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## Diaspora Networks for Creating National Infrastructure: Rural Morocco, 1985–2005

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As migrant remittances worldwide have risen to stratospheric levels, the aggregate role of countless small transfers of money in national economic growth has become impossible to ignore. Development scholars have produced a spate of increasingly sophisticated models of how remittances affect economic performance, as well as a growing body of qualitative analyses of the ways that transfers of money, but also of knowledge, social networks, political influence, and even cultural values, affect economies of migrant-sending countries. Likewise, policymakers have rushed to apply the prescriptions those efforts have yielded to design policy that directs migrant resources to uses whereby they can have the greatest positive effect on economic growth. Both the policy interventions and the models on which they are based, however, share a fundamental assumption about migrant resources, monetary and nonmonetary, that seriously undermines their usefulness: policymakers view migrant resources as fungible as capital that is unchanged by its transfer across local and national contexts. Moreover, they cast remittances as the vector of change, placing them at the center of an impact model in which remittances—like proverbial meteors, large and small—cause change as they collide into receptive locales.

In this chapter I present an alternative view of migrant resources as constituted through the actions of migrants. I argue that remittances are not merely transferred; they are *made*. Their import for local and national development cannot be read off the remittances themselves, with forecasts dependent on the assumption that outcomes are predictable given certain preexisting conditions. Rather, I maintain that the significance of remittances for development is shaped by the ways in which migrants and their communities engage with them; it is the social processes through which

actors infuse remittances with meaning and choose how they will use them that are the drivers of economic change. Furthermore, I argue that because remittances are constituted, policy interventions are most effective in forging a link between emigration and development when they actively connect with the social processes through which local actors determine the value of migration-generated resources. Instead of merely directing remittances to a limited predetermined set of uses that the state or donor institutions deem economically beneficial, this approach allows policymakers to participate in the envisioning of new previously unimagined uses for remittances and, in doing so, to magnify the value of remittances themselves by using state resources to extend the reach of the social processes through which they are constituted.

The experience of Moroccan emigrants from the mountainous Souss region in the rural south of the country illustrates that remittances are a constituted resource and demonstrates the potential that this attribute represents for policy. In the 1980s and 1990s, Soussi emigrants acted as catalysts for the transformation of rural infrastructure provision in their homeland. In partnership with their communities of origin, they engaged migrant resources in order to generate innovative solutions for infrastructure provision. Drawing on the social networks, wages, and labor-organizing experience Soussi emigrants had acquired in French industrial cities, they came up with new technical and social approaches to supply their isolated and long-neglected hamlets with electricity, water, and roads.

The Soussis' modest initiatives would ultimately spark the redesign of major national programs for the provision of basic infrastructure in rural Morocco, and would lead to the restructuring of the government agencies charged with implementing those programs. Soussi migrants deliberately pulled state actors into their conversations about how to transform both monetary and nonmonetary remittances into new infrastructure schemes. The Moroccan central government's involvement in the social processes through which migrants and their communities determined what their remittances would mean for local development caused it to revise its own narrow and conventional views about how it could deploy its resources to provide infrastructure to about 65 percent of the nation's 35 million residents, dispersed in the mountainous terrain of Morocco's arid countryside.

The results of the engagement between Soussis and the Moroccan government have been nothing short of dramatic: within one short decade the Moroccan government quadrupled its electricity coverage from about 20 percent of rural residents in the late 1980s to almost 80 percent by 2004; it adopted a compendium of ecologically sustainable approaches to irrigation and water distribution, doubling by 2005 rural access to water for drinking and agriculture; and it revamped its national rural roads program, redrawing road placement in its construction plans in keeping with its new priorities,

and replacing kilometers paved with social impact as its primary measure of success (ONE 1999, 2004; Daoud 2005; World Bank 2004a; Levy 2004; van de Walle 2004).

This chapter addresses Moroccan emigrants' role in the reform and expansion in one area of infrastructure provision—rural electricity—to flesh out the notion of remittances, both monetary and nonmonetary, as constituted. In the first section, I provide a conceptual treatment of remittances and of the processes through which their value is socially created, borrowing from management and organizational behavior analyses of the movement of resources within extended firms. The second section focuses on how the engagement between emigrants and villagers constituted three kinds of resources generated by migration—knowledge, funds, and labor organizing experience—to build an innovative rural electricity solution. In the third section I describe how the state's participation in migrant-initiated processes in constituting remittances changed the government's strategy for electricity provision; the state appropriated the insights that it drew from its engagement with migrants around rural electricity delivery to modify its knowledge base about the design of rural electricity networks, to retool the funding schemes to bankroll rural electricity provision, and to amend its view of the social organization needed to support the new power distribution systems. The case presented here is based on six months of fieldwork in Souss, Rabat, and Paris stretched over several years, between 2001 and 2005, and on substantial documentary research in archives of both the government and nongovernmental institutions.<sup>1</sup> In the final section I discuss the implications that a view of remittances as constituted has for designing policy to link emigration to local economic development.

### Constituting Remittances

The scholarship on migration and development is organized around a defining assumption: migrant resources—monetary (see Orozco 2001), social (see Levitt 1998), political (see Goldring 2002; Popkin 2003), knowledge based (see Saxenian 1999, 2005; Schiff 2005), or network based (see Portes 1999)—are remitted back to communities of origin, and those remittances then have an impact on local economies that can be predicted given existing local conditions. The literature documents well how migration channels resources to migrant-sending countries and communities. It further demonstrates how local institutional structures and practices direct the impact of those resources, much like water canals direct the flow of water for irrigation (see Durand, Parrado, and Massey 1996; Chaudhry 1989). It has also shown how those resources can and do change local social and economic relationships and processes (see Edwards and Ureta 2003).

