CITAM Network:

Project to Reduce the Isolation of the Mexican Agricultural Workers

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1 This project is currently ongoing and will eventually be presented to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While this project focuses on Mexican migrants in the United States, there are a number of similarities between Mexican farm workers and other migrant groups in other places, i.e., it is the level of isolation that triggers their vulnerability. Thus, the main idea behind this project can be fully implemented in other parts of the world as well.

2 The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Executive Summary

The Interactive Communication Network with Mexican Agricultural Workers or CITAM Network, is a proposed interactive network that is aimed at reducing the isolation of the agricultural workers in North Carolina, with the aim of empowering them and increasing their standard of living.

The dependency efforts of the government and civil society organisations have proven insufficient to break the isolation, which has caused a crisis of vulnerability that independently affects their migratory status.

The CITAM Network would operate with a text messaging system for both smart and traditional mobile phones that facilitates a communication of two channels between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mexican agricultural workers. This type of basic technology would permit valuable information to be carried out to them and in good time: also it would offer the workers an efficient medium to obtain relevant input for their wellbeing without the necessity of an internet connection.

The Centre for Information and Assistance for Mexicans or CIAM would be the platform for operating the CITAM Network, with input from the General Consulate in Raleigh.

This project, a product of more than two years of research work collaborating with the University of Duke, it consists of four phases of instrumentation. The first two entail the development and commencement of the CITAM Network in North Carolina; the third phase would be centred on the consolidation of the Network as a tool to strengthen the dialogue with Mexicans throughout the United States, and the last phase is to update the Registration System for Mexicans Abroad (SIRME).
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Background and Methodology

The proposal to create the Interactive Communication Network with Mexican Agricultural Workers (hereinafter, CITAM Network), rises from the experiences gathered between December 2013 and March 2016, during the visits conducted by the Consulate General of Mexico in Raleigh, North Carolina (hereinafter referred to as the Consulate). It was also born of a research project that began in September 2015, which included interviews with Mexican agricultural workers (hereinafter, TAM), government officials, academics, and NGO’s, as well as a thorough analysis, which was carried out by the University of Duke at the request of the Consulate.

One of the first alarming signs perceived during visits and, in particular, through the interaction with the TAM, was their pronounced level of isolation. This fact aroused the concern to generate an interactive communication mechanism, which would allow the Consulate (or any other organization that has a solid network) to transmit real-time information to the TAM while workers would also have a simple and efficient way in to contact back to the Consulate; in other words, a two-way mechanism. Of the options investigated, the most optimum was the implementation of an Unstructured Supplemental Service Data (USSD) system, complemented with a Simple Message Service (SMS).

As a result of the above, the following hypothesis was reached: a USSD and SMS system, anchored to a technological communication platform, can reduce the isolation of the TAM and, therefore, their level of vulnerability, with the ultimate objective of increasing their quality of life.

In order to determine whether the hypothesis could be sustained, a methodology was developed to avoid loopholes in the research process. Thus, in December 2015, a preliminary draft was sent to the Sanford School of Public Policy at the University of Duke, through the Spring 2016 Consulting Project, to test the hypothesis. In January 2016, they began the research which included field visits, personalized interviews and focus groups; it was concluded four months later, and these results supported the original hypothesis.
Introduction

The isolation in which thousands of Mexican agricultural workers live in the United States is one of the components that aggravates their vulnerable status, regardless of their immigration status. This test shows the causes and consequences of this component among the agricultural workers community in North Carolina and, at the same time, makes recommendations to reduce it.

North Carolina represents one of the states of the American Union with greater proportional growth of migrants: between 1990 and 2000, this population sector experienced a 274% increment, the highest percentage in the US; between 2000 and 2010, it was about 67%, the sixth entity with the highest proportional growth. By 2013, there were 750,000 migrants in the state, of whom 34.3% were Mexicans.

Mexicans have a great influence on the agricultural sector in North Carolina and its 49,500 farms and agricultural fields. Although there are no official figures, it is estimated that there are between 100,000 and 120,000 agricultural workers in the state, of which 95% are of Hispanic origin, and of these 90% are Mexicans. In this context, providing the TAM with a truthful and timely communication mechanism would reduce their isolation at any instance and therefore improve their quality of life.

9 out of 10 farmworkers in North Carolina are Mexicans

Safeguarding the rights of migrant workers has become a categorical imperative for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its network of US consulates. In the case of the TAM, the generation of mechanisms that reduce their isolation would contribute to the achievement of this objective and would favor their empowerment, especially in a country where basic or sophisticated information technologies are components that assist social integration.

