



## “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

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*dialogue*

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**Cover Photos:** (top left): Migrant family in India (Photo: Balz Strasser; (lower left): Teachers and wives of migrants in Kyrgyzstan (Photo: Christine Bichsel); (on the right) Migrant family in Mexico (Photo: Silvia Hostettler). Layout by Simone Schoch.

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# Summary

The relationship between international migration and its developmental impact in the sending country has repeatedly been termed as “unsettled” or “unresolved”. Despite the considerable amount of research that has been conducted, the debate 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 migration 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: Firstly, 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 for the case of international labour migration. This hypothesis states that international labour migration can be considered a mitigation strategy through the investment of remittances. Secondly, the paper aims to contribute to the discussion of an NCCR North-South methodological approach by applying a specific comparative research design.

The paper is based on a comparative study which focuses on three rural communities in Mexico, India and Kyrgyzstan. Following the geographical set-up of the NCCR North-South, the research addresses 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 of remittances found in many studies: the majority of remittances are used to cover subsistence needs such as food, clothes and medical costs. Once these needs are satisfied, households do invest in house construction, agriculture or in starting a business. Migration can be considered as 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, the long-term developmental impact of remittances, such as the creation of employment, appears to be largely absent.

For the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, the study has shown that the process of defining core problems of sustainable development still needs further thought as some normativity, aggregation and scale issues remain problematic. Furthermore, the study suggests that the ambiguous character of international labour migration being a limitation (or core problem) *and* an opportunity (or mitigating strategy) results from underlying assumptions about development that need to be addressed in the 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 the destination countries to local livelihoods in the distant community<sup>1</sup> of origin of migrants. It transgresses the boundaries of the nation and the nation state and requires new approaches to sovereignty and citizenship in the “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 adapted. Migration may be exemplary for 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 as to buying a cow or a TV<sup>2</sup> 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 set development paths.

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 stated that remittance flows are more equally distributed (Jennings and Clarke 2005) and have less transaction costs than foreign aid (Kapur 2004; Nicholson 2004). The development impact of these remittances is highly 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 return are indeed automatically converted into accelerated development (Seddon 2004). Contrarily, they might 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 from a lack of it (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 enormously even within communities (de

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use community for small rural settlements (see also in: Ellerman 2005, p.621).

<sup>2</sup> The title “Should I buy a cow or a TV?” has been 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 on the one hand because over time our study became known by this title and on the other because we simply seemed unable to come up with an equally tempting one...

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 the sending countries remains ambiguous.

The NCCR North-South programme<sup>3</sup> has a predominantly negative view of migration with regard to development. Migration has been 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 migration was yet again mentioned as such in six out of eight regions (Hurni et al. 2004b). Together with 29 other core problems, *population pressure and multi-dimensional migration* figures now on the consolidated core problem list of the NCCR North-South<sup>4</sup>. However, as the actual mainstream debate on migration suggests, and ongoing NCCR North-South research confirms (see for example Thieme et al. 2005), it might 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 as core potentials was debated in two workshops in South Asia and in Central America and the Caribbean. In the workshop taking place 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 sum of net foreign aid received (The Economist 2002). And while the sending countries benefit from remittances, receiving 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 that international labour migration represents such a mitigation strategy is set forth. The scope of the comparative analysis encompasses three different Joint Areas of Case Studies (JACS)<sup>5</sup>, and is situated in the high-

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<sup>3</sup> 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 normatively positions itself by declaring a need to mitigate these negative manifestations of Global Change. Through mitigating these syndromes of Global Change, it aims to contribute to sustainable development (Hurni et al. 2004b).

<sup>4</sup> See list of core problems in Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419).

<sup>5</sup> Joint Areas of Case Studies (JACS) are nine geographic regions around the world in which field research of the NCCR North – South 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 context<sup>6</sup>. Second, the paper aims to contribute to the discussion of an 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 for the *Global Overviews*<sup>7</sup>. 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 on international labour migration that we conducted from August 2003 until August 2005. As all three authors carry out PhD research 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 PhD 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 PhD thesis is about 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 PhD thesis focuses on the transformation of water conflicts in Batken, Kyrgyzstan. In her study area, labour migration to Russia becomes 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 this study is an integral part of our extensive PhD field research in the same regions, it benefits from a sound understanding of the regions' cultural, political and economic particularities that all researchers were able to develop. The study also benefits from an interdisciplinary perspective, as the research team consisted of an agricultural socio-economist, an environmental scientist and a human geographer.

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<sup>6</sup> 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 start 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).

<sup>7</sup> For the definition of the Global Overviews please refer to the Glossary.

The present paper is divided into seven chapters. After this introductory chapter, we briefly summarise the conceptual framework of the NCCR North-South in chapter 2. Based on this framework, we develop the main hypothesis that guided our research. Next, we introduce its “operationalisation” for the study on international labour migration. Chapter 3 focuses on the research strategy by presenting the multiple case study design. Further, we discuss the applied methodology 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

In this chapter, we outline 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 NCCR North–South conceptual framework

The starting point for the conceptual framework is the “problematization” 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) which have accelerated tremendously during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in their frequency and acuteness (p.15). The appearance of a multitude of environmental, political, economic, socio-cultural and technical problems and disparities is symptomatic of these changes, and 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 for specific spatial and social contexts. Such a *cluster of core problems* is designated as a *syndrome of global change* (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.13), thus building on former research (Petschel-Held et al. 1995; WBGU 1997) and adopting 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 rather than potentials, and its purely analytical versus solution-oriented nature (Hurni et al. 2004a, p.16). This should be met by the programme’s focus not only on analysing, but on reducing the negative effects of single or clustered problems, thus 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 through understanding 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 context.<sup>8</sup> These syndrome contexts transcend national or regional boundaries, and do not have clear-cut spatial or social limits, but “broad societal, economic, political and ecological

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<sup>8</sup> 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).

characteristics"<sup>9</sup>. It is important to note that, despite the fact that the programme acknowledges global existence of *syndromes of global change* and obviously syndrome contexts, it assumes that transition and developing countries (the "South") share a common disposition to 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 for, and 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 "South"<sup>10</sup>.