The most recent literature on this topic is more nuanced in its analyses, and observes that migrant resources set in motion local transformations that are subtle, sometimes indirect, but profound, affecting communities over time—like a stream of water that gradually erodes and ultimately redefines the local landscape. These studies, qualitative and ethnographic for the most part, show how migrant resources have revamped the architecture of institutions as basic as family and property rights (Kanaiaupuni and Donato 1999; Nuijten 1998), reshaped modes of production (Guarnizo 2003; de la Garza and Lowell 2002), and shaken up deeply held worldviews (Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001). Furthermore, they call into question the notion that migrant resources flow only in one direction, back to communities of origin. Studies on transnationalism show that migration-generated resources—money, ideas, networks—move back and forth between different nodes or expressions of a community, such that migration makes these communities transnational (see Levitt 2001b). Moreover, the practices of moving resources from one area implicated in the local migration processes to another, in themselves, create transnational social fields that “exist within but [are] constituted apart from the larger states and societies in which they are constituted” (Smith 1995, quoted in Pries 2001, 34).

Both the canonic studies and the latter revisionist batch share two defining assumptions: first, migrant resources are always generated *elsewhere*, and are merely *transferred* back (Hart 2002). In this view, migrant resources are not altered by their trajectory; they arrive intact to affect a passive locale, whether the locale in question is a community or a nation. Building on this understanding of migrant resources as traveling unadulterated across space and into a locale, the second assumption is that the remittances themselves are the cause of local change. While local institutional structures and practices may set the stage for the kind of impact remittances have, migration resources are the catalyst for economic development, or in some cases, for economic dependency and distortion (Hart 2002; Guarnizo 2003). So even while these perspectives acknowledge that remittances may often have subtle and complex effects, they always identify remittances as the force that carves out new curves in a social or economic landscape that is otherwise static and receptive. Consequently, the overwhelming concern in the field has been to hone analytic models so that they might better assess, explain, and predict the effect that migrant resources have on communities or countries of origin (see Taylor 1992; Acosta 2006; Page and Adams 2004).

These twin assumptions of remittances as unchanged by their transfer and as the instigator of economic change have defined migration and development policy. They have given rise to the analogy of migrant resources—especially monetary remittances—as flows, and, like any flow, the perception is that the resources can be rerouted without altering their makeup in

any way or distorting the effect that the redirected remittances are predicted to have for economic growth. Thus, the overwhelming concern of governments and multilateral institutions in designing policy in this area has been to develop tools to channel migrant resources to uses where they are forecast to have the most positive impact. On the whole, policy interventions are designed to achieve two goals: first, to increase the volume of remittance flows by lowering transaction costs and removing any friction that obstructs their movement; and, second, to divert some portion of remittance flows away from household consumption, often viewed as “unproductive,” to investment or savings in the country of origin, uses viewed as generators of economic growth. In none of these policy initiatives is the action of the state viewed as changing the good transferred: money is money is money, supremely fungible and its material essence impervious to change. The same is true of knowledge, social networks, and even political influence: policy efforts to capitalize on them are not deemed to have any effect on the basic makeup of those resources.

Other analyses of what happens to resources when they are moved from one context to another take a very different view and contend that their transfer alters their intrinsic character. This notion is well developed in organizational behavior analyses of the transfer of resources through the various branches of large multilocal firms, and the findings in those studies provide helpful guideposts for an examination of the way migrants and their communities ascribe value to remittances, and how the social process involved can lead to economic development. These organizational analyses demonstrate that the value of a resource grows out of the way in which it is employed.

Research on knowledge transfer has been particularly compelling in its illustration of the ways that knowledge is situated in the everyday practices of the organizational settings in which it is used; it is embedded in local languages, practices, routines, and social relationships (Kogut and Zander 1992). Observations of groups of workers that perform specialized tasks, sometimes called occupational communities, stress, for example, that the knowledge required to complete their work is inlaid in the groups’ shared jargon, in conventions for the appropriate way of completing certain jobs, and in the norms governing social exchanges of members as they work together on a task (Dougherty 1992). Many scholars have taken that observation further and have argued that knowledge is more than just embedded group languages, procedures, relationships, and routines; it is part and parcel of them. They posit that knowledge is enacted through practice and has no meaning or value separate from the actions or contexts in which it is used. Knowledge, they note, is in fact indistinguishable from social exchanges (Lave and Wenger 1991; Orlikowski 2002). Even knowledge as seemingly codifiable and abstract as mathematical formulas, for example, is only intel-

ligible and useful when related to social contexts; the numerical concepts that are the building blocks of algorithms depend on socially constructed understandings for measuring quantity, as well as culturally specific, although widespread, conventions for counting, like the use of the concept of zero. As Lave and Wenger observe in their monograph on learning and knowledge transfer, "Any 'power of abstraction' is thoroughly situated, in the lives of the persons and in the culture that makes it possible" (1991, 34).

As a result, epistemologists increasingly maintain that it is impossible to separate out knowledge as a good that can be picked up and moved from one organizational location to another (von Hippel 1994; Cook and Brown 1999; Orlikowski 2002). They suggest knowledge is more than just "sticky," more than just difficult to extract from specific settings because of the way it was interwoven in local practices. They argue that knowledge actually undergoes a transformation when it is transferred from one situated context to another, one that is so fundamental that it ultimately changes basic aspects of the knowledge being transmitted (Bechky 2003; Lave and Wenger 1991). Observers of this process are referring to more than the slippage of translation, where certain concepts are truncated or lost because the palette of another (literal or practice) language cannot capture them; they are referring to more than the clumsiness of making tacit knowledge explicit, a process that hopelessly blunts subtle understandings in order to encode them (Polanyi 1967). What they are pointing out is that the way that people engage with knowledge in order to communicate it in a situated context different from their own alters what that knowledge actually is (Bechky 2003; Carlile 2004; Kellogg, Orlikowski, and Yates 2006).