Perspective of the Problem and the Efforts to Reduce it

The major problem that the TAM faces in North Carolina is its high degree of vulnerability. This pattern is repeated in other states of the American Union, which generates a significant impairment in their quality of life and in that of their families; it is also cause and effect of factors that directly affect the situation of the TAM.

Subject to addressing the causes and effects of the vulnerability of the TAMs at a later stage, it is appropriate to mention for the moment that the common denominator that it detonates is its isolation. It is no coincidence that a good part of the tasks of public and private entities to reduce their vulnerability, is focused precisely on generating channels of communication with agricultural workers.

Efforts to counteract their vulnerability in North Carolina are carried out by functional units of the federal and state government: organizations of all civil society and religious organizations and the government of Mexico through the Consulate General in Raleigh, North Carolina.
Support of Government Dependencies

The Wages and Hours Division of the Labor Department of the United States of America (WHD), assists the TAM’s by assuring the enforcement and execution of federal labor laws, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, among others. This legal framework allows WHD to work with TAM directly regardless of their immigration status.

In the case of North Carolina, the WHD District Office goes on field visits to talk and distribute materials at the disposal of agricultural workers with information about their labor rights. In like manner, the employers and contractors are given tasks in order to familiarize them with the regulatory framework, particularly regarding the compensation of their employees. According to their director inspector, Richard Blaylock, between January and February 2016, informative workshops were held that benefited 3,000 workers, employers, and contractors.

However, WHD faces tangible challenges; one of them is the size of their personnel. With only 42 staff members, WHD conducts inspections in and throughout North Carolina and attends to the cases that it collects during its visits or through telephone calls. On the whole, a large number of its personnel do not speak Spanish, so communication could be hampered by this limitation. Another problem they face is their inability to familiarize themselves with the farm workers in the state. For example, according to director Blaylock, TAM has detected cases in which groups of workers “flee or hide” when this Federal Labor dependency visits for inspection, believing that it is an element of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL) also has a protection program for the agricultural workers. As a result of the 1989 enactment of the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina, this agency is to ensure that farm dwellings comply with workers’ compliance standards for sanitation workers. To ensure the training of state law, NCDOL conducts workshops and visits throughout the year; it also carries out an inspection visit prior to the arrival of the workers. It also has a program by the name Gold Star Grower Housing (which has been in operation for 23 years), which serves as the public knowledge to farmers in North Carolina who meet the standards established by the law.

According to Regina Cullen, Head of the Occupational Safety and Health Office of NCDOL, the programs they implement have proven effective: however, the number of farms or agricultural enterprises employing TAM exceeds their operating capacity. Her office operates with only 6 employees, who cover the 88 agricultural counties in the state.

Without contrasting the situation of the NCDOL, Workforce Solutions of the Department of Commerce of North Carolina (a unit that monitors compliance on regulations on procurement and housing, among others), has 4 constant employees throughout the year and with 6 between April and November, these employees work in all the state in addition to the inspection visits they perform constantly.
Civil Society Organizations

Another key ally for TAM are the civil society organizations, which beside monitoring the compliance with the regulatory framework that protects them, also carry out lobbying actions to influence legislators and public policymakers.

For example, the Division for Agricultural Workers of the Legal Aid organization of North Carolina, is noted for a program through which visits are made to farmlands and residence of workers to give them tasks and share information about the labor rights. In 2015, the above office accomplished 107 visits where they shared information through presentations and community gatherings.

Despite the great effort made by the Legal Aid, its funds are intended exclusively for workers who hold business/work visas, with the exception of those who had been victims of human trafficking or those who have suffered one kind of physical or sexual violence. Per Lori Johnson, Legal Director of the Division for Agricultural Workers of the Legal Aid, the greatest challenge that the organization faces is the legal loophole in the US law to protect the rights of farm workers.

An abysmal fault of the juridical framework of the United States is excluding the right of the farm-workers to receive visits from third parties in their own houses.

-Lori Johnson-

Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) is a nonprofit organization whose plan is based on training 20 university students to support the work of other organizations from different angles, such as public health, education and labor rights. At the end of their studies, some of these students end up working on projects to protect the rights of farm workers.

SAF visits approximately 5,000 agricultural support workers each year. These visits are part of the focus on which this organization is interested in implementing, which includes the creation of channels for workers to have access to health support services. For Melinda Wiggins, SAF's Executive Director, one of the most challenging tasks for her organization is to have free and constant access to workers in the field, as this would allow them to build a lasting relationship with them.