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); *sustainable development* being a normative and context-bound concept itself (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). For the 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 only meaningful for "members of a society concretely affected by the issues at stake", thus in a concrete social context (p.49). Therefore, it is a precondition for sustainable development to define these values and set goals to reach them in a social negotiation process. 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 *trans-disciplinary* research perspective to define the core problems of non-sustainable development and to find solutions for their mitigation (p.37). The next chapter defines the leading assumptions of the NCCR North-South programme.

## 2.2 Formulation of research hypothesis

As the research is based on the NCCR North-South conceptual framework, we derive the hypotheses from its core assumptions. In a first step, we will present the programme's core assumptions. In a second step, we will derive the main hypothesis and the two sub-hypotheses from these assumptions.

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

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the Joint Area of Case Studies (JACS) Alps.

The NCCR North-South conceptual framework is based on three core assumptions. The first assumption is that problems of non-sustainable development, thus 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 do 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 into the “self-regulating” functioning of the system. Based on literature and empirical observations, we hypothesise that international labour migration may be considered as 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.**

The 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 in JACS Central America and Caribbean (CCA), JACS South Asia (SAS) and in 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 taken by individuals or institutions, (2) the strategy needs to help reduce the effects of single or combinations of core problems, (3) by this, the strategy should reduce negative impacts of global change, and, (4) it should thus contribute to sustainable development. To test this main hypothesis, a division in two sub-hypotheses proves to be useful. These sub-hypotheses are shown in Figure 1.

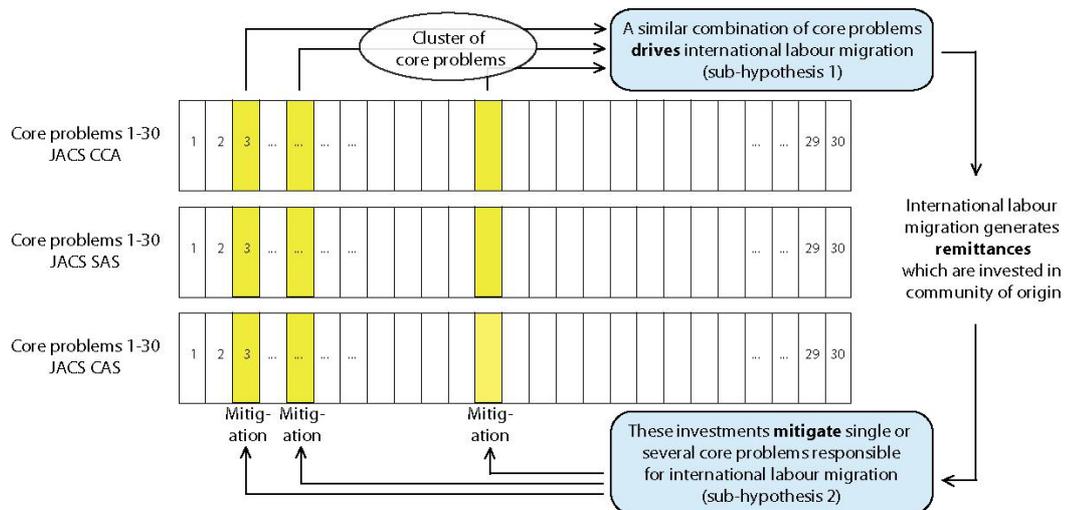
**Sub-hypothesis 1: International labour migration results from a similar combination of core problems.**

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

**Sub-hypothesis 2: International labour migration reduces the negative effects of the 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 those same core problems that led to migration.

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



Source: own illustration

**2.3 Operationalisation and definitions**

In a next step, the above-formulated hypotheses were operationalised in order to test them in the case study. The study looks exclusively at international and not at 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”<sup>11</sup>. In order to test the first sub-hypothesis, we chose the driving forces of international labour migration as a variable. 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 of international labour migration as a variable. They are defined for the purpose of this paper as “transfers of

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

*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 that the migrant is a member of. 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 in “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), as well as publicly available data. This database facilitates further analysis by enabling an interactive selection and valuation of indicators of core problems.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, approaches have been developed to analyse globally valid functional patterns with non-sustainable dynamics. They 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 should then be generalised towards a more global, macro-scale system valid for all the examined regions.<sup>13</sup> 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 for the study. First, this research strategy allows investigating 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 on those facts (Tellis 1997). Second, case study research provided for a methodologically sound conceptualisation of the comparative framework. According to Yin (1994), case studies do not represent “samples” that can be generalised to larger populations. However, they aim at expanding theoretical propositions, and are thus analytically rather than statistically generalisable (p.10). Thus the *multiple case study design*

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<sup>12</sup> 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](http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/publications/Infosystem/On-line%20Dokumente/Upload/Poster_04_IP1_Schichler.pdf), accessed: August 2005.

<sup>13</sup> 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](http://www.nccr-north-south.unibe.ch/publications/Infosystem/Online%20Dokumente/Upload/05_cassel_2.qxp_s.pdf), accessed: August 2005.

