forces of international labour migration.

In *Autlán municipality*, the main driving force of migration is the absence of job opportunities at home and the fragile living conditions of the families. Even if the family owns land, cultivating rain-fed maize is often not enough to secure a livelihood. As off-farm jobs are rare, migration is often the only option to earn enough money to cover basic subsistence needs. Furthermore, the dream of building a house is a very important driving force. For many families, it is only through migration that they are able to accumulate enough capital to purchase the building materials for a house or even to repair an existing one. A few men migrate in order to save enough money to be able to open a small business upon their return. Nonetheless, the prospect of earning a higher income abroad is only a partial driving force, since most people know very well that the cost of living in the USA is also much higher and that it is difficult to save significant amounts of money. Lastly, some young men are attracted to migration because of the sense of adventure that is involved in going to “El Norte”.

In *Kizhakothe Panchayat*, high unemployment and limited financial income from local, often part-time and seasonal employment opportunities are the major driving forces in migration. While the poorest families cannot earn enough income from local opportuni-

ties, other families can earn just enough to meet regular expenses. However, income is not sufficient to overcome unexpected expenses such as health problems. Credits can help in the short term, but if income regularly remains too low, migration is the last option. However, the biggest push factor for migration is the dowry needed for the marriage of female family members. Indeed, Muslim communities require very high dowry payments, which are a key constraint, especially for families with more than one daughter. On the "pull" side, the desire for a better job with more income is an important reason to migrate. This can make it possible to purchase some land and build a new house at a later stage. As has been pointed out by many interviewees, the construction of a new house can only be done with remittances from migration or with a local highly-salaried job (e.g. an important position in a Government institution or in the private sector). Another pull factor is the fact that the social status of a migrant is higher than that of a non-migrant. The very fact that one has been in the Gulf States gives him/her a higher status. This is reason enough for some people to migrate.

In *Sai village*, almost half of the interviewees indicated that the lack of employment opportunities in the village or nearby, in combination with small agricultural plots that hardly allow for earning a livelihood, is a reason to migrate. The other half stated that more money could be earned abroad. The villagers clearly have socio-economic arguments for migration.²⁵ Some young men declared that they wanted to see other parts of the world beyond the village, but this seems to be the exception, as many interviewees claimed that they would prefer to live and work in their home village instead of migrating abroad. There is no indication that driving forces for migration differ according to status in the village. An important motivation behind these two factors is the pressure to respect tradition and fulfil social obligations, like financing lifecycle feasts such as weddings, funerals and circumcisions. The main financial expenses of these feasts are associated with hosting and providing food and drink for the large number of invited guests, paying bride money and providing for dowries, and (for the guests) offering gifts to the inviting party. For a household, the expense of holding such a feast can easily reach USD 1500. However, the household can expect reciprocity from the invited guests, including a gift and an invitation to a future feast.

Summing up, in all three communities, the driving forces for international labour migration were similar. The decision to migrate was driven mainly by an absence of employment opportunities in the home village or nearby region, combined with a need for greater subsistence income and money to finance specific projects such as lifecycle events, building a house, or starting a small business. Migration offers the opportunity to find (temporary) employment abroad that will – at least theoretically – allow the migrant to earn more money for catering to these needs.

²⁵ This is reflected in newspaper publications on the topic of international labour migration that see mainly socio-economic reasons as driving forces (IRIN 2003b).

4.4 Remittances and their spending

In *Autlán municipality*, 90 percent of migrant households receive remittances. Remittances are mainly sent by money order. In the case study areas, the amounts remitted varied from USD 60 to USD 6000 per year, averaging USD 1370 per year per migrant. For 25 percent of migrant households, remittances represent the most important income, and for an additional 25 percent the second most important income after agriculture. Remittances are predominantly used for consumption: food, clothes, medical expenses, repaying loans, and educating children. If a migrant manages to send a more significant amount of money, it is spent on house repairs or to construct a new house. However, very few migrants actually succeed in constructing a house. In most cases they can send enough money for repairs, such as roof repair, but the great majority of remittances are used to pay for food. Some households invest remittances in agriculture but only after subsistence needs are met. Even though there are several Mexican migrant associations in the USA, channelling communal remittances to a number of their home communities in the State of Jalisco, there were no communal remittances in the case study areas themselves.²⁶

In *Kizhakothe Panchayat*, interviewees were quite reluctant to reveal the amount of remittances sent back. However, some respondents said that they did not receive anything from relatives who had migrated. This could be explained in some cases by the fact that migrants had just left and were still looking for employment opportunities abroad; in other cases, migrants were in need of income to pay for food and accommodation in the destination country. Finally, many migrants kept their savings in the destination country while waiting for the first opportunity to travel back home. Only in a few cases where the household at home was in need of regular remittances were these sent on a monthly basis. For the above reasons, yearly remittances range from USD 0-675, which are either sent on a monthly basis or once every 2-3 years. Normally, in the first years, remittances are used both for consumption by the households (e.g. food, health, education) and to pay back loans taken for migration. In some cases where new migrants are given a loan by family members who have already migrated, the loan is paid back in the destination country and only a small remittance is sent home. Once the loan is reimbursed, the money that is not used by the households is saved, usually in the destination country. The savings are then invested, in order of importance, to purchase land, build a house or repair an existing one, and in some cases for agricultural purposes. An important part of remittances are spent for dowries and wedding costs for female members. Last but not least, remittances are spent for the following: investment in a local business, school fees for private English schools, financing migration of other relatives, expenses such as health costs, and consumer goods such as TVs, refrigerators, furniture, etc. The use of remittances is largely restricted to the family. There are, however, some