Only by building a lasting relationship with the agricultural workers could a systemic change be generated in their favor

-Melinda Wiggins-

Some religious organizations also promote communication channels with the TAM in order to diminish their isolation and thus to provide them with more support, particularly through the donation of clothing and basic work equipment, such as hats, boots and gloves. This is the case of the Episcopal Ministry for Agricultural Workers of its North Carolina, an organization that has worked directly with the TAM since 1982.

According to Father Jesus Antonio Rojas, Executive Director of that Ministry and has over 20 years been supporting agricultural workers, the biggest problem they face is abandonment, caused among other issues their isolation. For this reason, this church
tries to penetrate the agricultural fields to approach the workers, either through sports
tournaments or mass festivals. For example, at the beginning of autumn each year, the
organization carries out an event attended by about 5,000 TAM people, most of them
are field workers.

For Father Rojas, the most important thing is working as humans and not as a church or
program per se: “it is only by gaining the confidence of the workers that will make it
possible to break barriers generated by the fear that they face every day, even for the
latter who have a work visa”

Support of the Government of Mexico

In the case of North Carolina, the General Consulate in Raleigh operates the programs
and grants support based on the guidelines set forth by the SRE.

The Consulate operates three programs that facilitate a closeness with the TAM. The
first consists of visits to agricultural fields and workers' camps to provide basic
information on their rights and responsibilities at work, as well as the services provided
by this consular Representation, for instance, in 2015 information was provided to
about 4,000 TAM, most of them holders of H-2A visas. Likewise, a shared collaboration
scheme was established with the Alliance One International company, in order to
acquire straw hats for direct delivery to the TAM (this program continues in 2016).

Two other initiatives that the Consulate operates are the programs of mobile consulates
and the Consulate on Wheels. Each mechanism allows TAM, to process consular
documentation and in some cases, request some kind of protection support. However,
the number of TAMs that can benefit from this depends precisely on their ability to go
down to the designated headquarters for this purpose and, of course, those that have
received information about the headquarters and dates about them.

The final tendency that the SRE stakes is investment in information technologies. In
2013, with the inputs from the Embassy of Mexico in Washington, it launched two
mechanisms to make the communication with the Mexican communities in the country
more efficient, namely, the CIAM application for smartphones MiConsulmex and the
Information Center on Current Immigration, which in 2015 was transformed into the
Center for Information and Assistance to Mexicans (CIAM)

In the case of MiConsulmex, as of March 2016, more than 150,000 users had
downloaded the application, with the objective is to provide consular services
assistance, directions to diplomatic representative offices and scheduling appointments
to receive consular assistance in their respective offices. This figure shows that there is
an interest in having information about the services that the consular network can
provide, including topics on consular protection.

Presently, the number of Mexicans who use MIConsulmex is relatively low with regards
to the number of people that were expected to use it in the beginning. This could be
attributed to various factors related to the use of mobile telephones in the USA. For
example, in the case of North Carolina, more than 50% of farm workers have a smart
phone, however many of them do not have access to the internet because of the costs involved in wireless connectivity or simply ignorance. This fact occurs mainly with those over 40 years of age in TAM.

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Smart phone 55%
Ordinary mobile phone 38%
Fixed line telephone 3%
Without telephone 4%
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*From the universe of interviews in the University of Duke, the 93% indicated to be owners of mobile phones. On their part, those below 40 years had a possibility three times higher to own a smart phone.*

The second mechanism promoted by the SRE is the CIAM, “a free nationwide call center for the protection, information and assistance of Mexicans residing in the United States”. The CIAM, undoubtedly, represents an ambitious support platform to Mexican nationals in the country and, at the same time, an additional tool that Mexican consulates use to channel cases of protection.

*CIAM is a solid and effective platform of consular support for Mexican nationals in the United States*

The CIAM has attended to more than 193,000 calls from Mexicans from July 2013 to February 2016. In the case of North Carolina, 18% of calls received were related to consular protection cases, however, only two were related to issues of the labor field, which permits one to assume, but not to infer, that there is a general lack of knowledge about the advantages that this tool provides to Mexican nationals and, especially, to the TAMs.

Despite the great efforts described above and the support received by a considerable number of agricultural workers from government agencies and civil society organizations, most of them are not reachable at their homes, leaving them in a situation of helplessness because it only fuels their vulnerability.