Many of the resources that migration makes available to migration communities may seem more materially tangible, more fixed—and less elusive—than knowledge. However, as sociologists of economic change have observed, even though the money, social networks, and political leverage generated through migration appear more concrete, they share the same situated and contingent qualities of knowledge (Zelizer 1997; Hart 2002). Just like knowledge, what those resources are, intrinsically, depends on the ways they are enacted and woven into practice (Giddens 1984).

Zelizer (1997) forcefully illustrates this contingent and situated quality of seemingly concrete resources in her study on the relationship between the social and economic values of money. She argues that even though money's usefulness in society and in production is wholly derived from the appearance of having a constant, objective worth, it nevertheless acquires value only through the social interactions in which it is used or invoked symbolically. So profoundly inscribed is money by the social and cultural ways in which it is used, she posits, that one cannot accurately refer to money as being a single currency. Rather, she concludes, to capture money's social and economic functions, it makes more sense to talk about

money as a social medium with multiple currencies, some of which are "as unexchangeable as the most personal and unique object" (1997, 17). In other words, the way money is used, both materially and symbolically, shapes what money is, and variations in the practices of using money transform an apparently undifferentiated resource into distinct, nonfungible objects that are not just valued differently but that invoke different registers of value altogether. Thus, shifting money from one use to another often requires a dramatic change in practice and the meanings with which it is infused (Somers and Block 2005).

What is true of resources like money and knowledge in their particular social, economic, and geographic contexts is even more so in migration communities where the repeated exchange of resources is what weaves communities together across space. Just as the organizational behavior studies suggest, the resources themselves are defined through practice—the way migrants and their communities use them define what they are. Financial remittances sent home to support a child, for instance, express and maintain familial relationships and identities in ways that are different from monies sent to support a quranic school in the village mosque where the same child is learning to read. The remittances in this example, earmarked for different functions, will have different and symbolic value, and people in the community will engage with those resources in ways that reflect that difference in worth.

Moreover, just like the movement of knowledge or funds within a firm, the transfer of resources across context depends on the practices that translate those resources from one place to another: currencies must be exchanged; the local knowledge that is tacit and implicit in one setting—a French urban neighborhood, for example—must be made explicit in another, in a Moroccan village, for example; and the relationships that make up transnational social networks must be sustained using practices that are culturally intelligible and acceptable in specific contexts. The practices that both migrants and their communities use to move resources, especially practices to reconcile different ways of understanding and using money, knowledge, and relationships, fundamentally transform those resources, redefining what they are, their perceived value, and the potential uses ascribed to them.

As the case of infrastructure innovation in the Moroccan countryside will show, practices through which migrants and their communities move and use remittances can enhance those resources significantly; they can infuse them with meanings that turn them into catalysts for economic development and social change. The resources themselves are not what cause local change; remittances in and of themselves do not flow into a given locale to either spark or hinder economic growth. Rather, the social processes that move those resources and give them meaning are what create

change; they—not remittances they move and constitute—are the link between migration and development. Indeed, it was precisely the processes through which Soussi migrants and their communities transferred and transformed remittances that turned their abandoned drought-depressed region into a hotbed of infrastructure innovation.

### Electrifying Remittances

In the mid-1980s, no more than a fraction of Morocco's rural inhabitants had electric power. While data for the 1980s are sketchy at best, they indicate that rates of electricity access were abysmally low, with coverage estimated at anywhere between 4 to 18 percent. The data from the 1990s are more reliable, having been drawn from a series of government and aid agency studies. Although they still display some variation,<sup>2</sup> they clearly indicate that the rates of electrification for the Moroccan countryside lagged far behind those for similar income countries in the region (ONE 1999; World Bank 1990, 1998). By 1990, Algeria had achieved 70 percent rural electricity coverage and Tunisia was close behind with 60 percent (World Bank 1990).

The Moroccan government explained away its poor performance by contending that hooking up dispersed villages to the national electricity grid across the country's craggy rural topography was prohibitively expensive, and that the alternative of setting up self-standing diesel-generator or solar-powered systems diverted too large a proportion of local revenues from other government functions (World Bank 1990). In the early 1980s, prodded by the World Bank, the Moroccan central government embarked on a rural electrification program, but by all accounts, it was a half-hearted effort with little impact: between 1982 and 1996 the state connected only seventy villages per year to electricity services, with most villages selected located on the outskirts of urban centers and often on the verge of being swallowed up by the burgeoning towns anyway (ONE 1999, 2004). At that rate, it would have taken Morocco over 300 years to provide electricity to its 34,000 villages. As a former director of the National Office of Electricity, Driss Benhima, tersely conceded, "Between 1960 and 1990, it [rural electrification] was not a priority" (qtd. in Daoud 1997, 40; Daoud 2005).

Faced with government inaction in the provision of electricity, a group of emigrants from the Souss region decided in the mid-1980s to fund and erect self-standing networks in their villages of origin. The emigrants had been working at the Pêchiney company, a group of aluminum-processing plants in the Argentière valley in southern France since the late 1960s and early 1970s. A little less than two decades after they first joined the factory, Pêchiney, a casualty of the mortal blow that the oil shocks of the 1970s dealt French heavy industry, was first nationalized and then was forced to

restructure and close most of its plants. As part of its severance package to hundreds of laid-off workers, the now politically accountable parastatal granted start-up funds for small firms to its former employees. The Soussi emigrants decided to take the funds and set up firms in their villages of origin rather than trying to rebuild their lives in Argentière.

