

Dominican Republic



“Now I eat meat, I have credit with the *colmado*”

Diana is a 69-year-old widow who has 9 children, 19 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. She lives with 4 children in her house in Las Placetas. One of her daughters lives in New York where she works in a factory. She sends monthly remittances of 150 dollars to Diana through a remittance agent. The money is for food but she occasionally sends her mother things for the house. The house has a gas stove, a washing machine and a refrigerator, all of which were gifts from her daughter.

The house was constructed from cement, thanks to the help of another daughter who lived in the United States, but passed away. “During the times, when they left for there, it was hard. The first went there in 1985 and she was the one who died. It was when we didn’t have a house. We lived on a ranch, there where the little canteen is, a ranch with a palm roof. You enter here and could see everyone who passes on a road through the fence that we had. When she left she was the one who helped me.”

Before her daughters went to the US, Diana sold raffle tickets or did sporadic domestic work such as washing or ironing clothes. Life changed with the remittances from her daughters abroad.

“Yes, because we did not have a secure way to eat. You could eat your rice and beans, a little meat as well, but during those times, no. In those times it was difficult to eat meat, some chicken yes, because one always raises chicken. Now I eat meat, I have credit with the *colmado* (local convenience/grocery store). The *colmado* offers credit to those who receive remittances and when money arrives at the end of the month, they pay for their purchases.

Diana’s daughter never tells her how to spend the remittances. “I know what to do,” she says. She also does not ask for more money than what is sent. “Those who have not been to New York think that people there pick up money off the street, but when you go there, you know that people earn money in order to send it.”

What is missing in Las Placetas are jobs, although Diana also criticizes the women in the community who do not want to work. “Here there is nothing to do, no work, for this reason my daughter told me ‘I’m going to earn money.’ Because of this everyone went to New York. Everyone wants to go to New York because there is life there.”

An estimated 1.5 million Dominicans are living abroad and in 2008 they sent home around US \$ 3 billion in remittances. The town of Las Placetas receives the second largest amount of remittances in the country. The migrants travel mainly to the United States. The region has many structural obstacles to development, such as scarce public services, and international migration is one of few options for social mobility.*

This Life Story was published in March 2010 and pertains to the project “Gender and Remittances: Constructing Gender Sensitive Development” produced by UN-INSTRAW and UNDP, with funding from Japan WID.

*Source: Vargas, Tahira (2010), Migration, Remittances and Gender-Responsive Local Development. The case of Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo.