**Diagnosis**

The fundamental problem of TAM is its degree of vulnerability, which is relatively higher than the rest of the migrants in the United States, and does not have a distinguished migratory quality. The underlying cause of the problem is the isolation in which it is found and the consequence being a poor quality of life.
This diagnosis generates a series of ramifications, some of them intertwined, which shows the excessive disadvantages faced by TAMs.

The analysis of the diagnosis is based on basic causes that give rise to their degree of vulnerability; as well as, taking their isolation as a common denominator, an inalienable characteristic of the TAM, which exacerbates its circle of victimization.

Socio-economic conditions as a basic source of isolation

This report argues that the low socioeconomic level of the TAM leads to their physical and virtual isolation. It also argues later that isolation is the determinant of the low quality of life of the TAM in North Carolina (and practically across the American Union).

This condition is reflected in the profile of agricultural workers in North Carolina and TAM in particular. For example, the average educational level of agricultural workers in North Carolina is 6 years of basic education. In the mid-extremes, 13% of the workers have 3 years or less of academic education and only 13% of them have completed preparatory school. This condition creates sociological barriers, such as that of the language which prevents them from access to basic information or, in the case of having access, there is the difficulty of understanding the information given by authorities or organizations of the civil society.

There is also ignorance about the faculties and obligations of the authorities in this country, this makes the TAM express fear or distrust towards them. This aggravates their isolation, because it prevents them from receiving valuable information about their rights, regardless of their immigration status.

This reality makes an adverse equation for the TAMs. On the one hand, their socioeconomic conditions give rise to the urgent need to obtain a wage for themselves and their families, on the other, the need to cultivate their agricultural fields with low costs generates a solution for the variables determined by the consumers themselves (demand).

Now, part of the solution to this equation comes from low wages that TAM receives, especially those who do not have a work permit, for them, their salary does not exceed the minimum wage in most cases, that is, between $ 7.25 and $ 10.72 per hour, depending on the crop and if the tabularization of the state or federal minimum wage is used. Also, the minimum wage does not necessarily reflect the total annual amount, because it depends on the type of crop, the climate and other factors that sometimes reduce production and therefore their working hours. This situation, combined with possible abuses in this field, makes the majority of agricultural workers to live below the poverty level, with half of them earning a salary of $7,500 per year.

Some legal gaps in the normative framework that protects the TAM’s

Another factor, rather circumstantial, that worsens the isolation of the TAMs, has to do with the regulatory framework that controls housing. This generates, among other
things, limited access to the TAMs by government agencies, NGOs and the Consulate General.

For example, Section 203 (29 USC 1801, et seq.) of the Migrant Law and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, employers are not required to provide housing for those who work outside the temporary visa, v.gr., H-2A visas, In this context, TAMs without a work visa have the relative liberty to choose the location of their house. However, their salaries do not allow them to have the optimal flexibility to pay rent (at best, a mortgage) in less isolated areas and therefore of greater surplus value.

In the case of TAMs with H-2A visas, Section 218 [8 USC 1188] of the Immigration and Nationality Act (better known as the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952), requires its employers to proportionate housing in accordance with the Federal laws. This implies that many of the houses of the TAM are far from urban populations and, in some cases, located in private properties whose access only could be given by the employer's authorization.

**Human resources that limit the support to the TAM**

In previous paragraphs the critical situation that impedes the government agency and civil society organizations were identified to be limited human resources. It fitting to add that this situation exists to some extent, due to the absence of groups that have the capacity to influence public policy in order to hire more people (there are no groups that have influence on the law making body of the society to strengthen the legal framework that impose these rights and responsibilities to them).

In this way, the shortage of human resources that the main governmental agencies suffer, leads to a greater isolation of the TAM, since it does not only limit the number of inspection visits to verify their working and living conditions, but also impedes the communication of vital information.

**Limited Internet generates their virtual isolation**

TAM has limited access to the internet, which leads it to their isolation. This is, among other things, due to the fact that they do not have sufficient resources to acquire a data plan for their mobile phones and / or because they are unaware of the usefulness of such a plan.

In this way, it can be argued that TAMs are also isolated virtually, especially in the case of workers with an H-2A work visa: according to the ad hoc study of the University of Duke, 17.3% of households in the US that earn less than $25,000 a year (the TAMs would fall into this category) have access to the internet from their mobile equipment.

