

Dominican Republic



“We are more intelligent, you better know it!”

Berky lives with 10 family members in her house in the community of Las Placetatas, Dominican Republic. Like other Dominicans, her family ties are extensive. Berky has raised her 7 children, one granddaughter (the child of her daughter who lives in the United States), and one daughter of a friend. Berky arrived in Las Placetatas from the El Rajao de la Sierra, a town close to San Jose de las Matas.

Besides domestic work such as washing and ironing, gathering coffee and cooking for pay, for some years, Berky had two small business initiatives: buying clothes in the city to sell in the community and making popcorn to sell to school children. Now many people in Las Placetatas have relatives abroad who send clothes and Berky left this business in order to dedicate her time to the children in her home.

Her daughter, Margarita, left for the United States about 10 years ago. She worked in a factory and now she has a small business. Margarita has two daughters, one in the United States and another who lives with her mother in Las Placetatas.

“I took care of Margarita’s first child, she sent her with her first cousin. She did not want to give her to anyone there to take watch her because she was always very affectionate with her children. So she thought “ I’ll bring her to mami, she will take care of her and I can work. ”

Margarita’s other daughter who is 14 years old, lives in Las Placetatas with Berky. Her mother is making preparations to bring her to the United States.

“If she is going to pay 100 dollars weekly for someone to watch her baby, this is how much she can send me in one month. It’s much better this way!”

Margarita always sends remittances. Through an agency to one of Berky’s other daughters who lives in Santiago. Berky is not aware of the exact amount, she thinks it is about 75 dollars per month, or maybe double during Christmas. Her daughter in Santiago receives it, makes the proper purchases and sends the items to Berky. The other daughters also contribute food, medicine and school supplies for the children.

“When I had a daughter here, the other girl, she sent me more because she had less costs there. For some time both girls were here. You know how much babies consume, the medicine, the milk, pampers, you know all the things children wear. Now when her daughter is here, she sends money to buy her things. ”

Berky dreams of setting up a new business, a small store or buying some land. “We don’t have land because there isn’t any money to buy it. We still have not been able to buy some here. With land we could be able to grow a garden where we can get cilantro, peppers, eggplant, yucca, and we can sell some. It’s a good business, but if you don’t have land, you can’t do anything!”

Berky wants to create initiatives to facilitate the ability of women to have small businesses. “Sometimes we women risk more. It’s difficult for us with children and a husband. If your husband works you need to have the food there at lunch time. Children must have their food as well and sometimes some go to school in the morning and others in the afternoon, so when they come to have lunch it must be ready for them and for the others who are going to school. It’s much more difficult for women than men here in the countryside. Men go to their business and that’s it, they return at lunch time, eat and then leave.” Berky says that women organize everything, and also administer the household budget.

“If you have 100 pesos, you need to figure out what two or three things are needed, how you divide the money, a little bit of this, a little bit of that. To cook something for 100 pesos women know what to do, while men just get upset and don’t know what to do. We are more intelligent and you need to know that!”

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 Placetatas 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.*

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