CHAPTER 5

The Right to Stay Home: Equity and the Struggle of Migrant Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract

In this paper my goal is to reflect about equity theory and practice, based on my practical work with indigenous Mexican migrant grassroots organizations which are attempting to achieve the goal of making migration a last alternative for survival and have launched a programme called “The Right to Stay Home”. Indigenous Mexican migrants claim that rather than having migration as the only option for making a living, they want to have the opportunity to make ends meet and realize their dreams in their home communities. They want migration to become the last-resort choice for survival, rather than the first and sometimes the only choice for survival, since they are losing an entire new generation of youth, who in order to escape poverty have to migrate hundreds of miles away to a foreign land where they are losing their traditional ways, their language and their culture.

Introduction

In my inaugural address as Prince Claus Chair in April 2004, I reflected about the crucial link between cultural identity and development as an autonomous process. I attempted to explore certain implications of that link, while focusing on the dialectics of home and migration. In this paper my goal is to reflect about equity theory and practice, based on my practical work with indigenous migrant grassroots organizations which are attempting to achieve the goal of making migration a last alternative for survival and have launched a programme called “The Right to Stay Home”. In the autumn of 2011 in the City of Oaxaca, Mexico, during a bi-national gathering of an indigenous migrant grassroots organization called Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB), indigenous migrants from different parts of Mexico issued a statement calling for a change in the paradigm

1 Third holder of the Prince Claus Chair, 2004–2005.
of how we think about international long-term migration from indigenous communities. They declared that despite the fact that migration was allowing families who stayed behind in their home town access to much-needed money for their daily needs in the form of remittances, the price that these families and communities were paying was too high for the return they were getting. In exchange for a few hundred dollars a month, they were losing an entire new generation of youth, who, in order to escape poverty and despair, had to migrate hundreds of miles away to a foreign land where they were losing their traditional ways, their language and their culture. They claimed that rather than having migration as the only option for make a living, they wanted to have the opportunity to make ends meet and realize their dreams in their home communities. They wanted migration to become the last-resort choice for survival, rather than the first and sometimes the only alternative for survival.

It is true that indigenous peoples in the Americas face tremendous challenges for their own survival. However, in spite of centuries of poverty, discrimination and genocide, indigenous communities are no longer the passive victims of exploitative conditions and have now become actors of social change. No longer able or willing to wait for the nation-states to deliver the long-awaited promise of universal human rights, equality before the law, and