Because the funds, though paid out to individual workers, were disbursed to spawn a microenterprise-based economy to replace the closed factories, Pêchiney refused to give them to the Moroccan workers. With the help of the CFDT (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail), a major French labor union, the emigrants took Pêchiney to court. After a protracted and acrimonious legal battle, the Soussi plaintiffs were awarded their capital and began planning for the microenterprises they would establish on their return to their villages. They envisioned grocery stores and gas stations, small agro-processing outfits, and marginal agricultural improvements to their family plots.

Very quickly, however, it became clear to the emigrants that even their relatively modest projects would fail without electricity. Already organized because of their legal struggle against their former employer, they shifted their focus from the creation of small firms to the provision of electricity. In 1984 they pooled a portion of their severance award and set up a small association, Retour et Développement (Return and Development), to build electricity networks in their villages in the heart of the Souss (Daoud 1997). The migrants later renamed the organization they established Migration and Development (M/D) because they began to feel that the word *return* in the previous name sounded too much like an exhortation. And as the first project led to many others, the new name happily captured the ongoing nature of their development efforts (Daoud 1997).

The Soussi emigrants' idea of building informal electricity networks was not new. Villages throughout the Moroccan countryside had cobbled together electricity networks powered by local generators. In fact, external consultants contracted by the National Office of Electricity estimated that in 1993, about 2,000 villages had set up informal electrification schemes, most often bankrolled through emigrant remittances (Berdai and Butin 1993). The networks tended to suffer, however, from two serious and mutually reinforcing shortcomings. First, the independent systems used equipment of a quality that was so poor that electricity provision was sporadic and dangerous; low-hanging cables, frayed and too weak to carry the voltage that passed through them, along with faulty connections and unreliable circuit breakers, produced blackouts as well as accidents that were frequently fatal. Second, informal electricity networks tended to serve only those families that had contributed funds for their construction—by most estimates, somewhat more than 20 percent but rarely above 50 percent of residents (M/D 1992).

Poorer families, excluded from service, relied on "found" energy



sources; they scavenged for wood from already denuded slopes, aggravating rapid deforestation. This compounded increasingly regular droughts that were imperiling local agriculture. The stripped soil was unable to absorb and hold the seasonal rainwater that fed Moroccan agricultural production. The growing scarcity of water meant that families with access to the informal electricity networks relied ever more heavily on motor-powered water pumps, which drew water up from deep and rapidly falling underground water tables, to irrigate their fields. As they did so, they overtaxed their already maxed-out village electricity network, often causing damage that necessitated costly repairs. The expenses for the repairs thinned out the participants in the network, excluding those families that could not contribute additional funds to fix the system and relegating them to the ranks of those who relied on "found" energy. In a vicious cycle, as the number of families who foraged for wood increased, their collective impact on the environment and on the availability of water was augmented, which in turn compelled families that depended on electric water pumps to use them more intensely, causing short circuits and other malfunctions in the electricity network, which eventually required expensive repairs. In a pattern that was all too common, the network became too costly for an ever-smaller group of families to maintain and was abandoned (Missaoui 1996; M/D 1996).

The emigrants of M/D wanted to do things differently. Having observed electricity schemes in villages neighboring their own fall into disrepair and disuse, they resolved to build a network that fulfilled two criteria: first, an affordable, reliable, and safe network; and second, access for all villagers regardless of their ability to pay.

To accomplish this goal, the emigrants drew on three kinds of remittances: the technical knowledge about electricity networks they procured through the social networks they had forged in France, the funds they had earned and collected abroad, and the experience many of them had acquired as worker organizers in the French labor movement's conflict with P  chiney (Daoud 1997). In and of themselves, those resources were significant. It was the way the migrants and their communities engaged with them, however, that made the resources valuable for the construction of their electricity network, so valuable in fact that it turned their plan to build a modest electricity network into a laboratory for infrastructure innovation.

### *Transforming Knowledge*

In 1985 the Soussi emigrants decided to build their first electricity network in the village of Imgoun, a small hamlet of about a thousand residents that was home to the founder of M/D. The village was perched on a rugged mountainside approximately two hours away by all-terrain jeep from the

nearest town that had electricity and a well-stocked regional market where supplies to maintain a network could be acquired. To get help with the technological hurdles represented by setting up a safe and sustainable electricity network in that setting, M/D contacted the French Agency for Energy Management (Agence Fran  aise pour la Ma  trise de l'  nergie [AFME])—a French governmental agency, later renamed the Agence de l'Environnement et de la Ma  trise d'  nergie—through the social networks that the M/D emigrants forged during their legal battle with P  chiney.

The leadership of the AFME had long-standing ties to the CFDT, the union that supported the emigrants in their struggle against the aluminum magnate, and by the time the M/D emigrants began exploring energy options for Imgoun, the union boss of the CFDT, Michel Roland, was named president of the AFME. The energy agency mediated a relationship between M/D and Electricit   de France (EDF), then a French government producer and distributor of energy in France and, on a much smaller scale, in selected sites of North and West African countries. EDF, interested in exploring new decentralized energy solutions that the company could market widely, promptly sent thirty-seven volunteers to Imgoun to assist the emigrants and villagers in building their informal electricity network (Daoud 1997). A couple of AFME engineers, retained as consultants to the Moroccan government on the issue of rural electrification, joined the EDF volunteers of their own accord because they were interested in the design challenges the Imgoun project represented.

According to the plan, the EDF engineers would bring their technical expertise to come up with an energy network to fit Imgoun's specific topographical and economic constraints. Knowledge was not simply transferred to the village, however. Instead, the way that the M/D emigrants and Imgoun's residents engaged with the French technicians and with their knowledge reformulated both the standard technical guidelines for electricity networks and the procedures used to design the networks for varied settings. The migrants and the villagers hosted the EDF electricians in their houses, shared their meals with them, and involved them in Imgoun's daily rhythms of agriculture, water collection, and cooking and housekeeping (Daoud 1997). They engaged the technicians in extended and wide-ranging conversations about how residents used power and its relationship to the deforestation of nearby slopes. Those conversations revealed that the heaviest usage of power would be for everyday household functions ranging from cooking to lighting. Based on those findings, the technicians, the emigrants, and the villagers abandoned the idea of a solar-powered system, which would have drawn on a plentiful but undependable energy source, and opted instead for an electricity system that drew on a more reliable diesel-powered generator. Together, they began to draw up a blueprint for the new system.