Now, the conditions described in this section originates four problems that exacerbates their level of vulnerability and therefore their quality of life.
**Conditions that exacerbate their vulnerability**

**Manipulation or omission of information by employers**

The physical and virtual isolation of the TAM results in the consequence of some employers and crew leaders manipulating or simply omitting the information they provide to the workers. This also generates the absence of exhaustive controls by government agencies and access to basic public services as well as lack of complaints against their employers or people who infringe upon the human rights.

There is key information that the TAM requires, especially for those who have been working in the US for some few periods, and those who for such motive have a limited knowledge of public services which they can turn to in case of emergency, say information about labor rights or the civil organizations or government agencies that can assist them to such effect.

For example, Mr. Juan Vaz Avila, who was employed for the first time in 2016 by the contractor North Carolina Growers Association (the largest in USA), stated that the first thing he would do in case of an emergency would be “to call his employer for him to talk to a medical center”. This denotes his degree of dependency on his employer, a circle that is repeated in thousands of TAMs.

*I do not know anyone here so I think that my best option is to make good friends whom I can turn to when I need something urgently.*

*Sergio Luna, an agricultural worker, 23 years-

**Nearly unavailable security controls**

In addition, the isolation of the TAMs, results in a lack of exhaustive controls to ensure respect of their labor rights. This problem is connected to the lack of budgetary resources allocated to the government dependencies mentioned above. It is not surprising that inspections carried out by government and NGO units are limited since there is no existing database that includes all fields or agricultural sites of the TAM.

**Limited access to basic services**

Another third consequence of their isolation is the limited access to basic services, including public health. Indeed, even though their working conditions are dangerous for handling heavy machinery and their exposure to chemicals, according to the North Carolina Farmworker Institute organization, less than 20% of agricultural workers in North Carolina are receiving public health services.
Complaints of labor abuses

Finally, in the best cases, their physical and virtual isolation limits the civil or non-governmental organizations from offering them legal assistance in situations where their rights are being infringed upon; in worst cases scenarios, the workers fear to be reprimanded by the supervisors or by the foremen in case they report abuses of any kind.

In this respect, an employee of Bladen County, North Carolina, said they interposed to prevent members of the organization of Legal Aid of North Carolina to speak with TAM on a farm where there were reports for irregularities. Such employees argued that the organization was invading a private property, for which the elements of the Sheriff’s office prevented the TAM from being able to receive corresponding legal assistance.

Thus, from a taxonomic perspective, the four externalities presented in this section increase the level of vulnerability of the TAMs, this acts according to the degree of isolation.

Consequences of their Vulnerability: Impairment of their Life

Five consequences were detected to have originated for the high degree of vulnerability of TAM. Such information does not represent a comprehensive list, but rather responses from individuals found in North Carolina; this does not mean, however, that some of these causes are not patent in other States of the American Union.

Health problems and accidents at work

There unfortunately exists very little information about cases presented by TAM in North Carolina that stem from health problems or includes work-related deaths. The lack of statistics is largely due to the fact that since 2006, NCDOL does not account for these cases considering the fact it is not their responsibility. This is a major challenge, especially since the laws of North Carolina which are supposed to protect agricultural workers are relatively laid-back: in that a way, there could be a good number of cases that would not be considered as part of the responsibilities of that dependency.

One fact is that the vast majority of TAMs in North Carolina are exposed to three elements that put their health at risk, namely heat stroke, exposure to nicotine and pesticides. Also, dangerous plants and animals, as well as heavy equipment and one of the most dangerous chemicals for agricultural work in that state and throughout the American Union.

The impact of extreme weather

Another element related to the previous one is the impact they suffer due to extreme climatological conditions. The multiplicity of climates in North Carolina generates elevated hazards, especially due to the formation of tornadoes (33 tornadoes on the
average between 1997 and 2011.) and hurricanes (159 hours of category 1 hurricane winds in the foregoing, between 1945 and 2005)

Also, the intensity of the heat, particularly between June and September (maximum temperatures of 33 °C with humidity percentages between 50% and 90%), generates dangerous conditions for the TAM. In order to get an idea of the magnitude of this problem, North Carolina, together with California and Florida, accounted for 57% victims of heatstroke recorded between 1992 and 2006.

*Lack of payments or payments retained by employers*

Another cause by their degree of vulnerability is the non-compliance with the salary stipulated in the contract and the undue collection of fees by contractors. This is a problem that has been widely documented and responds to a systemic situation in North Carolina and a major part of the United States.

