# A conversation with Dr. Michael Clemens, November 29, 2017

## Participants

- Dr. Michael Clemens – Co-Director of Migration, Displacement, and Humanitarian Policy, Center for Global Development (CGD)
- Alexander Berger – Program Officer, US Policy, Open Philanthropy Project

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

## Summary

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Dr. Clemens of CGD as part of an update on our 2017 grant to support CGD's migration program (https://www.openphilanthropy.org/focus/us-policy/immigration-policy/center-global-development-migration-program). Conversation topics included Dr. Clemens' and CGD's recent activities on migration issues, Dr. Clemens' progress on his book, and hiring.

## Dr. Clemens' work

### Contact with US government agencies

Dr. Clemens has worked with staff of USAID and the Department of Homeland Security to get data for a study of Central American child migrants. He's given six presentations of those results to various government agencies, which have been generally well received.

### US-Mexico labor agreement

Dr. Clemens attended a conference in Mexico, run by two top Mexican universities, where he argued that Mexico ought to lead on proposing a bilateral immigration agreement with the US, and ought to emphasize that many of the US's interests (e.g. labor protections, regulation of flows of Central American migrants through Mexico to the US southern border) will require bilateral cooperation. This has been well received by a credible, well-respected group of Mexican politicians and academics.

Demographic transitions in Central America are driving labor flows to the US, similar to what happened in Mexico in the 1980s. Two years ago marked the first time that more non-Mexicans than Mexicans were apprehended at the US-Mexico border. Labor flows from Guatemala (for instance) are unlikely to subside for at least 10 years. A 2004 paper by Gordon Hanson correctly predicted that the net labor flow from Mexico would drop to zero. (The Pew Research Center estimates that net flow of zero consists of a gross movement of about 175,000 people entering and 175,000 leaving).

The only recent bilateral cooperation between the US and Mexico on immigration is a memorandum of understanding between the Mexican Secretariat of Labor and California's state government to share information about labor recruiters. An

attempted US-Mexico deal during the George W. Bush administration failed due to a lack of support in Congress (at the time, border control was weaker, with net flows from Mexico of around 300,000 people per year).

It might be beneficial for a US-Mexico agreement to include a system for regulating migration on the sending country's side similar to the agreement the US has with Jamaica.

There isn't a US congressperson championing this issue.

**Global Skill Partnerships**

The work Dr. Clemens would be most excited about focusing on next is piloting "Global Skill Partnerships," which are programs aimed at training immigrants in skills that will be socially valuable in a host country before they migrate. Dr. Clemens thinks this is the best proposal on the table to positively shape the outcome of migration flows that seem very likely to eventually happen. Given that it won't be feasible to deter this migration, it's important to train as many people as possible before they migrate.

On his trip to address the UN General Assembly in Geneva, Dr. Clemens talked with the European Commission (EC)'s International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) departments to promote Global Skill Partnerships, and he is working on building a coalition of supportive people at DG DEVCO, DG HOME, and the World Bank.

Germany has similar programs in several countries (including Vietnam, the Philippines, China, Sri Lanka, and Serbia) to train nurses before they migrate to Germany. Those programs are just aimed at meeting Germany's need for nurses and aren't tied to the migrant crisis. Dr. Clemens hopes to convince potential host countries of the benefits of combining the goals of a) bringing in needed skills and b) addressing the migrant crisis. Some countries have had reservations about whether the small scale that such a program would start at is worth it.

Dr. Clemens thinks a pilot program that allows experimentation will be needed to figure out what works best (it's unlikely this program can be designed well just on paper). If a destination country partner were identified, Dr. Clemens could work with the World Bank to coordinate things on the origin countries side. He hopes to get language about Global Skill Partnerships into the UN Global Compact on Migration in some form.

Dr. Clemens thinks there is a decent chance that he will get some buy-in to test Global Skill Partnerships, but it may not work out.

**Progress on his book**

Dr. Clemens plans to take November and December to only work on his book; his other research projects are largely on hold while he focuses on this. He expects progress on the book to be highly nonlinear because the first half covers the

material he is least familiar with; he expects writing the second half, which focuses on immigration, to go much faster.

Dr. Clemens is writing the book with an audience of students and young people in mind, and hopes that it will be assigned in classes.

## Other CGD activities

### Cindy Huang's migration policy work

Cindy Huang (CGD's Co-Director of Migration, Displacement, and Humanitarian Policy) is pursuing funding for an outreach and education program on immigration for journalists, students, and political staffers. CGD is able to approach a more diverse pool of potential funders because the program would include both domestic and international components.

Dr. Huang has also proposed putting together a collection of historical successes in regulating migration to the mutual benefit of migrants and host countries, provisionally called *Millions Move*. This might take the form of a website and a book. There are lots of examples of guest worker programs that work well, don't lead to permanent migration, and provide large benefits (e.g., in South Korea, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia's new Pacific Labour Scheme).

### Kathleen Newland paper

Kathleen Newland's paper on US migration and development policy has been released. While the working group that CGD convened around that has disbanded because many of the leaders are no longer in government, Dr. Clemens expects the paper to be useful for documenting the group's experience and providing context for future discussions.

## Hiring

CGD recently hired:

- Jimmy Graham as a research assistant for the Forced Displacement and Humanitarian Reform team. He primarily works under Dr. Huang.
- Nicole Cassou as Migration and Forced Displacement Program Coordinator.

CGD is looking to hire another Research Fellow and has received around 280 applications for the role. Dr. Clemens is going to the American Economic Association conference in January to interview candidates.

CGD may need to hire another policy outreach person; this will depend in part on whether its proposed outreach and education program on immigration (described above) gets funding.