While they built the network, they revised the plan many times over; they improvised with materials, modified the design to deal with the topographical challenges of connecting houses on steep slopes, and adjusted machine components to make the generator and the distribution system easy to maintain and repair. The process through which villagers employed the electricians' technical knowledge, and through which the technicians drew on Imgounis' local knowledge, was highly iterative and in the end, so profoundly transformed their technical and social conceptualizations of electricity that neither party could have imagined the electricity network they ultimately constructed prior to their engagement. Moreover, as their knowledge base was revised, work practices were also amended. Instead of drafting a complete design for a network based on industry standards and abstract engineering principles and then only afterward constructing it on the ground, they learned to adopt a more improvisational approach in which obstacles that emerged in building led to a change in design, which in turn led to a change in construction strategy.

The final product diverged significantly from the construction standards mandated by the Moroccan government as well as those used by the EDF itself—both of which were formulated with an urban setting in mind—but nevertheless complied with the logic that underpinned those standards: the network was safe, and it was reliable. The dimensions of the network and of the physical structures to support it were based on the real and projected electricity consumption in the village, and were therefore smaller than the norm. Thinner than usual cables were strung on poles that were only 6 meters tall instead of the required 10. The poles, stripped eucalyptus trunks, were bought locally, and substituted for the compulsory concrete columns that were impossible to transport up the dirt road that led to the village and were difficult to pour on site. Electricity was transmitted along this network at a frequency one-third the intensity specified by the industry standard, and the circuit breaker was secondhand and refurbished.

After the project, Jamal Lahoussain, one of the emigrant founders of M/D, reflected on how the perception of what technical options were viable shifted with the Imgoun project: "The standards of the National Office of Electricity were too draconian. They imposed them on the villages. In the end, even EDF found that they were excessive and that they did not take technological evolution into account" (qtd. in Daoud 1997, 37). The rough poles and slack wires that now wove through the village, rudimentary though they appeared, represented a significant technological advance. They embodied a new way of thinking about rural electricity provision, one that grew out of the particularities of the locale to which energy would be supplied rather than on the design of the network that would distribute the power (M/D 1996).

### *From Remitting Funds to Funding a Project*

The funds required for the construction of the electricity network were relatively modest, but the labor that the M/D emigrants expended in collecting them was substantial. The way the emigrants assembled the project money informed its significance and its material value for the electricity network, as well as for the economic development of Imgoun more broadly. Wary of shouldering the entire financial cost of the network and of replicating the social divide that had emerged in other villages between those who paid for electricity service and those who did not (and who were thus excluded), the emigrants insisted that 40 percent of the monies required to erect the network be collected in Imgoun. The source of the money contributed could of course be remittances, but what mattered more to M/D was that the money be donated through families still living in Imgoun so that the genesis of the project would be rooted in the village rather than in the cities of France. Moreover, they insisted that every family contribute some amount to the project, either in cash or in kind, but scaled the donation requested according to household income. These conditions transformed the electricity project from an emigrant initiative to a community project and ensured that the electricity produced would always be considered a public good, whose creation all in the village had supported and on which all in the village could thus draw, for as long as the network still stood.

The emigrants raised the remaining 60 percent of the funds required among themselves, each of them contributing a percentage of the severance capital they had received from Péchiney. They also fund-raised among French donors, appealing to the French organizations involved in the Imgoun electricity project—AFME and EDF—for monies. Additionally, they registered as an immigrant nongovernmental association with the French government and successfully applied for a grant through the government's Fund for Social Action, an endowment established in 1981 to support immigrant integration in France (Daoud 1997).

By drawing on sources of funds other than their remittances, sources both in Imgoun and in France, the emigrants transformed the conception of the project from a remittance-funded migrant initiative to a village project in which emigrants participated as members of the village community. Their multifaceted fund-raising approach recast emigrant remittances, converting them from a financial lifeline on which the village depended to one resource among many that the village could tap into for the electricity project, as well as for any future projects carried out in Imgoun. Moreover, the relationships that emigrants established with foreign funders, and that the villagers cemented when they hosted EDF technicians in their homes, augmented the value of the funds donated, changing them from a delimited sum of money earmarked for a specific purpose to a potential source of financial

support for additional development initiatives that the village would launch in coming years.

### *Organizing Electricity*

With the funds collected and the electricity network constructed, the remaining challenge for the village of Imgoun was to develop a system to maintain the network. The generator that powered the network needed to be refilled and recalibrated almost daily; the costs of the benzine had to be collected in a manner that adhered to the principle of equal access to electric power regardless of income; and the equipment itself had to be monitored for usage damage, and repairs had to be completed quickly, with the outlay recovered. Taken together, these tasks represented a significant logistical and organizational hurdle.

The M/D emigrants brought their labor organizing experience to the problem; several of the emigrant activists recounted that their participation in numerous strikes against Péchiney during its plant closures in the 1980s and then in their subsequent mobilization against the company to obtain their severance grants made clear to them that the way people organized to address obstacles mattered just as much as the outcome they achieved. The extensive deliberations they held among themselves and with the union that was supporting them persuaded them that it was essential, even if laborious, that all the villagers, as users of electricity, should have some say in how the network was run and how fees were collected. They recalled that their lengthy and sometimes meandering discussions during their French labor struggle made their mobilization durable enough to last even when confronted with Péchiney's intransigence, but also flexible enough to incorporate new insights about the companies' vulnerabilities and to experiment with creative strategies. In a call that ran counter to patriarchal village norms, they insisted in particular that women and youth in Imgoun contribute to decisions about the network's management. Additionally, emigrants remarked that their French organizing experience underscored the value of collaboration between people with different skill sets and knowledge bases in the design of effective strategies, and were adamant that people with the ability to read, write, and interpret engineering drawings be given as much voice as village elders whose pronouncement carried the weight of law in Imgoun.