For example, between 2009 and 2013, WHD detected through an investigation in several states (including North Carolina) that 1,925 employers breached contract clauses subscribed between agricultural workers with an H-2A visa and them. In the case of North Carolina, according to a research by Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center, 18.3% of 300 agricultural workers interviewed reported having suffered some type of wage withholding or unfair payments.

*Unhealthy living conditions*

The poor housing conditions of the TAM is one of the major problems that continue to impair their quality of life, as these can lead to physical and mental problems. This factor is registered both in housing provided by employers (especially in the case of those who have an H-2A visa), as well as those who rent with their own salary.

A serious problem for those who are not provided with accommodation by their employer (between 72% and 78% of workers In North Carolina are forced to rent one), this is because the government agencies are not required to verify their physical condition for being part of their property. Even in situations where the salary could be enough for them to rent a room in good condition, most of the agricultural fields are located in remote areas making the bad living conditions rather a product of their isolation.

For those living in camps facilitated by their employers, their fate is not necessarily any better. In 2009, it was found that between 11% and 44% of workers living in agricultural camps in North Carolina did not meet the minimum hygienic conditions: also 89% of the camps violated at least one provision of the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina.

Thus, the poor conditions in many TAM households expose them to toxic substances, including lead and pesticides, products that generate allergies, harmful molds and dangerous insects. In addition, 1 out of every 5 camps is infested with rodents.
The problems of space are equally common: 78% of the agricultural workers interviewed, admitted to living in overcrowded conditions and between 26% and 31% had less square meters of space per person in their dormitories (it is believed to be overcrowding if someone cohabits with one or more persons in a room measuring between 6.5 m² and 8.3 m²).

Violation of personal integrity

In extreme situations, agricultural workers are violated against their physical integrity. For example, between 2011 and 2013, the National Human Trafficking Response Center (NHTRC) received 1,400 complaints about possible violations of their labor rights and 130 possible cases of human trafficking for the purpose of labor or sexual exploitation. While these data are of cases from the whole country, North Carolina is not exempted from this problem: in 2015, the NHTRC received 463 calls and served 110 cases of trafficking, and by March 2016 it had received 115 calls and served 36 cases of this nature.

Due to the isolation of the TAM and their families, it is believed that many of these cases are not reported, either because of fear, ignorance or simply because they do not have the means to convey it. Although there are no specific figures on cases of trafficking in agricultural fields, organizations such as the Salvation Army and Legal Aid of North Carolina realize the problem faced by TAM as victims (and perpetrators) of this scourge. There are also some media that have reported this problem through research articles and briefing notes. The five elements described above largely reflect part of the reality in which the TAMs live in North Carolina (and definitely in other states Of the American Union), it also brings to light that their immigration status does not necessarily determine their degree of vulnerability.

Although the diagnosis is discouraging, an interactive communication mechanism can facilitate and make the work of public and private entities more efficient in favor of the TAM, as it would tend to bridge the information sharing between them, in real time and in a reliable way.

Recommendation to Fix the Problem: The CITAM Network

The proposal to reduce the isolation of the TAM in order to reduce their vulnerability and to increase their standard of living is to launch the Interactive Communication Network with the Mexican Agricultural Workers or CITAM Network.

The CITAM Network would have the ability to decrease the situation of the TAMs in North Carolina in order to reduce its vulnerability, and to increase its quality of life.

The CITAM Network would implement a mechanism of interest for interactive and efficient communication with a two-way communication channel, that is, between the Government of Mexico (SRE) and the TAM. This channel would be implemented through an unstructured supplementary service data (USSD), combined with a short message...
system (SMS). These services can be used by those who have a simple or smart cell phone.

The Information and Assistance Center for Mexicans or CIAM would be the platform that would operate the CITAM Network, in the sense of taking advantage of the available resources. Most importantly, CIAM would have the ability to eventually operate the CITAM Network in the rest of the US, that is, if the pilot program in North Carolina is successful (see chapter Phases of Instrumentation of the CITAM Network).

The Network would have the capacity to provide information and attention in real time and with first-hand information, with inputs from the Consulate and, in turn, with information provided by civil organizations and government agencies. The information would include issues from labor rights to climatological emergencies and would be sent by SMS messages. In the meantime, the TAMs would have access to a list of topics of their interest, for instance, emergency numbers and government agencies, addresses of health centers and hospitals, among others, through the USSD system, that is, without the need to have access to the internet or a smartphone.