²⁶ Research in the community of Rincón de Luisa, which is located in the same region, showed that migrants from this community have formed an association in Las Vegas and regularly send money for community projects such as the renovation of the church, constructing a new “plaza” (main square), a community garden etc. (Portner 2005).

cases in which returning migrants have sponsored the construction of a village road, a local bus transportation company, or an orphanage.

In *Sai village*, when migrants send back remittances, they usually do so with the help of a bank. According to the interviews, migrants send or bring money back once or twice a year. There were also, however, cases where no money was sent back at all. Annual remittances that reach the village varied from USD 20 to USD 930 per household, the average being USD 460. However, almost half of the households indicated a higher sum, ranging from USD 700 to USD 930. Migrants used these remittances for the following: food/clothing, lifecycle feasts, medical expenses, education, vehicles (mostly cars), and agricultural inputs. There was no visible shift from consumer needs in the first year to more long-term investments in later years. More than 50 percent of the households interviewed stated that they were not able to invest remittances as they wished. Many had planned to invest in a small business. As interviewees stated, specific investments were rarely made, as they either received less money than expected, or had to spend it for other urgent needs, such as food, health expenses or festivals. The use of remittances was largely restricted to the household. Very little money, if any, was spent on communal needs. Village authorities mentioned several times that it is difficult to motivate villagers to spend money on communal projects, as people lack trust in the authorities. Others said that remittance amounts were often barely sufficient for the household itself.

In conclusion, it can be stated that in all three villages, remittances are primarily used to satisfy daily needs such as food and clothing, but also medical expenses if necessary. While remittances are sometimes invested in agriculture, investments in businesses are rare, as they are barely sufficient in most cases to cover basic subsistence needs. Additional spending of remittances differs according to the community, though there were similarities between pairs of communities. While in Sai and Kizhakothe migrant households spent remittances to fulfil societal and traditional obligations such as weddings, funerals and circumcisions, this spending mode was absent in Autlán. In the case of investments for construction and house repair, Autlán and Kizhakothe showed similar patterns, while in Sai very little (if any) money was spent on houses. In Autlán and Kizhakothe, remittances are sometimes used to finance the travel costs of the migrant himself or migration costs for another member of the household. If one looks at communal spending, the pairing is similar: in the State of Jalisco (the study areas being more of an exception) and to a certain extent in Kizhakothe, remittances are invested regularly in communal projects. This is not the case for Sai.

Table 2 summarises the importance of remittances and their investment in the three case study areas.

Table 2: Remittances and their investment in Autlán municipality, Sai village and Kizhakoth Panchayat

	Autlán municipality	Sai village	Kizhakoth Panchayat
% of migrant households receiving remittances	90	79	64
Money remitted to migrant's household (in USD)	60–6000	20–930	0–675(2)
Annual average remitted to migrant's household (in USD)	1370	460(1)	ca. 500
Regularity of remittances to migrant's household	3–12 times per year	1–2 times per year	1–11 times per year
Use of remittances (in order of importance)	1. Food, clothing, medical expenses, education 2. Repaying debts 3. House repairs or construction 4. Agricultural investments ²⁷	1. Food, clothing 2. Lifecycle feasts 3. Education, health expenses 4. Cars 5. Agricultural inputs ²⁸	1. Food, clothing, medical expenses, education 2. Repaying debts 3. Dowry (wedding costs) 4. House construction and repair 5. Investment in local business 6. Fees for private schooling 7. Financing migration of other relatives 8. Furniture, electric appliances

Source: Authors' own data.

Notes:

(1) This amount might be too low, as half of all the households receiving remittances named an amount between USD 700 and USD 930.

(2) Some of the migrants brought home money very irregularly, e.g. each 3–4 years when they returned home. This figure represents an average.

Based on the following exchange rates from May 2004:

1 USD = 45 INR (Indian Rupee) , 1 USD = 11 MXN (Mexican pesos), 1 USD = 43 KGS (Kyrgyz Som)

²⁷ Research conducted in two other case study areas in the same region by Brigitte Portner (IP1) showed similar investment patterns. Remittances were used for food, clothing, medical expenses, and education. Investments in land purchase were reported for two migrant households (Portner 2005).

²⁸ Irene Rohner (IP6), in her forthcoming MSc thesis, notes the following investments of remittances for Lower Sai, listed in order of importance: (1) repayment of debts incurred to finance migration, (2) food, clothing and fertiliser, (3) education, (4) renovation and construction of houses, and (5) investment in livestock and small businesses. Remittances are also spent on lifecycle feasts. In addition, the study notes that migrants often bring back cars from Russia (Rohner 2005).