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 condition under which a particular phenomenon is likely to be found, as well as the conditions when it is not likely to be found. Yin (1994, p.46-48) consequently differentiates two kinds of replication: literal, therefore predicting similar results of the singular case studies, or theoretical, hence predicting contrasting results, but for predicted reasons. Following our main hypotheses, we chose our case studies according to literal replication logics. For the intercultural context, such a case study design provides a meaningful comparative approach, avoiding the traps of generating mere anecdotic singular cases that strive for statistical generalisation, or overly generalised results, without embedding 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. For selecting the households, proportionate stratified random sampling was used. In order to complement these interviews, (2) focused key-informant interviews were done. Key informants represented knowledgeable persons in their respective communities such as formal and informal village authorities, teachers, elders and so forth. The focused interviews aimed at providing 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 above-described procedure generated a total number 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 CPro software<sup>14</sup>. Secondly, every researcher composed a case study report that outlined the setting and preliminary results. These reports mainly drew from 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.

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<sup>14</sup> CPro (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).<sup>15</sup>

Chiquihuitlán is located at 1000 m a.s.l. 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 of Mexico. The fruits are considered a delicacy and are relatively well paid for. El Jalocote is located at 1500 m a.s.l. 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 them to cultivate 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 is 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 years of education, poor sewage systems, intra-familial violence and omnipresent corruption<sup>16</sup> prevail. The two communities consist mainly of smallholder agriculturists who own a relatively minor amount of land and typically engage in mixed

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<sup>15</sup> All statistics about Mexico are from INEGI (2000).

<sup>16</sup> The "Corruption Perception Index" (CPI) of the organisation "Transparency International" lists Mexico on the 64th position out of 145, [http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University\\_Press\\_Release\\_04.pdf](http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University_Press_Release_04.pdf), accessed: January 2005.

subsistence and market strategies of production. Their main sources of income stem from agriculture, subsidies from the PROCAMPO programme<sup>17</sup> and remittances. A few families also engage in small businesses or have temporary part-time jobs in the horticulture or construction sector.

The large majority of migrants are young men between 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, the illegal crossing of the border is becoming even more dangerous as many people have died in the attempt to walk across the desert or cross rivers. As a consequence, the periods of migration are becoming longer seeing that it is dangerous and expensive to risk frequent border crossings. Hence, many men do not come home for lengths of 3 to 5 years or longer.

An important amount of money is necessary in order to migrate. Currently, approximately 2'500 USD is paid to people (known as "coyotes") who bring 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 for successful migration is access to a network of people, in the sense of having a first "stepping stone" upon arrival in the USA. Often this involves staying with relatives or friends before some money is earned. Furthermore, a network of relatives or friends often helps the newly arrived migrants with getting a job. Migrants find work primarily in the agricultural and horticultural sector, on construction sites, in factories or in restaurants. In California for instance, which is the largest agricultural producer 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<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup>). By bus, Kizhakothe can be reached in one hour from Kozhikode. Kizhakothe is situated in the lower midlands at an altitude of ca. 300 m a.s.l. Hilly areas appear towards the Western Ghats situated eastwards. The landscape in the village is dominated by homestead gardens with coconut, arecanut and other trees as well as annual crops such as banana and tapioca.

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<sup>17</sup> 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 disbursements of payments to eligible farmers, based on the area planted, on the conditions that farmers use their land for legal agriculture or livestock production, or for an environmental programme.

<sup>18</sup> Panchayat refers to the local administrative unit (local government).

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

People in Kizhakoath mostly engage in part-time homestead farming, with the cultivation of annual and perennial crops. Part-time income derives from daily work in both the agricultural or construction sector. Land-shares are small, with the average in Kerala ranging 0.36 ha per household (Véron 1999, p.96). Many household members get secondary income from small trade and business activities, with both agricultural and non-agricultural products. In Koduvalli, the nearby town, trade and business is the main activity; 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 belong to the first group. They form a new generation of Keralites who refuse to work in sectors such as agriculture or construction, and believe in a modern lifestyle which starts with a well remunerated job in the trade or service sector. They want to have access to the same consumer commodities as their elder brothers, who have returned from or are still in migration. Furthermore, once they have been abroad, they get the “migrant” status which is highly praised in the village. The second group of migrants is formed of middle-aged men (and more seldom women) who have no other income option than remittances from migration. They often have already been to the Gulf and are reluctant to migrate again. They prefer to secure a job with sufficient income in Kerala if the possibility arises. Migrants in the Gulf States work mostly in the construction or service sector. 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 (which is the validity of the migrants’ visa). For the ones staying, low-paid and irregular jobs are frequent and lead to a high livelihood insecurity. Successful migrants, who have accessed a good job, return home every 3-4 years for a couple of months if their financial situation allows it. Migration therefore occurs more on a long-term than on a seasonal basis.

### **Sai village, Kyrgyzstan (Batken province)**

Sai village is located approximately 50 km south-east of Batken town, the province centre. It is located at an altitude of 1125 m a.s.l. in the hilly area at the foothill 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 is composed of 1979 habitants.<sup>20</sup> The village is divided into two sections: Upper Sai and Lower Sai. The school marks the boundary of the two parts. This boundary separates the village according to clan affiliation. This research has limited itself to Upper Sai, which has a total of 130 households.

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<sup>20</sup> 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 the independence of Kyrgyzstan in 1991, the arable land has been privatised and each family received a garden share and a land share. These shares are very small however, and estimated to be 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. The apples in particular constitute a cash crop. Before privatisation in the mid-90s, the land of the village belonged to a collective and later to a state farm. In addition to agricultural income, a small percentage of villagers are employed at the village administration, the local school and 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 of Sai have started to seasonally migrate to Russia during the mid-90s. The main destinations are the cities of Tjumen, Irkutsk, Krasnojarsk and Moscow in Russia. Most migrants work without official permission. Migrants are mostly male and young or middle-aged. 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 their migration is bound to their husband's, they also leave during the summer season. Working on the construction sites is physically very demanding, potentially dangerous and harmful to health. Often this 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).