While the insights the emigrants gleaned from their activist experience in France alone were valuable, both the emigrants and the villagers engaged with them in Imgoun transformed those observations into an organizational form robust enough to maintain the electricity network over the long term. Together, they used the lessons the emigrants articulated to reinvent the *jema'a*, a traditional council of elders that had for centuries pronounced

binding verdicts in disputes and governed the management of communal resources (like water and pasture access) in villages throughout the Souss region. Often celebrated as a form of protodemocracy, the *jema'a* elected its leader each year, and most decisions were made by consensus (Mernissi 1998). Membership, however, was limited to male village elites, the senior heads of families with landholdings expansive enough to qualify (de Haas 2003). By 1985, however, when ground was broken for the electricity network, the *jema'a* in the Souss had been seriously weakened owing to a series of political blows and administrative measures the monarchy's control had inflicted on the rural south over the previous two decades (de Haas 2003; Lugan 1992).

The emigrants and the villagers resuscitated the injured institution by reinventing it. They applied the lessons the emigrants brought with them about organizing and transformed the arthritic *jema'a* into a vibrant village association. In the new association, all villagers—regardless of income, landholdings, age, or gender—were automatically vested as members, with equal rights to speak and participate in the consensus-based decisionmaking processes. Moreover, villagers with certain skill sets, notably literacy, were assigned the task of supervising the implementation of the associations' decisions. By reviving the *jema'a*, they implicitly classified electricity as a communal resource, akin to water and pastureland, over which all residents had usufruct rights. But by amending the council makeup, they redistributed the authority over how those rights would be defined from a handful of notables to include some of the most marginalized members of the community (M/D 1996; Daoud 1997). As an M/D document would later summarize: "[T]he association enables everyone to get involved in the development of the village, and reduces the hierarchical inequalities between rich and poor, between young and old" (M/D 1992).

After protracted rounds of discussion, the village association decided that tariffs for electricity usage would be modulated according to household income, with wealthier residents charged more per kilowatt hour to subsidize usage by poorer families, who would pay somewhat less than the net cost. Tacked on to the fees would be a proportional tax, both to cover a modest salary for two or three schooled young men who would monitor and keep records on the day-to-day function of the network, and to feed into a contingency fund for any necessary repairs.

The sociotechnical model that the emigrants and villagers together developed for energy provision quickly expanded to villages surrounding Imgoun. M/D was rapidly overwhelmed with requests from nearby villages for help with electricity networks. It managed to assist an average of ten villages a year in establishing electricity provision between 1985 and 1996, at a time when the Moroccan central government succeeded in providing less than seventy with electric power per annum. Inundated with petitions for



assistance, the emigrant association began to look to the state to fulfill its long-neglected responsibilities to the Souss. As one M/D emigrant activist explained:

We want to take the state by the hand and bring it here. We don't have the resources the state does; we can never accomplish what the state can. What we want is for the state to do the work of the state *here*. Once the state takes responsibility for something—like providing electricity—there is no need for us to continue [doing that]. (Interview, January 2004)<sup>3</sup>

### Bringing the State by the Hand

To “bring the state by the hand” to their communities, the M/D emigrants began by involving the Moroccan central government indirectly in their processes of constituting migration resources. Two engineers from the AFME who assisted M/D with its Imgoun electricity network served as the first bridge between the migrant development organization and the government. The Moroccan government contracted the AFME for technical assistance to improve its badly limping rural electricity program, and the French AFME technicians brought the new technological and organizational understandings about electricity provision developed in Imgoun to bear on their consulting work. The exchange was, as one AFME consultant recalled, “informal, indirect.” It was a casual, even lackadaisical, consideration of ideas brought to the table by politically neutral French technical assistants and was far from being bureaucratically sanctioned (Interview, August 2004).

Soon, however, the Moroccan government's dismal performance in rural electricity provision compelled it to search more intentionally for successful and affordable approaches to rural electrification, and the exchange of ideas with M/D grew more institutionalized. The government's National Program for Rural Electricity, launched in 1982 at the behest of international donors, was a miserable failure; the state was able to supply only 287 new villages with electricity between 1982 and 1987, about 60 per year, and even that modest effort proved too expensive for the government to envision on a grand scale (World Bank 1998). In 1987 the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior tasked the AFME with helping design a pilot program for rural electrification in the hopes of developing new models for electricity distribution. The government was particularly keen on experimenting with rural energy strategies that did not require villages to be linked to the state network (Ministry of the Interior, Kingdom of Morocco, and AFME 1987; World Bank 1988, 1990; Grosclaude 1990; AFME 1988).

Although none of the 200 pilot sites selected for the program were located in the Souss, M/D was able to influence the government's scheme by using its own collaboration with AFME technicians to invite government

officials into the villages where the migrant organization had erected innovative electricity networks. M/D actively engaged the government on the development of new electrification strategies for the duration of the pilot program's existence, from 1987 to 1995. Government engineers regularly visited M/D sites to draw insights from the electricity experiments, and M/D regularly, albeit informally, drew them into the process of constructing new electricity networks. Additionally, government electricians used the mature, well-functioning M/D electricity networks to test the viability of various electricity-related strategies (like the use of fluorescent bulbs) (Berdai and Butin 1993, 1994; Butin and M/D 1993).

