

# **A conversation with the Center for Global Development, November 22, 2016**

## **Participants**

- Dr. Michael Clemens – Senior Fellow, Migration and Development Team, Center for Global Development (CGD)
- Cynthia Rathinasamy – Program Coordinator, Migration and Development Team, CGD
- Kathy Smith – Director, Institutional Advancement, CGD
- Alexander Berger – Program Officer, U.S. Policy, the Open Philanthropy Project

**Note:** These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Dr. Clemens, Ms. Rathinasamy, and Ms. Smith.

## **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Dr. Clemens, Ms. Rathinasamy, and Ms. Smith of CGD as an update on an Open Philanthropy Project grant. The grant was awarded in March 2014 to support CGD's research on labor mobility. Conversation topics included updates on various research projects funded by the grant, longer-term needs for building support for labor mobility, and possible changes to the CGD Migration and Development team in the future.

## **Mexico labor mobility**

Mexico has been a major focus for Dr. Clemens' team since this summer.

### **“Shared Border, Shared Future” report**

In September, CGD published the “Shared Border, Shared Future: A Blueprint to Regulate US-Mexico Labor Mobility” report.

Since the report was published, CGD has been working on ways to get the recommendations implemented. It has engaged with various civil society organizations to identify the most actionable recommendations and find the right audience and framing for the report. It is unlikely that all of the recommendations will be implemented, but the report includes many options, some of which could be of interest to the U.S. Congress.

### **Bracero program policy analysis**

The termination of the Bracero program was the largest one-time exclusion of immigrant workers from the U.S.: 20-30% of the seasonal agricultural labor force was expelled from the country when the program ended. President John F. Kennedy stated that the goals of ending the program were to raise wages and improve conditions for domestic agricultural workers.

### *Academic research on labor and immigration*

The academic literature on labor and immigration has been dominated by studies of exogenous changes that led to migration, such as an influx of refugees. Studies have not focused on the impact of an immigration policy change that aims for a certain result.

In economics, there are many studies of active labor market policies – e.g., what impact training or Trade Adjustment Assistance programs have on workers' unemployment rates or wages. In a paper due to be released next month, Dr. Clemens will evaluate the Bracero program as an active labor market policy. According to his review of the literature, this will be the first such study of a change to U.S. immigration policy. Because it focuses on the effects of a policy change, the study should be more relevant to contemporary policy discussions on migration.

### *CGD's analysis and findings*

CGD created the first state-by-state, monthly database of the number of individuals in the Bracero program. Previously, only annual national totals of individuals in the program were available, which made it difficult to understand how the program impacted total U.S. wages.

With the new database, CGD found that terminating the program had the following effects:

- **Wages** – Ending the program did not lead to higher wages for domestic seasonal agricultural workers. Wages did go up in states where hundreds of thousands of braceros were excluded, but they also went up at the same rate in states that had few or no bracero workers.
- **Unemployment** – Ending the program did not lead to improvements in the unemployment rates of U.S. seasonal agricultural workers.
- **Agricultural productivity** – Of the top seven crops that braceros were harvesting during the program, three were almost fully mechanized – i.e., machines replaced the bracero harvesters – after the program ended. Three others – asparagus, strawberries, and melons, for which mechanized harvesting processes were not available – experienced declines in production. In addition to replacing workers with machines, the U.S. agricultural producers were forced to move production to Mexico or other states, reduce production, and adopt seed varieties that required less labor.

## **Guest-worker programs**

### **Haiti guest-worker program evaluation**

Dr. Clemens has been working on an evaluation of the Haiti guest-worker program and recently submitted it to an academic journal.

## **University of Chicago conference and publication**

Dr. Clemens participated in an academic conference on guest-worker labor organized by Professor Glen Weyl and Professor Eric Posner at the University of Chicago. He presented his Bracero paper there and received useful feedback.

The University of Chicago will be publishing a special issue of the Journal of Legal Studies focused on guest-worker labor. Dr. Clemens plans to submit a new paper on Indian migrant labor in Dubai to the journal. This paper will have a different framing than Dr. Clemens' previous work on this subject. It will focus on six different formal definitions of repugnant transactions and analyze the popular views of guest work through these six definitions.

## **Forced migration**

### **Aid to halt refugee migration**

Within the governments of the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Austria, there has been increased interest in foreign aid as a tool to stop the influx of refugees. Dr. Clemens does not believe that further development will prevent migration, and his research has been cited in press interviews on this topic. CGD is planning to host an informational event on this topic.

### **Impact of violence on international migration**

Researchers have not yet offered a general quantitative analysis on the effect of violence on the international movement of refugees. There have been some studies on the effects of violence on internally displaced migrants.

## **Book on labor mobility**

Dr. Clemens is continuing to make progress on his book project. In the book, he will be bringing together examples of past mainstream views that have since been discredited but are similar to contemporary views on migration. By demonstrating that similar views were once held about other communities, with many of the same justifications that are now used to limit migrant labor, he hopes that readers will be encouraged to reexamine their views on migration.

## **Longer-term needs for building support for labor mobility**

Institutions play an essential role in social movements. As "mobilizing structures," they can provide a center around which the movement can rally.

Universities are not currently focused on researching or creating proposals based on the ideas that Dr. Clemens will be putting forward in his book. These ideas will need to be represented in universities or other institutions in order to be more widely adopted.

## Future work of the CGD Migration and Development Team

The team sees two options for how it could operate in the future:

- **Core work** – continuing the work that the team is currently doing, with a small expansion of staff.
- **“Core plus”** – a larger increase in the size of the team to build capacity in policy evaluation and outreach.

### Core work

After the U.S. election, prospects for positive immigration action from the U.S. government seem to be reduced. But Dr. Clemens would continue to prioritize work on all of the priorities described above, as well as working on:

- **Global Skill Partnership** – Dr. Clemens is planning to continue discussing this with more European audiences. CGD is convening a roundtable on this subject in the United Kingdom next month, and Dr. Clemens will present on it in Germany in March.
- **Policy evaluation** – CGD is planning to evaluate the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act. There has been no quantitative evaluation of the impact of this policy, but the data is available to study. This paper would be similar to the Bracero paper.

### “Core plus”

- **Policy** – To build more capacity for policy evaluation, the current four-person team would need to be expanded to five or six dedicated staff members, comprising two or three staff at the senior level and two or three at the junior level.
- **Outreach** – In order to work on more communications and outreach – e.g., multimedia projects, coalition building, and student outreach – more resources would be needed from the CGD communications and external relations team than are currently budgeted from the Open Philanthropy Project grants.

This expansion would be comparable to the size of the existing health team at CGD, so it is not an unprecedented growth in staff for CGD.

*Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at*  
<http://www.openphilanthropy.org/research/conversations>