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

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

	<b>Autlán municipality</b>	<b>Sai village</b>	<b>Kizhakoth Panchayat</b>
<b>Migrants profile</b>	Usually young men between 18 and 30 years. Sometimes wives join them later.	Mostly young or middle-aged men, very few women who accompany husbands.	Two main groups: jobless young men and middle-aged men.
<b>Form and duration of migration</b>	Duration: A minority engages in seasonal migration of 6–8 months per year. However, the large majority leaves for several periods of 3–5 years on average or permanent migration.	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 month if no job is obtained. If job can be secured, long-term cyclical migration of several migration periods of 2–3 years or permanent migration.
<b>% of migrant households in community</b>	54	45	50
<b>Country/Places of destination</b>	United States	Several cities in Russia (Tjumen, Irkutsk, Krasnojarsk and Moscow)	Gulf States (mostly Saudi Arabia)
<b>Average monthly income for unskilled work in destination country in USD</b>	960–3200	200–250	50–100
<b>Average monthly income for unskilled work in place of origin in USD</b>	200–600	10–30	35–70
<b>Initial capital required to migrate in USD</b>	960–3200	50–120	2800
<b>Type of work</b>	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 as stated in Messerli and Wiesmann (2004, p.418-419, see also Table 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 by the three communities. The results are presented by 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 differentiation between “small” and “big” helps to understand the acuteness of the core problem. Figure 2 summarises graphically the responses.

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

<b>Political &amp; institutional realm</b>	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	<b>Infrastructure, services &amp; land use realm</b>
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
<b>Socio-cultural &amp; economic realm</b>	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	<b>Bio-physical &amp; ecological realm</b>
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
<b>Population &amp; livelihood realm</b>	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 Kizhakothe Panchayat, only core problem number [7]<sup>21</sup> *Unequal distribution of power and resources, corruption* is perceived to be 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 problem [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 almost an every day experience for peo-

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

ple in Kyrgyzstan<sup>22</sup> and Mexico<sup>23</sup>. 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

Again, there are great differences between the three communities in their perception of socio-cultural and economic problems. While interviewees from Autlán were very concerned about them – in Autlán, almost all core problems of 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. An exception is marked by core problem [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 has grown 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 of the country almost totally collapsed, and collective and state farms were dissolved. Therefore, many people with a formerly practiced profession had no option other than to become farmers or to work in the bazaar. Villagers see this as a very problematic development. The high rating 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 consequence, 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

For this realm, core problem [15] *Poverty and livelihood insecurity* is perceived to be an important problem in all three communities. Core problem [17] *Population pressure and multidimensional migration* is perceived as being important both in Kizhakoth Panchayat and Sai village, but also in Autlán, where almost 50 percent of the interviewees consider it to be important. In Autlán, although “*multidimensional migration*” is considered a big problem, “*population pressure*” is 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. We will discuss this issue with more

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<sup>22</sup> The „Corruption Perception Index“ (CPI) of the organisation „Transparency International“ lists Kyrgyzstan on the 122<sup>nd</sup> position out of 145, see [http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University\\_Press\\_Release\\_04.pdf](http://www.icgg.org/downloads/University_Press_Release_04.pdf), accessed: January 2005.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 16 page 25.

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: a high and sometimes prohibitive cost (and the debts linked to it) as well as a relatively high amount of failed attempts. Interviewees in Autlán have 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 absence of services. Core problems of this realm are especially of concern in Autlán, and less in Kizhakothe and Sai. In Autlán, all the core problems of this realm except core problem [22] *Discrimination in information and communication flows and technologies* are perceived to exist, [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 which 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* are stated as being 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 to engage qualified teachers for school, and distant health services for elder people) in the village. In Sai and Kizhakothe, cultivable land is scarce, and the land shares are very small indeed. This seems to be a major constraint for extending agricultural activities. In Autlán, it is more the access to common land than the size of land plots that is considered as an important problem by some families.<sup>24</sup> Water is not considered to be an important core problem in Kizhakothe because a new drinking water supply scheme had just been opened previous to the researcher's visit. Before that however, it was a big concern for many households.

### Bio-physical & ecological realm

Core problems of the bio-physical & ecological realm rate very high in Autlán. In fact, all of them are stated as being 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 rated them accordingly as big problems. Furthermore, the region is prone to earthquakes and hurricanes which led to a high rating for risks of natural hazards. Another reason certainly is that people are more directly concerned by