Over time, M/D's imprint on the government pilot program became increasingly clear. Because M/D's sway stemmed from its back-and-forth exchange with government engineers, its influence occurred not through a direct application of M/D innovations but, rather, through the government's appropriation and reinterpretation of the insights the migrant organization generated about rural electrification. In a process strikingly similar to the one that occurred when migrants and their communities of origin engaged with the monetary and nonmonetary remittances, the new knowledge about rural electricity provision that government technicians gleaned from M/D villages was not merely transferred to government pilot sites; it was transformed as it was applied.

The effect of the engagement between the government and M/D emerged in three main areas of the government scheme. First, the pilot program began to reflect the understanding that electricity-generation and -distribution technologies had to be adapted to local contexts, and that the modifications needed would more likely than not emerge during the process of construction. Moroccan government bureaucrats, however, proved much more deliberate in trying to balance topographical, economic, and social specificities of individual villages against the goal of adhering to state electricity network standards. Second, as the Moroccan government employees experimented with different funding and cost recovery arrangements in their pilot sites, they drew on the principle advanced in Imgoun and at other M/D villages that all community members should have access to electricity, irrespective of their ability to pay. Rather than press wealthier villagers to subsidize their poorer neighbors, however, the directors of the pilot program preferred to advance various pay-by-installment and loan schemes.

Third, the French engineers and their Moroccan colleagues gleaned from the example of Imgoun the importance of a viable social organization to the maintenance of an electricity network over the long term. Thus, associations in pilot sites were established at the encouragement of bureaucrats working to implement the pilot project. The degree of protection from government influence of these pilot associations is a matter of debate, but the significance of government recognition that an autonomous social organiza-

tion could be valuable at a time when the monarchy was carrying out some of its most ruthless suppression of nongovernmental organizations since independence cannot be minimized. So heavily did the fist of the government fall, in fact, that the late 1970s and 1980s have been dubbed the "lead-in years."

In the mid-1990s, as the pilot program was drawing to a close, an unprecedented opportunity for rural villagers to "take the government by the hand" and bring it to areas it had long abandoned suddenly emerged. The Moroccan national energy sector entered a crisis so severe it led to a fundamental reorganization of power production and distribution in the kingdom. Energy production and distribution had been a state concern since the mid-1970s. Years of underinvestment led to the sector's progressive breakdown, and by 1994 the state was forced to begin rapidly privatizing energy production along with most of its energy distribution franchises.

With privatization, the National Office of Electricity (ONE), the administrative body that had been charged with producing and distributing the kingdom's electricity, lost its reason for being. But dismantling the public sector and turning out its several thousand employees, or even a sizable fraction of them, was not a political option, especially at a time when the monarchy's preparations for an upcoming succession made it fragile. To stay afloat and maintain its employment levels, the ONE adopted rural electricity as its new mission, and in 1996 the agency launched a massive rural electricity program, called the Programme d'Electricification Rurale Globale (PERG). The goal of the program was to provide electricity to 90 percent of households in rural Morocco by 2010. To meet its ambitious target, the ONE invested heavily in the program and restructured its bureaucracy around its new organizational vocation (World Bank 1998; Bentaleb 2002; Interviews, March–August 2004; Triki 1994, 1993a, 1993b; Mossadeq 1996a, 1996b).

What distinguished the PERG from its predecessors were the lessons incorporated into its program design; it drew on the insights generated through the decadelong engagement between government engineers and M/D activists around the construction of rural electricity networks. But just as occurred with the pilot program, the lessons were not simply adopted wholesale; they were transformed when the ONE translated them into a scheme that could be deployed on a national scale. The government reinterpreted the three main insights that the pilot program had generated about the technologies used, funding sources, and the social organization necessary to maintain the network, and incorporated them into the PERG in reinvented form.

The PERG built on the pilot program's observation that electricity networks were most cost effective when they corresponded to local needs. The PERG was based on new national electricity standards that were written as

guidelines, with defined ranges, to allow for some local variation in topography and electricity usage patterns. Furthermore, the ONE embraced the idea of community cost-sharing and expanded it to a national level. While levying a tax on electricity usage by urban households to cover 55 percent of the cost of hooking up new villages, the ONE required the local township to contribute 20 percent of the expense, and the consumer to bear the remaining 25 percent (ONE 1999, 2004). Finally, the PERG's design reflected a government acknowledgement, though limited, that community management of electricity networks was important to keeping them functional and cost effective over the long term; and the program formally mandated some degree of community management, chiefly in the form of fee collection (ONE 1999, 2002).

With the PERG, the government reversed its three-decades-long losing streak in the field of rural electricity provision. Impressively, the ONE surpassed its own expectations of performance, connecting 80 percent of rural households to electricity by 2004 instead of the forecast 70 percent (ONE 1999, 2004), all the while managing to stay well within the budgetary bounds the agency set for the program. The PERG's success stemmed from its program design and the grounded insights around which it was conceived. Without the lessons generated from the emigrants' electricity initiatives in Imgoun, and later in surrounding villages, the state would likely not have had access to the conceptual bases that allowed it to create an effective national rural electricity provision scheme.

### Lessons for Reconstituting Remittances

A group of emigrant workers, laid-off from their manual production jobs in France, built a rudimentary electricity network in an isolated hamlet tucked away in the Atlas Mountains and changed the way a nation provided electricity to hundreds of thousands of its citizens. Similar processes and successes occurred with respect to water capture and distribution and road planning. By the 1990s the way that emigrants and their communities engaged with migration-generated resources contributed to the conceptual understandings on which three new major state initiatives to alleviate rural poverty were built: the national program to provide rural electricity (PERG), the national program to provide water to rural areas (Programme d'Approvisionnement Groupé en Eau Rurale, PAGER), and the national program to construct rural roads (Programme Nationale de Construction de Routes Rurales, PNCRR) (van de Walle 2004; Levy 2004; World Bank 2001). Combined, the programs had yearly operating budgets that totaled several hundred million dollars.