4.5 Changes in and impacts of migration

This chapter summarises analysis of the interviews with respect to the changes that occurred in these villages due to migration and the impact of remittances at village level.

In *Autlán municipality*, all people interviewed agreed that remittances only benefited the individual family and not the community as a whole. So far, remittances have never been invested in a way that improved the situation of the communities, i.e. by creating jobs or by improving the infrastructure so that the entire community would benefit. Nonetheless, in El Jalocote it was mentioned that the presence of a small shop was very useful and that the establishment of this shop was only possible because the owners had accumulated the necessary capital to open the shop while working in the USA. On the other hand, in two cases, migrants saved around USD 3000 during their stay in the United States, which allowed them to buy the material required to build a fence. They then fenced off approximately 10 hectares of communal land in the hills, thereby reducing access to it by other families. Every person interviewed thought that migration rates would increase in the future and that migration has become a "normal", a way of life. This is so on the one hand because it continues to be difficult to make a living by staying in one's home community, and on the other because young people no longer want to work in agriculture. There is some concern among the elderly that the communities are being abandoned by the young. Furthermore, some families stop sending remittances to their relatives once they succeed in establishing themselves permanently in the USA.

In *Kizhakothe Panchayat* most remittances benefit private households. According to expert interviews, the community as a whole does not seem to benefit much. It merely profits from remittances when money is provided to sponsor wedding parties (sometimes via charity organisations at the local Mosque) for women from poorer families. In some cases richer families open and operate social institutions such as orphanages. The community also benefits from private investment of remittances when richer migrants invest in roads leading to their villas. These roads are also used by other community members. More important than direct investment is the indirect impact of migration on the whole community. In some cases returning migrants have started a local bus company that improves and complements the local transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, all the companies started by returning migrants employ staff, thus creating local job opportunities and a certain income flow for households, at least in the short term. The problem in the long term is that almost all businessmen invest in shops that mostly sell consumer goods. Hence the main street in the nearby town has plenty of small shops filled with TVs, video recorders, fridges and mobile phones, but not a single customer. Whether these businesses can sustain themselves is doubtful. Therefore, it is also questionable whether this local economy can sustain these employment opportunities in the long term. In conclusion, it can be said that the overall economy is greatly sustained by an influx of money in the form of remittances from the Gulf States. However, some respondents stress the fact that the economic status of families in the community was more homogeneous previously, while nowadays there is a certain gap be-

tween wealthy families who have succeeded and poor families where there is no migrant member or where migration failed. What remains in the latter case, at least, is a certain improvement in the social status of the migrant who travelled abroad.

In *Sai village*, on a personal level, migrants see slight or significant improvement in the economic situation and living conditions of their households. Migration is also linked with higher social status and creditworthiness. A few households experienced an improved educational situation. Interestingly, interviewees stated that women's workloads did not change or improved, whereas men's workloads became somewhat heavier, probably due to harsh working conditions in Russia. Overall, the people interviewed did not perceive migration as a contributing factor in the accumulation of wealth, but as a factor sustaining their livelihood.²⁹ On a community level, people did not see migration playing a role in the future development of the village. Its impact can be felt on an individual level, but remittances cannot be used to tackle the major problems of the community. There are, however, indirect effects of migration on the community. New cars might facilitate transportation to other places, offering a lift for a small fee. Migrants might pay slightly higher school fees for their children. They might also donate a higher sum, compared to others, when the community raises money for a certain task. Furthermore, migrants might give loans to other people. However, as one respondent mentioned, the larger issues such as the broken bridge or road will not be attended to with this money. As expressed in the core problem analysis, many see migration on the whole rather than as a negative phenomenon – people cannot make a living in their native country, so they have to go to a foreign country for work. Many experience this situation as “wrong”.

In all three communities, migration primarily benefited the migrant's household. The potential to improve the overall situation of the community was seen as limited. Effects on the wider community were more indirect than direct, and almost no increase in job opportunities was observed. While the situation of individual households might improve in cases of successful migration, there was also a considerable risk of a negative outcome, as shown by the Kizhakoth case in particular. However, migration was also closely related to societal status – directly, in the Kizhakoth case, when even failed migration had a positive effect on status, and more indirectly, in the Sai case, where the social status of a person increased when he or she was able to conduct lavish lifecycle feasts or afford proper presents and thus be invited to other such feasts.

²⁹ “People do not get rich through migration, they just survive.” Russian teacher of Sai village, April 2004.

5 International Labour Migration – a Mitigation Strategy?

In this chapter, we summarise results and discuss hypotheses. We then reflect on the results of the case studies, namely on core problems, on the Janus-faced ³⁰ nature of international labour migration, and on its context.

5.1 Hypotheses

The main hypothesis formulated for this study suggests that international labour migration represents a mitigation strategy for the three communities of Autlán, Kizhakoth and Sai. To facilitate the testing of this hypothesis, we divided it into two sub-hypotheses, which will be discussed in the following section.