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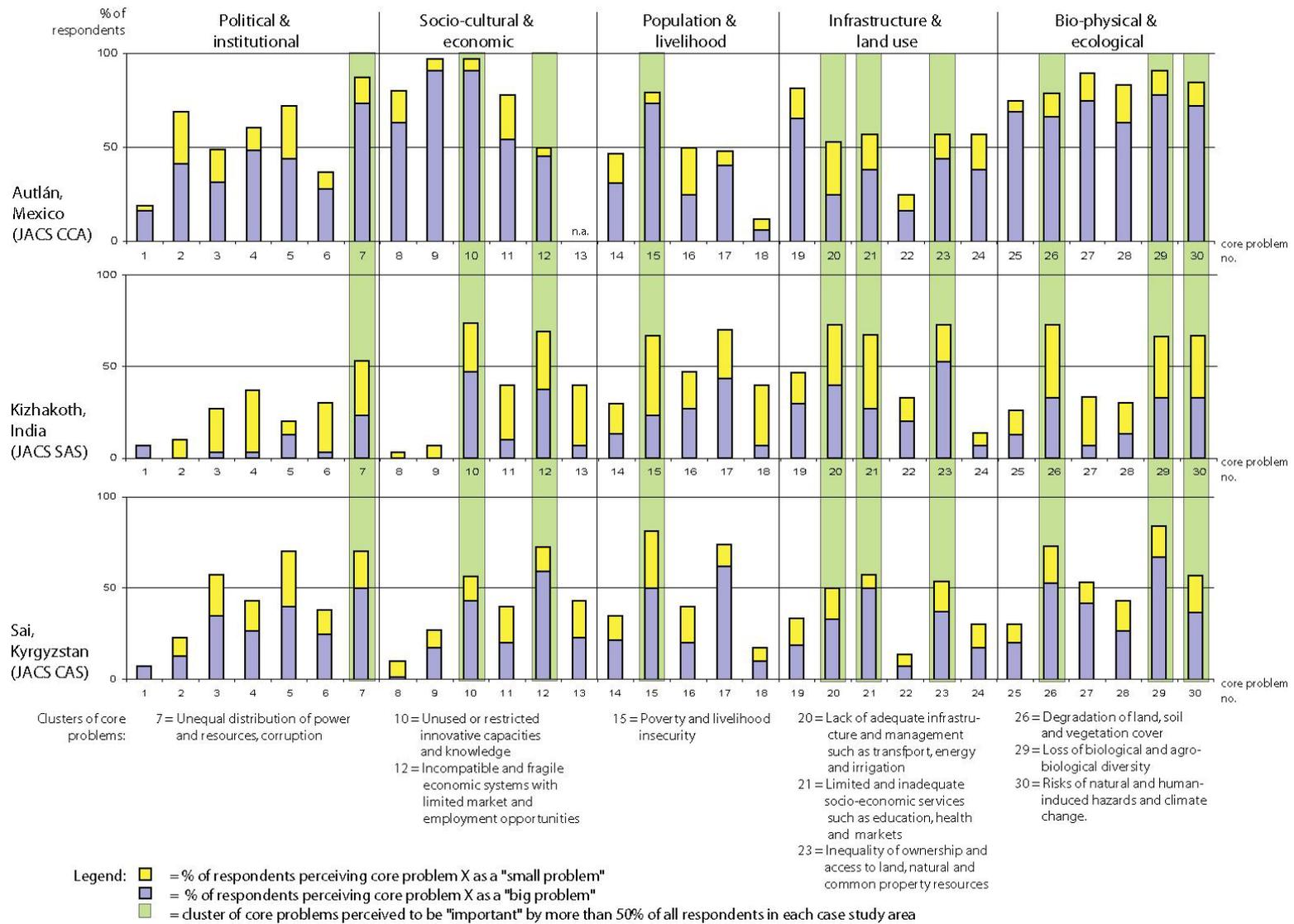
<sup>24</sup> Land tenure and access to common resources is a very complex issue in Mexico and cannot be discussed in the framework of this study. In the Ejido and the Comunidad Indígena (both are a form of agrarian community), included in the study, most households own land. A majority own between 1-3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

issues linked to their livelihood; since they are mostly farmers, important problems for them are strongly linked to the bio-physical realm. In Kizhakoth and Sai the responses are similar even though the situation appears less acute than in Autlán. In fact, the following three core problems are 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* might 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* is not perceived as getting worse, as some people say it even got better since the collapse and closure of the nearby industry after independence.

The following Figure 2 graphically summarises the relevance of the core problems of each scientific realm.

"Should I buy a cow or a TV?"

Figure 2: Relevance of the core problems in Autlán municipality, Sai village and Kizhakoth Panchayat (n=77)



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

Summarising these results, the following statements can be made:

As a first indicator, the total number of core problems stated as 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 & ecologic realms that appear to be important, for Kizhakoth and Sai both the infrastructure & land-use and biophysical & ecological realms matter. When looking for similarities, we observed that the following 10 core problems appear 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 thus cluster since they appear to be important in all 3 JACS.

### 4.3 Driving forces

Analysis of the interviews in the three communities shows the following results concerning 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 in order to earn enough money to cover basic subsistence needs. Furthermore, a very important driving force is the dream of building a house. 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 return. Nonetheless, the perspective of obtaining a higher income abroad is only partly a 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 force for migration. While the poorest families cannot get enough income from local opportunities, other families can get 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 the income regularly stays too low, migration is the last option. However, the biggest push factor for migration is the dowry needed for the wedding of female family members. Indeed, the 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 wish for a better job with a higher income is an important reason to migrate. This can enable buying some land and building 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 the one of a non-migrant. The sole fact that one has been in the Gulf States gives him/her a higher status. This is reason enough for certain to migrate.

In *Sai village*, almost half of the interviewees indicate that the lack of employment opportunities in the village or nearby, in combination with the small agricultural shares that hardly allow making a living, is the reason to migrate. The other half state that more money can be earned abroad. The villagers clearly have socio-economic arguments for migration.<sup>25</sup> Some young men declare that they want to see other parts of the world beyond the village, but this seems to be the exception, as many interviewees claim 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 (on the guest side) to offer gifts to the inviting party. For a household, the expense of holding such a feast can easily reach 1500 USD. However, the household can expect reciprocity from the invited guests, including a gift and an invitation to a future feast.

Summing this up, in all three communities, the driving forces for international labour migration are similar. The decision for migration is mainly driven by an absence of employment opportunities in the home village or nearby region, combined with a need

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

for more income for subsistence and 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.