In constituting remittances, emigrants cast themselves as protagonists

of their history, of their own local processes of development, and of their homeland's effort to eradicate rural poverty, and in ways that were far more profound than simply bankrolling community projects or subsidizing their family members' expenditures. As the M/D director explained in a moving reflection on the meaning of participating in development, emigrants reclaimed a sense of themselves as agents that did more than channel resources back to their communities of origin:

The act of doing local development work, that's something very important. Important not only for the village, in terms of what they [the migrants] do and what comes into being in the village, but also for their concept of themselves, their personality. . . . Doing development work, it's revealed to them that they . . . can be actors. *This is over and above the money that they bring, over and above what they can do, the skills that they have and that they can bring back.* (Lahoussain Jamal, qtd. in M/D 2002, 273; emphasis added)

The experience of M/D in the Souss demonstrates that remittances have no value independent of that with which migrants and their communities infuse them as they transfer them, use them, and reinvent them. Contrary to the prevailing models used to understand the relationship between migration and development, remittances are not the vector of economic transformation and cannot have, in and of themselves, any impact, positive or negative, on economic development. Rather, it is the process through which migrants and their communities relate to remittances and imbue them with meaning and worth that is the catalyst for economic development. The way that Soussi migrants and their communities engaged with the emigrants' knowledge, funds, and organizing experience transformed those resources into something more, and that process of transformation galvanized social and economic change in the Souss region of Morocco.

The infrastructure innovations authored in a handful of Soussi villages had national-level impacts because the emigrants were able to draw the state into their process of transforming remittances. The Moroccan government appropriated the resources migrants had reinvented, and reinvented them in turn, transforming very local insights about infrastructure provision into foundational concepts that could be built into a national program. The fact that the state engagement with Soussi emigrants and their community revamped rural infrastructure provision through Morocco suggests important lessons for the design of migration and development policy.

First, migration and development policies that are built on the notion that remittances—monetary and nonmonetary—are fungible resources and that focus on channeling remittances to uses viewed as supportive of economic growth are forgoing the main potential that migration offers for economic transformation. The promise that migration offers for development

lies in the ingenuity and innovation that can emerge as emigrants and their communities engage with remittances, and the best way for governments to reap the benefits of that creativity is to support and join the process of constituting remittances.

Second, policies that foster state engagement with migrants and their communities, and with their process of constituting remittances, must be open in their design and evolving in their character. For the innovations that surface in migration communities to affect development on a large scale and in an enduring manner, they have to be incorporated into government policy. In Morocco this openness happened by historical accident. Morocco's repeated failures in rural infrastructure provision and the rapid collapse of its national electricity service forced an otherwise authoritarian regime to remain receptive to new approaches to rural electrification. Had it not been, however, for ongoing amendment of the pilot program's rural electrification strategy and the embrace of a completely new electrification approach with the 1996 national rural electrification program, the insights would never have been formally integrated into government infrastructure provision. The ideas that emerged in the Souss would have died in the Souss.

Third, and finally, government can amplify the resource that is the process of transforming remittances and spread it to the nation as a whole, including to areas that experience no significant out-migration. And in so doing, it can make the relationship between migration and development into the relationship that connects every village and every neighborhood in the nation to the process of re-imagining and reinventing what development can be.

## Notes

1. The information on the case drawn from ethnographic observation and interviews are not noted in the text but should be assumed. When supporting information is drawn from documentary evidence (articles, reports, and so on), the citations are noted in the text. When these citations are provided, it does not indicate that they are the sole source of the data provided; they were always corroborated through interview information.

2. The Moroccan National Office of Electricity estimated that only 18 percent of rural Morocco was connected to electricity in 1994 and the World Bank measured that access as somewhat higher, at 25 percent.

3. The exchanges between Moroccan emigrants and the Moroccan state documented in this chapter vacillated between collaborative and conflictual. Many of those who participated in conversations with the state did so at some political and personal peril. As a result, the confidentiality of the people I interviewed is maintained throughout this chapter. Where necessary, the organization, place, and month in which the interviews occurred are noted.

## National Development Planning: The Case of Dominica

*Thomson Fontaine  
with Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff*

This chapter explores what happens when a country's economy is almost entirely dependent on remittances, thus encouraging a national culture of out-migration. The presumed outcome is often consistent with the traditional orientation of the migration and development literature: few prospects, if any, of retaining skills and knowledge and developing a locally driven economy. Indeed, some countries for whom these characteristics are strong, though not necessarily universal, have evolved a human-capital export model. This is the case, for example, for the Philippines, which maintains several nursing programs with the primary purpose of exporting labor and thus creating a continuous stream of remittance inflows. Such a scenario risks creating a vicious cycle, where diasporas' contributions are limited to remittances, as out-migration, including brain drain, is encouraged. What is a nation to do to escape such a vicious cycle, and how might its diaspora help?

Dominica is a good case for exploring this question. Dominica is ranked among the top five countries in the world with the highest rates of net migration, having lost most of its population in the last decades of the twentieth century. It is considered to be the only country in the world in the recent past to experience negative population growth owing to voluntary migration. So widespread is the phenomenon it is estimated that every household on the island has at least one family member who has migrated. Dominicans often view migration as a rite of passage, with a vast number leaving to seek further studies, while others do so in search of employment opportunities or to join family members. Building on a sound primary and secondary education system in the country, a large number of those migrating have gone on to distinguish themselves in their adopted homelands, in areas as diverse as business, medicine, information technology, and law.

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# Diasporas and Development

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