Sub-hypothesis 1: International labour migration results from a similar combination of core problems.

For sub-hypothesis 1, we postulated that a similar combination of core problems for the three communities led to international labour migration. The core problem analysis showed that, for all three communities, the following 10 core problems appear to be important:

- Political & institutional realm: [7] *Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption.*
- Socio-cultural & economic realm: [10] *Unused or restricted innovative capacities and knowledge;* [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities.*
- Population & livelihood realm: [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity.*
- Infrastructure & land use realm: [20] *Lack of adequate infrastructure and management (e.g. transport, energy and irrigation);* [21] *Limited and inadequate socio-economic services such as education, health and markets;* [23] *Inequality of ownership and access to land, natural and common property resources.*
- Bio-physical & ecological realm: [26] *Degradation of land, soil and vegetation cover;* [29] *Loss of biological and agro-biological diversity;* [30] *Risks of natural and human-induced hazards and climate change.*

Furthermore, in all three communities, the driving forces of international labour migration are similar. The decision to migrate was mainly driven by an absence of employment opportunities in the home village or nearby region, combined with a need for more income for subsistence and to finance specific projects such as lifecycle events,

³⁰ Janus-faced: having two contrasting aspects.

building a house, or starting a small business. Migration offered an opportunity to find (temporary) employment abroad that would allow the migrant to earn more money for catering to these needs. These driving forces emerged from the following two core problems: [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities* (mostly the absence of employment opportunities) and [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity*. We therefore confirm this hypothesis.

Sub-hypothesis 2: International labour migration reduces the negative effects of core problems.

For sub-hypothesis 2, we postulated that international labour migration alleviates core problems that lead to migration in the three communities. As established above, these are [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities* (mostly the absence of employment opportunities) and [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity*.

Overall, migration and remittances appear to mitigate poverty by covering basic needs such as food, clothing and medical expenses. This also means that livelihood insecurity decreases, even if only to a minor extent. We can therefore conclude that migration mitigates core problem [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity*. Concerning core problem [12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities*, the mitigation effect of migration can be considered very limited. This was, firstly, because mitigation refers only to part of the core problem, namely the creation of employment opportunities, and secondly, because the creation of job opportunities due to the investment of remittances was rare. Furthermore, while it has been noted that migration might create a number of new employment opportunities at the local level, their local positive impact remains very limited, especially in the long-term. We can thus only partly confirm this hypothesis.

Main hypothesis: International labour migration is a mitigation strategy.

As we can only partly confirm sub-hypothesis 2, the main hypothesis, which states that international migration mitigates the same core problems that lead to migration, cannot be entirely accepted. This result will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.2 Core problems in perspective

Analysis of the core problems provides a number of interesting results. Here we shall discuss some of the results that figure in Chapter 4.2. The results of our study will then be compared with the results of the Syndrome Pre-Synthesis Project (SPSP) of 2001 (Hurni et al. 2004b). Finally, aggregation, normativity and scale issues will be discussed.

The overall high ranking of core problems in Autlán, compared to Sai and Kizhakoth, raises several questions. Does it mean that the situation is comparatively worse in

Autlán than in the other communities? The negative effects of NAFTA on agricultural prices in Mexico might be a specific reason for high rankings in the *socio-cultural & economic realm*. However, a similar worsening of rural agricultural livelihoods occurred in Kyrgyzstan as a consequence of the disintegration of the Soviet Union during the 1990s, and in India since the process of market liberalisation and deregulation began in 1991. This would suggest an equally high ranking of core problems in this realm, which was not the case. Similarly, the ranking of core problems in the *political & institutional realm* raises questions in Kyrgyzstan. Considering the political development that followed the period of field research ³¹, the respondents in Sai assigned relatively little importance to the core problems in this realm. While some clearly stated that they were not interested in political matters, there was also much caution in talking about such issues, which may be explained as a consequence of the exercise of political control during the Soviet Union. These examples raise the question of whether such an analysis does not have a distinct cultural, social and political bias that could pose a methodological constraint, especially in a comparative setting.

During the Syndrome Pre-Synthesis Project (SPSP), regional experts and researchers assessed the core problems of sustainable development in each of the 8 JACS regions during the preparatory workshops of the NCCR North-South. In the framework of the SPSP, Messerli and Wiesmann (2004) compared the ranking of core problems obtained in the different JACS ³² for each syndrome context and ultimately established a global ranking independent of context. Results obtained during the SPSP for the highland-lowland context are quite different from the results obtained in the present study, which was to be expected. Only one of four core problems considered acute in the SPSP was also rated as important by all three JACS in the present study, namely [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity*. With regard to the eight core problems found to be “not very acute” in the SPSP, the present study found that only [1] *Weak international geopolitical position and negotiation power* and [22] *Discrimination in information and communication flows and technologies* received a similar low ranking.