#### 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 vary from 60 USD to 6000 USD per year, averaging 1370 USD 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 purposes: food, clothes, medical expenses, repaying loans and for the education of the children. If the migrant manages to send a more significant amount of money, it is then spent on house repairs or for constructing a new house. However, very few migrants actually succeed in constructing a house. In most cases they can send enough money for house repairs, such as the roof, but the large majority of remittances are used to pay for food. Some households invest remittances into 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 are no communal remittances in the case study areas themselves.<sup>26</sup>

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 their relatives in migration. 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 their income to pay for their food and accommodation in the country of migration. Finally, many migrants kept their savings in the country of migration 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 0-675 USD 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 purposes of the households (e.g. for food, health, education) and for paying back the loans that were taken for migration. In some cases where new migrants were given a loan by family members already in migration, the loan is paid back in the country of migration and only a small remittance is sent back home. Once the loan is reimbursed, the money which is not used for the households is saved, usually in the country of migration. The savings are

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<sup>26</sup> Research in the community of Rincón de Luisa which is located in the same region, showed that migrants from this community had 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).

then invested, in order of importance, for the purchase of land, building a house or repairing an existing one, and in some cases for agricultural purposes. An important part is spent for dowries and wedding costs of female members. Last but not least, remittances are spent for the following: investments in a local business, school fees for private English schools, financing migration of other relatives, other expenses like health costs but also for consumption goods such as a TV, fridge, furniture, etc. The use of remittances is mostly restricted to the family. There are, however, some 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 are also, however, cases where no money has been sent back at all. The yearly amount of remittances that reach the village varies from 20 to 930 USD per household, the average amount being 460 USD. However, almost half of the households indicate a higher sum, ranging from 700 to 930 USD. Migrants use these remittances for the following: food/clothes, lifecycle feasts, medical expenses, education, vehicles (mostly cars), and agricultural inputs. There is no visible shift from consumption needs in the first year to more long-term investments in later years. More than 50 percent of the interviewed households stated that they were not able to invest the remittances as they wished. Many had planned to invest in a small business. As interviewees stated, specific investments were hardly made because they would either receive less money than expected, or had to spend it for other urgent expenditures, such as food, health expenses or festivals. The use of remittances is mostly restricted to the household. Very little money, if any, is 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 the amount of remittances is often hardly sufficient for the household itself.

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

The following Table 3 summarises the importance of remittances and their investments for the three case study areas.

**Table 3: Remittances and their investment in Autlán municipality, Sai village and Kizhakoth Panchayat**

	Autlán municipality	Sai village	Kizhakoth Panchayat
<b>% of migrant households receiving remittances</b>	90	79	64
<b>Range of yearly money sent to migration household in USD</b>	60–6000	20–930	0–675 <sup>(2)</sup>
<b>Average of yearly money sent to migration household in USD</b>	1370	460 <sup>(1)</sup>	ca. 500
<b>Regularity of sending remittances to migration household</b>	3–12 times per year	1–2 times per year	1–11 times per year
<b>Purpose of remittances (in order of importance)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Food, clothes, medical expenses, education</li> <li>2. Repaying debts</li> <li>3. House repairs or construction</li> <li>4. Agricultural investments<sup>27</sup></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Food, clothes</li> <li>2. Life-cycle feasts</li> <li>3. Education, health expenses</li> <li>4. Cars</li> <li>5. Agricultural inputs<sup>28</sup></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Food, clothes, medical expenses, education</li> <li>2. Repaying debts</li> <li>3. Dowry (wedding costs)</li> <li>4. House construction and repair</li> <li>5. Investment in local business</li> <li>6. Fees for private schooling</li> <li>7. Financing migration of other relatives</li> <li>8. Furniture, electric appliances</li> </ol>

Source: own data.

Notes:

<sup>(1)</sup> This amount might be too low, as half of all the migration households receiving remittances state an amount between 700 and 930 USD.

<sup>(2)</sup> Some of the migrants bring home money very irregularly, e.g. each 3–4 years when they go home. The number 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)

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

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

## 4.5 Changes and impact of migration

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

In *Autlán municipality*, all people interviewed agree that remittances only benefit the individual family and not the community as a whole. So far, remittances were never invested in a way as to improve the situation of the communities, for example 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 3'000 USD during their stay in the United States, which allowed them to buy the material required for building a fence. They then fenced off approximately 10 hectares of communal land in the hill thereby reducing access of other families to it. Every person interviewed thinks that migration rates will increase in the future and that migration has become "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 the home communities and on the other because young people do not want to work in agriculture anymore. 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 to establish 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 given to sponsor wedding parties (or sometimes via the charity organisation of the local Mosque) of women from poorer families. In some cases richer families open and run social institutions such as an orphanage. The community also benefits from private investments 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 investments is the indirect impact of migration for the whole community. In some cases returning migrants have started a local bus company which improves and complements the local transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, all the companies started by returning migrants are employing 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 which sell mostly consumer goods. As such, the main street in the nearby town shows 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. To conclude, it can be said that the overall economy is strongly sustained by money flowing in as 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 cer-

tain split between wealthy families which have succeeded and poor families without migrant members or with failed migration. At least what remains in the latter case is a certain improvement of the social status of the migrant who has travelled abroad.

In *Sai village*, on a personal level, migrants see a slight or significant betterment in the economic situation and living conditions of their household. Migration also goes in line with a higher social status and credit worthiness. A few households experienced an improved educational situation. Interestingly, interviewees state that women's working load does not change or become better, whereas men's working load becomes rather heavier, probably due to the harsh working conditions in Russia. Overall, the people interviewed do not perceive migration as a contributing factor to the accumulation of wealth, but as one to sustain their livelihood.<sup>29</sup> On a community level, people do not see migration as playing a role in the future development of the village. Its impact can be felt on an individual level, but remittances are not able to tackle the major problems of the community. There are, however, indirect effects of migration on the community. The 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, if 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 as a whole rather than as a negative phenomenon – people cannot make a living in their native country, so they have to leave to a foreign country for work. Many experience this situation as “wrong”.