Finally, three options would be programmed to facilitate the access of the TAM to the Network: 1) by sending a text message from their cellular phone to activate an invitation that the CIAM would automatically send in order to be added to the Network; 2) communicating with the CIAM telephone number for their personnel to add them directly to the Network, and 3) including an option in the Integral System of Consular Administration and / or Comprehensive System of Consular Protection for the nationals interested in joining the Network, they would grant permission for CIAM to obtain their telephone numbers which would be added to the CITAM Network database.

**Costs**

According to the *ad hoc* analysis of the University of Duke, the implementation of a technology system to operate the CITAM Network could cost $1.00 dollar per 10 people to join or, in other words, $10,000.00 dollars per month with a capacity for 100,000 people. This option includes a programming of five options so that TAMs can select from their phones the type of information they require.

Despite being a high cost, the analysis did not consider possible savings that could be derived by using a platform that is already constituted through the CIAM. In this sense, it would not be necessary to hire a company for this purpose, but rather to add the USSD and SMS services to the CIAM platform. Also, since it is a project involving thousands of Mexicans who work directly or indirectly for transnational corporations (Phillips Morris, Alliance One, Reynolds, Smithfield Foods, Tyson, among others) that have to protect the rights of their employees, it could attract important sponsorships for its maintenance, with the understanding that it would not imply any type of influence in the design of the communication strategy of the SRE nor in the type of information that would be provided to the TAM.
Dissemination Measures

The success of the CITAM Network depends fundamentally on knowing that the TAMs are aware of this service and are able to access it. For this reason, the measures of diffusion to make the Network form a crucial part of the project.

The proposals that are included below are merely enunciates, for which the inputs for a greater and better diffusion will result in the success of its implementation.

I. To continue with the distribution of printed text material, it has the advantage of a low cost in addition to being widely distributed among the Mexican community. As a fact, this option has had a positive and relevant impact in the distribution of projects of the SRE, such as CIAM. For example, the distribution of printed materials done by the Consulate (supplemented with radio interviews), has had an impact on the number of calls the CIAM has received from residents of North Carolina: between January 2015 and April 2016 the CIAM received 6,005 calls, from only lower Arizona, California, and Texas. Thus, the distribution of printed materials to notify them about the CITAM Network would be a crucial element to ensure that a significant number of agricultural workers can benefit from the information that would be forwarded by CIAM.

II. To start a program of internships that the Consulate coordinates with young people or students interested in working with the TAM (this network as a first step, were included in the ad hoc analysis of University of Duke). A similar program of internships would meet two common objectives, provide information to the TAM about their rights and, at the same time, publicize the CITAM Network. Likewise, a program of this nature would give the Consulate the opportunity to work directly with other organizations that support young interns interested in helping the migrant. In this sense, the image that the Consulate would transmit to foreign agents would also be a valuable element, to know: that the project behind the CITAM Network is part of the mechanisms that the Government of Mexico and the SRE in particular have set in place to protect the interests of Mexicans abroad.

III. To include the CIAM telephone number in the passport hard covers. In this way, the TAM (and any other interested Mexican) would have the first-hand information necessary to join the CITAM Network through a text message. In the case of those who obtain a passport in national territory, the compatriots could initiate communication with the CIAM even before they entered the USA. Which would allow them to have valuable information prior to their arrival in the agricultural fields or any other programmed destination. It should be noted that the hard-cover of the passports issued at the Consulate may also have this information; this could benefit the TAMs that do not have a work visa (most of them are in North Carolina and in the United States).

IV. To request the support of the US Department of State to promote the CITAM Network to those applying for a temporary work visa in the US consulates in Mexico. One way to counteract the (unilateral) program implemented by the Government of the US for the hiring of temporary agricultural workers is to raise the possibility of collaborating with its non-consular network in Mexico in order
to provide information to avoid labor abuses and improper quotas and intimidation of contractors and to invite them be part of the CITAM Network.

V. To strengthen collaboration with migrant support organizations, particularly those operating in the border area, in order to provide timely information on the CITAM Network. This would have an impact primarily on Mexicans crossing the border without a visa.

**Phase of implementation**

The implementation of the CITAM project would consist of four phases, which would have their own measurement to determine the impact and consequently the pertinence of continuing with subsequent stages.

One of the impactful measurements would be the number of TAMs that would adhere to the Network during the first 12 months. Likewise, the number of NGOs and government agencies in or interested in collaborating with this project could be taken into account: in the case of government dependencies, the signing of a memorandum of understanding could be the most appropriate way of commencing a joint work (much will also depend on the relationship each Consulate of Mexico in the US maintains in its constituencies with public and private entities).