Interestingly, if we compare SPSP’s core problem rankings independent of the context, both the SPSP and the present study largely agree on the most important ([12] *Incompatible and fragile economic systems with limited market and employment opportunities*, [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity* and [20] *Lack of adequate infrastructure and management (e.g. transport, energy and irrigation)*), as well as on the least important core problems ([4] *Inadequate legal framework and regulations, lack of enforcement and means*, [14] *Restrictions on human rights and individual development potential* and [22] *Discrimination in information and communication flows and technologies*). This is rather surprising, given the respective bias of participants. The ap-

³¹ Kyrgyzstan experienced a change in political leadership in March 2005 that has been compared to the ‘revolutions’ in Georgia (2003) and the Ukraine (2004).

³² As not all results from the different JACS were comparable, the overall ranking for the highland-lowland (interactions) context was done based on results from JACS Horn of Africa, JACS East Africa, and JACS South East Asia (Messerli and Wiesmann 2004, p.402).

proach taken in the present project was different insofar as the core problems were evaluated by "the people", representatives of civil society with "non-scientific knowledge," while the ranking was done by "experts" in the SPSP. Furthermore, aggregation as well as scale problems might also have distorted the results. However, this would require a more detailed analysis.

The challenges associated with the normative dimension of defining core problems can also be illustrated by the case of migration. While a government expert may rate migration as a problem (because much migration is illegal, because migrants require housing and health care, etc.), many families in developing countries rate migration as an opportunity, since it allows them to secure a livelihood. Furthermore, the scale at which a core problem is defined has to be considered: For instance, deforestation at plot level may not be considered a problem by a family cultivating the land. At the national, regional and global levels, however, the aggregation of deforested plots might lead to alarming rates of deforestation. The importance of scale might also be illustrated by the examples of soil erosion, biological diversity, and other problems. In addition, large socio-economic, political and ecological differences may exist between countries in a JACS region, between communities within a region, and even within a single community. Therefore, certain core problems might be considered very important in one community but be absent in another community nearby, despite the fact that they are located in the same *syndrome context*. In conclusion, the extent to which the importance of core problems can be generalised is, without a doubt, limited.

Finally, the present study showed that one core problem should not contain more than one issue. While the ranking may be high for one issue, it may be low for the other, as was the case for *migration and population pressure* (see Chapter 4.2). In addition, migration is not necessarily linked to population pressure and, while migration may represent a core potential, population pressure is never perceived as a potential. Other core problems that should possibly be reformulated include [2] *Dominating and conflicting world views and ethical values*, [3] *Contradictory policies and weak formal institutions at different levels*, [4] *Inadequate legal framework and regulations, lack of enforcement and means*, [7] *Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption*, [8] *Social, cultural and ethnic tensions and insecurity*, [11] *Great socio-economic and gender disparities* and [19] *Poor water supply and environmental sanitation*.

5.3 The Janus-faced character of migration

All three case studies clearly demonstrated that migration is an important core problem in the communities. Simultaneously, it is clear to some extent that migration can be a mitigation strategy for these communities, based on the impact of remittances.

Figure 2 shows that core problem [17] *Population pressure and multi-dimensional migration* is perceived as important by all three communities. Qualitative enquiries have generated more details that help in understanding this assessment (see chapter 4.2). The empirical results have shown that certain groups such as women may perceive

migration as a problem, as demonstrated in the *Autlán* and *Kizhako* case studies. Migration is a problem for women because their husbands often leave them alone for years. Although migration makes it possible to provide a regular income for the family, the women have heavy responsibilities for all household decisions and education of the children. Particular constraints are experienced by female households in the Muslim communities of *Kizhako*, such as a prohibition on leaving home after nightfall. As demonstrated in the *Kizhako* case study, the perception of migration as a problem is linked to the considerable risk of failure, coupled with the danger of subsequent higher debt. Furthermore, as the *Sai* case study shows, migration is also characterised as a problem since people feel that it does not result from a free choice, but from sheer necessity. For the community, migration is a reactive and not a proactive strategy. Finally, as the *Autlán* and *Sai* case studies show, communities may simply think it “wrong” that people cannot make a living in their native place and have to go to a foreign country for work.

However, migration is often the only way for many men to provide a regular income for their families. Therefore, most migrant families experience an improvement in their economic situation and living conditions in their households. The results of the study with regard to the spending of remittances reflect the literature on the subject.³³ At first glance, it appears that remittances are spent more for “consumptive” than “productive” activities. Moreover, they are used almost exclusively by migrant households, with little or nothing being spent on communal purposes. This might suggest “unproductive” spending of remittances that has no developmental impact. However, the distinction between productive and consumptive spending has repeatedly been questioned in the literature. Consumptive spending may have an investment effect in the longer term, which is difficult to measure (Goldring 2004; Kapur 2004). Furthermore, Seddon (2004) challenges the conventional wisdom that the use of remittances for private consumption necessarily conflicts with more social aspirations and wider development. He argues that “*firstly, improved consumption itself directly contributes to improved living standards and poverty alleviation. Secondly, consumption stimulates demand, and may help to create markets and employment. Thirdly, investment in human and social capital is now more widely recognised as promoting the social basis for economic development*” (p.415). Seddon’s second point offers support for sub-hypothesis 2. Hence remittances may have a long-term and wider positive impact in the three communities.