In all three communities, migration primarily benefits the migrants' household. The potential to improve the overall situation of the community is seen as limited. Effects on the wider community are more indirect than direct, and almost no increase in job opportunities is observed. While the individual households' situation might improve in case of successful migration, there is also a considerable risk of a negative outcome, as the Kizhakothe case in particular shows. However, migration is also strongly related to societal status – directly as in the Kizhakothe case, when even failed migration has a positive effect on status, or more indirectly as in the Sai case, where the social status of a person increases if he or she is able to conduct lavish lifecycle feasts, or afford proper presents and thus will be invited to other such feasts.

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



## 5 International labour migration – a mitigating strategy?

In this chapter, we summarise the results and discuss the hypotheses. In a next step, we reflect on the results of the case studies, namely on core problems, on the Janus-faced<sup>30</sup> nature of international labour migration and on its context.

### 5.1 Discussion of hypotheses

The main hypothesis formulated for this study suggests that international labour migration represents a mitigation strategy for the three communities of Autlán, Kizhakoht and Sai. To facilitate the testing of this hypothesis, we have 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 lead to international labour migration. The core problem analysis has shown 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 for international labour migration are similar. The decision to migrate is 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,

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<sup>30</sup> Janus-faced: having two contrasting aspects.

building a house or starting a small business. Migration offers the opportunity to find (temporary) employment abroad that will allow the migrant to earn more money for catering to these needs. These driving forces emerge 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 accept this hypothesis.

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

For sub-hypothesis 2, we postulated that international labour migration alleviates those 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, clothes and medical expenses. This also means that livelihood insecurity decreases, even if 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. Firstly, because the 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 remains 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 accept this hypothesis.

**Main hypothesis: International labour migration is a mitigation strategy.**

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

## 5.2 Core problems in perspective

The analysis of the core problems provides a number of interesting results. In a first step hereafter, we discuss some of the results that figure in chapter 4.2. In a second, results of our study are compared with the results of the Syndrome Pre-Synthesis Project (SPSP) of 2001 (Hurni et al. 2004b). Finally, aggregation, normativity and scale issues are discussed.

The overall high ranking of core problems in Autlán compared to Sai and Kizhakothe leads to several questions. Does this mean that 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 the high ratings 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 beginning of the process of market liberalisation and deregulation started in 1991. This would suggest an equally high rating of core problems in this realm which was not the case. Similarly, the rating of core problems in the *political & institutional realm* raises questions in Kyrgyzstan. Considering the political development that followed the field research period<sup>31</sup>, the respondents in Sai gave relatively little importance to the core problems of this realm. While some clearly stated that they were not interested in political matters, there was also much caution to talk 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 as to whether such an analysis has not 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 rating of core problems obtained in the different JACS<sup>32</sup> for each syndrome context and finally established a global rating 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 as acute in the SPSP, is also rated as important by all three JACS of 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 rating.

Interestingly, if comparing SPSP’s core problem ratings 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 approach taken in

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

<sup>32</sup> As not all results from the different JACS were comparable, the overall rating 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).

the present project was different insofar as that the core problems were evaluated by "the people", representatives of the civil society with "non-scientific knowledge" while the rating 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 with 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 as 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 nor constitute a problem by the family cultivating the land. At the national, regional and global level however, the aggregation of deforested plots might lead to alarming rates of deforestation. The importance of scale might also be illustrated with the examples of soil erosion, biological diversity and other problems. In addition, large socio-economic, political and ecological differences may exist between countries of 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 while being 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 rating 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 Janus-faced character of migration

As the next two paragraphs show, all three case studies have yielded distinctly that migration is an important core problem in the communities. Simultaneously, the study asserted, to some extent, that migration can be considered as a mitigation strategy for these communities based on the impact of remittances.

As Figure 2 shows, core problem [17] *Population pressure and multi-dimensional migration* is perceived as important by all three communities. Qualitative enquiries have generated more details to understand this assessment (see chapter 4.2). The empirical results have shown that the perception of migration as a problem may be held by cer-

tain groups such as women, as demonstrated in the *Autlán* and *Kizhakoṭh* case studies. For women, migration is a problem in the sense that their husbands often leave them alone for years. Even though migration allows for providing the family with a regular income, the women have to assume all household decisions and the education of the children, which means a heavy responsibility. Particular constraints are experienced by female households in Muslim communities of *Kizhakoṭh*, such as the prohibition to leave home after nightfall. As demonstrated in the *Kizhakoṭh* case study, results have also shown that 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 expressed as a problem since people feel that it does not result from a free choice, but rather 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 perceive it as “wrong” that people cannot make a living in their native place, and therefore have to leave to a foreign country for work.

However, migration is often the only way for many men to provide the family with a regular income. Therefore, most migrant families experience an improvement of the economic situation and the living conditions of their household. The results of the study with regard to the spending of remittances reflect the literature.<sup>33</sup> At a first glance, remittances are spent more for “consumptive” than for “productive” activities. Moreover, remittances are almost exclusively used for the migrant household, and few if any remittances are spent for communal purposes. This might suggest an “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 investment type effects in the longer term, which are 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). The second point might give even more credit to assert sub-hypothesis 2. Following this line of argument, remittances may have a long-term and wider positive impact in the three communities.

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<sup>33</sup> 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).

The question whether international labour migration constitutes a core problem of sustainable development or rather a mitigation strategy cannot conclusively be answered by this study. Results more readily confirm that migration can simultaneously be a problem and a solution for sending as well as for receiving countries.