**Phase 1: Development of the CITAM Network**

This phase includes content design and outreach to other organizations and with government agencies to include them as partners for the development of the Network.

The SRE could determine, in addition to the design, content that it deems pertinent to share with the TAM and among the Mexican community in North Carolina. In the case of the information that would be shared with the TAMs, the Network could receive inputs from the Consulate and, they in turn, from organizations and government agencies wishing to collaborate with the project. For example, the NCDOL could share information on workshops and events for the TAMs, which would be sent through SMS.

**Phase 2: Pilot Plan**

In this phase, CIAM would perform direct tests with the system to determine its capacity. It can also include compatriots who are located in national territory and have a family relative in the USA (This would be useful for the design of a project in the medium or long term which would be to the benefit of compatriots who go and come to the USA every year).

Once the tests for the use of such a system were completed, the CITAM Network would be launched in North Carolina.

In this case, the Consulate could act as a bridge between the TAMs and the CIAM to coordinate with other civil organizations and government agencies to receive timely information on impactful issues for the TAMs, which would be forwarded to CIAM for inclusion in the USSD data system or to be sent via SMS.
The Department of Protection and Legal Affairs of the Consulate, may consolidate information provided by government agencies and civil organizations that are gathered with the effort to provide information for the TAMs. It would also be responsible for organizing the visits to the TAM fields and agricultural camps to distribute leaflets with information about CIAM and particularly with instructions as to how to be part of the CITAM Network.

As mentioned in the introduction of this design chapter, CIAM could monitor the demand of the users of the CITAM Network and, above all, the benefits obtained by the use of a semester survey for those who are part of the network. The measurement could be taken as a determinant to be continued in the third phase of the project.

**Phase 3: Expansion of the CITAM Network in the USA.**

A large part of the resources during Phase 3 could be used for dissemination in agricultural camps and fields throughout the American Union. The dissemination strategy of the Network would depend on each consular district—ultimately, the needs of The TAMs in North Carolina are different from that of TAM in Idaho or Oregon.

In addition, as part of the Network’s dissemination strategy, this phase would include a communication design to promote the Network among the Mexican community in the United States even if it is not the targeted population, the CITAM Network has the necessary elements to be transformed into a support platform that goes beyond the TAM.

As in phase 2, the CIAM could carry out technical measurements for a range that the CITAM Network has on the other side of North Carolina and also to determine its rationale to expand the Network outside the US, this is, like a final phase that this project could achieve.

**Phase 4 Expansion of the CITAM Network as a CIMx Global Network**

This stage is the prelude to bringing the CITAM Network a level beyond the TAMs and migrants in the USA: a step to launch the Global Interactive Communication Network with the Mexicans or CIMx Global Network, as a complementary tool for the Registration System for Mexicans Abroad (SIRME).

Subject to this concept being addressed in a later analysis, the CIMx Global Network would have the objective that any registered Mexican could receive SMS text messages with relevant information about where he is currently situated, including contact details of the Mexico Representation that corresponds to him in case of an emergency; this would avoid the need for the person to have to be connected to the internet.

This type of basic technology would also seek to save human resources when a significant number of people are in the same place, because in emergency situations such as earthquakes and hurricanes, telephone lines tend to become saturated. For this type of scenario, SMS messages can be more effective in providing valuable information to affected Mexicans.
Final Considerations

The CITAM Network represents a complementary consular protection tool that would strengthen the work of Consulate General in Raleigh in favor of the Mexican agricultural workers in North Carolina. This tool could reduce the isolation of the TAM and therefore their level of vulnerability, with the ultimate objective of increasing their standard of living.

The CITAM Network also has the potential to evolve to become an integral mechanism of protection for the Mexican community in the US and in the rest of the world.

No less important is the opportunity that the SRE has to include a communication strategy that allows it to keep the Mexican community informed about details that are considered relevant to share or that is of interest to the Mexican State to bring to the knowledge of its citizens residing abroad.

This proposal, more of a novel/new piece, recommends the use of a technology as a basic component of which virtually all the nationals can have access to. This would open a channel of interactive and massive communication with Mexicans outside Mexico, especially in the United States, and would lay solid foundations for the use of more advanced information technologies, (therefore more efficient) in the years to come, such as the MiConsulmex application.

The CITAM Network represents a two-way mechanism through which TAM and Mexicans in general may be connected to Mexico and especially with the country they have adopted as their second home.