The question whether international labour migration constitutes a core problem of sustainable development or rather a mitigation strategy cannot be conclusively answered

³³ Despite acknowledging variations, Seddon (2004) states that “there is a general pattern in which the first use is to pay off debts (particularly incurred in going abroad) and to cover costs of basic necessities, including medical expenses. Another use is to improve residential accommodation of the household concerned, or to purchase basic consumer durables. After this, an increasing priority is given to the education of children, accumulation of funds to enable another member of the household to work abroad, and maintenance of social networks. Usually only after all of these demands are met will the household invest in the purchase of production assets or the funding of some form of enterprise in agriculture, manufacturing or other sectors” (p.415).

by this study. Results more readily confirm that migration is simultaneously a problem and a solution for both countries of origin and destination countries.

5.4 Migration in context

Our three case studies were conducted in three JACS of the NCCR North-South within the *highland-lowland context*. We shall now consider the initial choices and selections that were made, based on the programme's conceptual framework (see Chapter 2). The NCCR North-South hypothesizes that similar patterns will emerge in different JACS within one context. As we outlined in Chapter 4, we chose our three cases accordingly, based on literal replication, thus expecting to find similar patterns in all three communities. The study has produced results that largely support this assumption. Not only does a cluster of core problems emerge, but driving forces and spending of remittances also show similar tendencies. At first glance, it appears that the study supports basic NCCR North-South assumptions, including the hypothesis that patterns emerge according to the context (in this case in the highland-lowland context) in three different JACS, within the larger Earth System of North and South (see Chapter 2). We shall examine these results more closely in what follows.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the syndrome contexts have "broad societal, economic, political and ecological characteristics" within which syndromes of *Global Change* are expected to emerge. Hurni et al. (2004a) specify that the highland-lowland context integrates existing research on mountains (mountain ecology, mountain cultures, and mountain agriculture and tourism) and incorporates interrelations between highlands and lowlands (p.21). In this sense, the context appears to be largely a geographic one, characterised primarily by biophysical and ecological parameters.³⁴ While producing similar patterns, the highland-lowland context proved to be quite an elusive boundary for the case studies.³⁵ However, the communities share other distinct characteristics, such as being rural and agricultural, which may constitute a stronger reason for the emergence of similar patterns. Still, this observation raises the question whether international labour migration can conceptually be linked to distinct ecological or socio-economic contexts.

³⁴ The semi-arid context is defined accordingly, while the urban-peri-urban context is defined by socio-economic and infrastructural parameters (Hurni et al. 2004a).

³⁵ According to the geographic definition, Autlán and Sai can be more or less accommodated, while placing Kizhakoth in a context proves more difficult.

According to NCCR North-South hypotheses, the JACS CCA, SAS and CAS all belong to the South, and therefore to the group of developing and transition countries that are homogenous in terms of their disposition towards syndromes and their coping capacity. Migration is not only a local phenomenon, but ranks on a national scale in Mexico³⁶, India³⁷ and Kyrgyzstan³⁸. However, upon a closer look, it can be seen that all three are not only countries of origin but also destination countries. Mexico receives labour migrants from South and Central America (Mahler 2000). As a study by Susan Thieme has shown, India receives labour migrants from eastern Nepal (Thieme 2005). On a smaller scale, southern Kyrgyzstan receives labour migrants from Uzbekistan (IRIN 2003a). This also holds true for the Sai case study community, where persons from the adjacent Sogh enclave (Uzbekistan) are employed. Moreover, Sai's destination country, Russia, shows an increasing trend of labour out-migration (Krassinets and Tiuriukanova 2000; Olimova and Bosc 2003) that is similar to other Eastern and Central European countries (see for example León-Ledesma and Piracha 2004). Though it is evident that Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan are mainly countries of origin and to a lesser extent receiving countries, and that the scale of international labour migration is smaller in Russia and Eastern Europe than in the other case study countries, these observations still raise the question of where the North ends and the South begins.

³⁶ In 1980, remittances to Mexico were estimated at USD 698 million. They rose to 9 times this amount in 1999, reaching approximately USD 6649 million (Goldring 2004).

³⁷ The number of non-resident Keralites, defined as the sum of emigrants and returning emigrants, was 2,730,000 in 2004 against 2,100,000 in 1999. Contrary to expectations, emigration from Kerala continued unhindered between 1999 and 2004 (Zachariah and Rajan 2004).

³⁸ It is estimated that more than 500,000 labour migrants work abroad, representing 10 percent of the total population of the country. Their remittances make an important contribution to the national economy (IRIN 2005).