## 5.4 Migration in its context

The three case studies have been conducted in three JACS of the NCCR North-South within the *highland-lowland context*. The results of the study now bring us back to consider the initial choices and selections that have been made based on the programme's conceptual framework (see chapter 2). The NCCR North-South expects similar patterns to emerge in different JACS within one context. As we outlined in chapter 4, we chose our three cases accordingly and 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 is there a cluster of core problems that emerge, but driving forces and spending of remittances also show similar tendencies. At first glance, the study supports the basic NCCR North-South assumptions, including the hypothesis that patterns emerge per context (in this case in the highland-lowland context) in three different JACS, as well as the division of the world into "North" and "South" (see chapter 2). In the following section we will take a closer look at these results.

As it has been first mentioned in chapter 2, the syndrome contexts are "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 (ex. 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, determined by foremost biophysical and ecological parameters.<sup>34</sup> While producing similar patterns, the highland-lowland context proved to be quite an evasive boundary for the case studies.<sup>35</sup> 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.

According to the NCCR North-South assumptions, the JACS CCA, SAS and CAS all belong to the "South", they therefore belong to the group of developing and transition countries that are homogenous with regard to their disposition for syndromes and their coping capacity. Migration is not only a local phenomenon, but ranks on a national

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

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

scale for Mexico<sup>36</sup>, India<sup>37</sup> and Kyrgyzstan<sup>38</sup>. However, at a closer look, all three are not only sending, but also destination countries. Mexico receives labour migrants from South and Central America (Mahler 2000). As the study by Susan Thieme has shown, India receives labour migrants from Far-East 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 that is employing persons from the adjacent Sogh enclave (Uzbekistan). Moreover, Sai's destination country, Russia, has an increasing trend for labour out-migration (Krassinets and Tiuriukanova 2000; Oli-mova 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 sending and to a lesser extent receiving countries, and that the scale of the international labour migration is smaller in Russia and Eastern Europe than in the other case study countries, these observations still raise the question as to where the “North” ends and the “South” begins.

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<sup>36</sup> In 1980, remittances to Mexico were estimated at USD 698 million. They rose to 9 times this amount in 1999, reaching approximately 6'649 million USD (Goldring 2004).

<sup>37</sup> The number of non-resident Keralites, defined as the sum of emigrants and return 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).

<sup>38</sup> 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 have 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” (Ellerman 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, the impasse might also suggest that diverging notions of development guide the various standpoints. Thus, it might be worth reflecting not only on migration as a phenomenon, but also on the different understandings of development that shape the migration-development nexus. In a next step, we present a few reflections on the understandings of “development” and how they are used in the NCCR North-South conceptual framework.

As it has been outlined in chapter 2, the NCCR North-South draws on an “equilibrium” understanding of the world known as the “Earth system” similar to a positivist perspective of the ecosystem that Forsyth (2003) mainly ascribes to natural sciences. It is based on the assumption that there is a “natural balance” in the world. This equilibrium is disrupted by human agency or human-induced environmental changes – notably Global Change - that negatively affect humankind and nature, and hinder (sustainable) development. Hence, these disruptions manifest themselves as the core problems of sustainable development. These can and must be mitigated in order to re-establish the equilibrium and allow for development. For the NCCR North-South framework, migration also represents such a disruption of the equilibrium. The ambiguous nature of migration proves to be a dilemma to this functionalist understanding as there are either problems or solutions. It subsequently might be questioned if 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 gives 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 the integration of the multiple goals of sustainability as an ethical rather than a technical consensus<sup>39</sup>, which offers tremendous potential. As the

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

discussion in chapter 5 has shown, the challenge lies in its operationalisation. It starts off with the assumption that it is enough to bring all the relevant actors together, and that the consensus achieved will represent the common values of all. The results of the study demonstrate that in practice the social negotiation process shows certain "distortions" from its ideal course, beside the fact that it is hardly ever possible to reunite all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, scholars have questioned whether participation provides the possibility for all groups to voice their needs (see for example Ferguson 1990; Kapoor 2004). As Hobart (1993) outlines for the case of development, the 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 proclaimed for the definition of core problems might so far not have given enough attention to these power relations.

While the literature documents many socially undesired aspects of migration, McDowell and de Haan (1997) caution us 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, instead of 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 critically reflecting 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 in "the North" (developed countries) and "the South," (transition and developing countries). According to the NCCR North-South, the transition and developing countries do not only share a common disposition for core problems, but have limited economic and institutional capacity to mitigate these syndromes (chapter 2). Therefore, they are defined 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 such a "South," 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 underestimating the potential of self-regulative processes such as international labour migration.

## 7 Conclusions

In this paper, we have explored the NCCR North-South conceptual framework for the case of labour migration in three rural, agricultural communities. The study suggests that it is rather difficult to distinguish between the “problematic” and the “mitigational” aspect of migration. At first sight, the contradictory results seem to represent an impasse that is impossible to answer conclusively. It suggests that it is not the phenomenon itself, but the assumptions about development that guide this observation that might be inadequate. In chapter 6, we investigated some of these assumptions. As a consequence, we suggest that the addition of “core potentials” (or “core opportunities”), besides the core problems of sustainable development, as has been done in JACS South Asia (Müller-Böker 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 dichotomy of the “North” and the “South” provides a fertile entry point for researching processes of development and globalisation. Therefore, we propose to rethink the conceptual division of the world in “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 to “open up” the “North” for research, and allow 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 argue 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 that concern the NCCR North-South over 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 “unsettled”.



# Glossary

- Cluster** In this paper, a cluster of core problems are those core problems that were 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 looks at in terms of sustainable development. Such problems – poverty for instance – occur in all three syndrome contexts. Their combination with other core problems, like governance failures and loss of biological diversity is specific in each context (adapted from NCCR North-South 2002, p.5).
- Driving forces** In this 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 data-base 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 of which 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 field research of the NCCR North-South 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 the 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 cooperation 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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