Creating Opportunities for Temporary Foreign Workers and their Communities: Innovation in Capacity Building and Skills Transfer in Latin America

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Summary: This proposal will help Latin American workers acquire skills and training in order to reinvest in their home communities, by starting a small business, investing in a social enterprise or applying new skills in local labour markets, upon return from a temporary work contract in Canada.

Context

In 2008, Canadian employers hired 193,000 foreign workers of different skill levels under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) and other temporary work categories. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Program, internationally considered a best practice in labour mobility programs, and the TFWP, offer needed income and work experience to Latin American workers and provides their family members with remittances to bolster family income. While the benefits of legal labour programs for migrant-sending countries are well documented, little is being done in Latin America to provide skills upgrading to foreign workers or to facilitate the reintegration of migrant workers once they return home. In fact, development programs often overlook the enormous potential for migrant workers—as opposed to remittances— to create and advance positive socioeconomic outcomes in their home countries.

Project Objectives

The objectives of the project are to contribute to poverty eradication, socio-economic growth and skills transfer in Latin America through educational and capacity building activities for migrant workers. The project also seeks to invest in human capital, to increase transnational connectivity and to increase awareness of the valuable contributions that temporary foreign workers make in Canada.

The Proposal

The project is based on a participatory, needs-based approach, with marginalized populations and gender featuring as cross-cutting themes. The project is comprised of four main components:

1. Pre-departure orientation workshops will be designed and implemented for migrant workers in Latin American countries, with the assistance of International Organization for Migration (IOM) missions and non-profit groups. These workshops will inform Latino workers of learning opportunities available to them in Canada as well as upon return to home communities, and will develop an electronic profile highlighting their training plans and objectives during the project.
II. **Educational courses, training or work-related skills upgrading** will be undertaken in Canada by selected migrant workers. Learning opportunities, such as courses on financial literacy and savings or English as a Second Language, will be facilitated in-person by qualified non-profit partners and teachers or will be available to migrant workers online.

III. **Additional capacity building and skills transfer activities**, such as referral to relevant job opportunities, domestic training programs or access to credit for microcredit/SME initiatives will be facilitated by IOM and project partners in home communities.

IV. Where workers request assistance with SME business start-up, short **technical visits of Canadian volunteers** to the sending communities will be arranged in order to lend appropriate and relevant expertise.

Project results will be monitored and disseminated using innovative media tools and resources, including an Online E-platform that can be accessed by migrant workers, stakeholders and the wider public. Workshops for marginalized populations on how to utilize these media tools form an integral part of the project. Additionally, FOCAL is examining the possibility of spearheading a research initiative to evaluate the development outcomes and policy implications of project activities.

**Anticipated Results**

- Increased skill levels among migrant workers
- Higher likelihood of finding employment among migrant workers upon return to Latin America
- Higher number of development initiatives such as micro-credit enterprises in Latin American migrant-sending communities

**Project Leads**

**The International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is the principal intergovernmental organization in the field of migration. It works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration and to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems. IOM has offices and operations in over 125 countries worldwide and over 1,500 projects related to migration management.

**The Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL)** is an independent, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to strengthening Canadian relations with Latin America and the Caribbean through policy dialogue, research and building partnerships. We coordinate and administer diverse projects, including one on labour mobility and development, as well as work in partnership with organizations and government bodies throughout the region.

**Associate Project Lead**

**Connexion Internationale (CI)** is a consulting group that provides innovative solutions, counter-intuitive thinking and groundbreaking solutions services for various sectors of the economy.
Beneficiaries

Migrant workers and their families from Latin American countries are the primary beneficiaries. Employers of migrant workers, government agencies and communities of origin and destination will also benefit through better informed and trained workers, better migration planning and enhanced development outcomes in Latin America.

Funding

A preliminary funding proposal was submitted to the Inter-American Development Bank’s Multilateral Investment Fund in October 2008; in tandem, project partners are seeking other funding sources. If you are interested in financing a component of this project, please write to Barbara MacLaren, Project Manager at FOCAL 613-562-0005 ext. 230 (bmaclarens@focal.ca).