6 Reflections on the NCCR North–South Conceptual Framework

In Chapter 5 we demonstrated that international labour migration has a Janus-faced nature constituting both a core problem of sustainable development and a mitigation strategy for the communities in question. Accordingly, the literature on the migration-development nexus sees international labour migration as a “development trap” (Elleman 2005), a “development symptom” (Martin 1994 in Massey et al. 1998) and a “development machine” (Durand et al. 1996; León-Ledesma and Piracha 2004). This diversity of interpretations might result partly from differing perspectives on migration, such as macro- versus micro-economic analyses. However, it might also suggest that divergent notions of development inform these various viewpoints. Thus, it might be worth reflecting not only on migration as a phenomenon, but also on the different conceptions of development that shape the migration-development nexus. We shall next present a few reflections on concepts of “development” and their place in the NCCR North-South conceptual framework.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the NCCR North-South draws on an “equilibrium” perception of the world that has been called the “Earth system,” similar to the positivist perspective of the ecosystem that Forsyth (2003) mainly ascribes to natural sciences. This perception is based on the assumption that there is a “natural balance” in the world. The equilibrium is disrupted by human agency or human-induced environmental changes – notably Global Change – that negatively affect humankind and nature and hinder (sustainable) development. These disruptions manifest themselves as the core problems of sustainable development. They can and must be mitigated in order to re-establish the equilibrium and allow for development. In the NCCR North-South framework, migration represents such a disruption of equilibrium. The ambiguous nature of migration proves to be a dilemma in this functionalist perception, as there are either problems or solutions. It subsequently might be questioned whether the equilibrium model, with its structural-functionalist world assumption, provides an adequate framework for the case of migration. Furthermore, it has been suggested by scholars from various disciplines that non-equilibrium, rather than equilibrium, historically provides a better description of reality.

According to the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, core problems of sustainable development are normative and context-bound (see Chapter 2). Thus, the NCCR North-South conceptualises integration of the multiple goals of sustainability in terms of an ethical rather than a technical consensus ³⁹, which offers tremendous potential. As

³⁹ The ethical consensus sees sustainability as socially defined, and attempts to integrate its different dimensions through the interaction of social groups, resulting in common values and norms. The technical consensus sees sustainability as a quantitative relationship between its dimensions, and attempts to achieve their integration through accounting and optimisation, resulting in a mathematical formula (Ratner 2004, p.57-61).

the discussion in Chapter 5 has shown, the challenge lies in operationalisation. This starts from the assumption that it is enough to bring all the relevant actors together, and that the consensus achieved will represent values common to all. The results of the study demonstrate that in practice the social negotiation process shows certain "diversions" from its ideal course, besides the fact that it is hardly ever possible to unite all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, scholars have questioned whether participation provides a chance for all groups to voice their needs (see for example Ferguson 1990; Kapoor 2004). As Hobart (1993) outlines in the case of development, integration of different types of knowledge implies qualification of what "knowledge" constitutes and is thus an act of power. It appears that this social negotiation process is affected by relations of power that exist between actors and types of knowledge. The transdisciplinary process claimed in the definition of core problems may not have given enough attention to these power relations so far.

While the literature documents many socially undesirable aspects of migration, McDowell and de Haan (1997) caution that mainstream development thinking often regards population movements as a threat to stability and a challenge to established lifestyles. They suggest that pursuing non-movement is a "development orthodoxy" in Western development policy, which considers sedentary patterns in society as the norm, as opposed to making the case that migration is often the rule rather than the exception (p.1). In line with this, many other scholars of development (for example Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Laurie 2005; Saunders 2002), call for critical reflection on conventional wisdom and the norms behind it in development research and practice. Equally, as the case of migration shows, it might be useful to reconsider the division of the world into North (developed countries) and South (transition and developing countries). According to the NCCR North-South, transition and developing countries not only share a common disposition towards core problems, but have limited economic and institutional capacity to mitigate the syndromes resulting from core problems (Chapter 2). Therefore, they are characterised by similar geographic and institutional determinants (Woods 2004) and are thus, to a certain extent, homogenous. Chapter 5.4 has shown that the case of international labour migration in particular – if conceptualised as a problem – poses questions about the homogenous nature and the boundaries of a "South" conceived in this way, and about the division into two (or three) worlds (Berger 2004; de Haan 2000, p.340-343). Last but not least, as the study has shown, an *a priori* problematisation of "the South" may lead to an underestimation of the potential for self-regulatory processes such as international labour migration.

7 Conclusions

In the present paper, we have explored the NCCR North-South conceptual framework for the case of labour migration in three rural, agricultural communities. Our study suggests that it is difficult to distinguish between the “problematic” and the “mitigating” aspect of migration. At first sight, these contradictory results seem to represent an impasse that is impossible to resolve conclusively. This suggests that it is not the phenomenon itself, but the assumptions about development that may be inadequate. In Chapter 6, we investigated some of these assumptions. As a consequence, we suggest that adding “core potentials” (or “core opportunities”) to core problems of sustainable development, as has been done in JACS South Asia (Müller-Böcker 2004), would enhance the framework of the NCCR North-South. Furthermore, as the results of the study show, it might be useful to reconsider whether the “North-South” dichotomy provides a fertile entry point for research on processes of development and globalisation. Therefore, we propose rethinking the conceptual division of the world into “North” and “South.” As de Haan states, *“if markets and social relations are supposed to become worldwide, then research has to be global, too. One thinks first, of course, of comparative studies analyzing similarities and increased diversity in ‘middle-’ and ‘low-income countries.’ But the Third World no longer exists and an exclusive orientation on these ‘middle-’ and ‘low-income countries’ therefore misses the point of globalisation”* (2000, p.360). Thus, we recommend “opening up” the “North” for research, and allowing for a “multilocal” rather than a “dichotomic” conceptualisation of development and globalisation. Comparative studies will remain important to draw conclusions on globalisation and development. We believe that a comparative case study setup, such as the one applied in this study, would provide helpful insights in addition to the *Global Overviews*. So far, the *Global Overviews* are mainly based on a global indicator database for core problems. This predominantly quantitative procedure, although complemented with expertise from Individual Projects, focuses on statistical generalisation. From our point of view, comparative analytical generalisation that studies specific processes in the respective context would be an important addition to this procedure. We thus suggest that the *Global Overviews* could be complemented by a series of such comparative case studies that look at specific issues which concern the NCCR North-South throughout several regions, including the “North.” Last but not least, this study shows the importance of pursuing further research in the field of international labour migration, since the relation between migration and development remains unresolved.

8 Glossary

Cluster	In the present paper, a cluster of core problems are those core problems considered to be important problems by more than 50 percent of respondents in all three JACS.
Core problems	These are issues the NCCR North-South perceives in terms of sustainable development. Such problems – poverty, for instance – occur in all three syndrome contexts. Their combination with other core problems, such as governance failures and loss of biological diversity, is specific to each context (adapted from NCCR North-South 2002, p.5).
Driving forces	In the present paper, driving forces are understood as the motivations that lead people to adopt migration as a strategy.
Global change	Global-scale human, human-induced and natural changes that modify the functionality of the natural, social, economic and cultural dimensions of the Earth system (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.13).
Global overviews	“Global Overviews” provide data and background information for testing the syndrome hypothesis and for positioning of case studies in the NCCR North-South. A broad global database has been compiled with publicly available data. Furthermore, an interface allows interactive selection and valuation of indicators of core problems of non-sustainable development (adapted from the NCCR North-South website, http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch , accessed: August 2005).
International labour migrant	A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State where he or she is not a national (UN-Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, Article 2, 1990, in: Thieme 2005).
JACS	Joint Areas of Case Studies (JACS) are nine geographic regions around the world in which NCCR North-South field research takes place: South America, Caribbean and Central America, West

Africa, Horn of Africa, East Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, South East Asia and Switzerland. (adapted from NCCR North-South 2002, p.5).

Mitigation

(or Syndrome mitigation) Measures taken by individuals or institutions in one or more areas of intervention, which help reduce the effects of single, or combinations of several core problems, thereby actually or potentially reducing negative impacts of global change, and contributing to sustainable development (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.14).

Remittances

Transfers of assets by members of immigrant communities or foreign nationals from the country where they live and work back to relatives or other individuals in their country of origin (adapted from Seddon 2004, p.405).

Syndrome context

As syndromes of global change are specific to concrete situations, circumstances or regions, one can also speak of so-called syndrome contexts. These contexts can not be purely defined as geographical or analytical categories, but they have broad societal, economic, political and ecological characteristics. Within one syndrome context, one or more syndromes occur, or may potentially emerge. As there is a wide range of different syndromes and syndrome contexts, the NCCR North-South focuses its research on the following three syndrome contexts: the urban and peri-urban context, the semi-arid context, and the highland-lowland context (adapted from Hurni et al. 2004a, p.14, and NCCR North-South 2002).

Syndromes of global change

Clusters of ecological, social, economic, etc. problems or symptoms that form typical patterns, are based on similar processes, and emerge in different regions of the world, thereby actually or potentially resulting in adverse impacts at the global level (WBGU, 1997, as modified by the NCCR North-South, in: Hurni et al. 2004a, p.14).

Transdisciplinarity

A new form of learning and problem-solving involving co-operation among different parts of society and academia in order to meet complex social challenges (According to Häberli et al. 2001, in: Hurni et. al. 2004a, p.14).

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The relationship between international migration and its developmental impact in the country of origin has repeatedly been termed “unsettled” or “unresolved”. Despite considerable research in this area, the debate about whether migration is fostering or hindering development continues. In the NCCR North-South research programme, migration has been designated as a core problem of sustainable development, while recognising that it can also represent an opportunity for families trying to secure a livelihood. We argue that the debate about “migration as a problem” vs. “migration as an opportunity” deserves more research.

The present publication offers a comparative study focusing on three rural communities in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan. The results confirm the general investment patterns for remittances found in many studies: most remittances are used to cover subsistence needs such as food, clothing and medical costs. Once these needs are satisfied, households invest in house construction, agriculture, or business start-ups. Migration can be considered a mitigation strategy for rural households in the sense that remittances alleviate poverty in the community of origin of the migrants. The importance of migration as a livelihood strategy is expected to continue in the future. However, there appears to be little long-term developmental impact from remittances, such as creation of employment. Apart from these results, the present paper reflects on the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South programme, testing the main hypothesis of the syndrome mitigation concept with respect to international labour migration.

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