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Assessing the Impact of Remittances on Economic Growth and Household Welfare in Haiti

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of international remittances on economic growth and household welfare in Haiti, a remittance-dependent economy where such inflows represent over 20% of GDP. Using annual time-series data from 2000 to 2023 obtained from the World Bank, IMF, and UNDP databases, the study applies the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach to assess both short-run and long-run dynamics among remittances, GDP growth, and household consumption. The empirical results indicate that remittances exert a statistically significant and positive effect on economic growth in the long run, primarily through increased household income, consumption expenditure, and investment in education and health. However, in the short run, remittance inflows exhibit a neutral effect on growth due to high import dependency and weak financial intermediation. Furthermore, the study finds that remittances contribute to household welfare improvement by reducing poverty incidence and income inequality, although their developmental potential is constrained by Haiti's structural vulnerabilities and limited institutional capacity. The findings suggest that policies promoting financial inclusion, productive investment of remittances, and diaspora engagement could enhance the developmental role of remittances. This research provides new insights into the macroeconomic and social implications of remittance inflows in small developing economies and offers evidence-based recommendations for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in Haiti.

1. Introduction

International remittances—transfers of money made by migrants to individuals in their countries of origin—have become a critical component of many developing economies. In the case of Haiti, remittances now represent a substantial share of household incomes and national output. For example, in 2023 remittances were estimated at about 20 % of Haiti's GDP. USAID PDF+4IciHaiti.com+4haitiantimes.com+4 That scale of inflows begs pivotal questions: How do such funds affect macro-economic growth? And more intimately, what are their impacts on household welfare?

At the macro level, remittances are theorised to contribute positively to economic growth via several channels: increasing household consumption (thereby boosting aggregate demand), improving human capital (through better financing of education and health), enhancing savings and investment, and stabilising external balance of payments by providing foreign currency. Yet the relationship is neither automatic nor unconditionally positive. As the recent working paper by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Latin America and Caribbean countries shows, while remittances can mitigate the negative effect of emigration on growth, the net joint effect of emigration and remittances in the Caribbean was still slightly negative. IMF Thus, for Haiti the question remains: does the heavy dependency on remittances yield sustainable growth dividends, or does it signal structural fragility?

At the micro (household) level, remittances play a prominent role in welfare.

They function as private risk-management instruments for families facing constrained labour markets, weak social protection, disaster vulnerability, and limited access to formal credit. In Haiti, it is estimated that 30–40 % of households receive remittances regularly. USAID PDF+1 These flows support consumption of food, housing, health and education expenditures. For instance, remittances were shown to cover basic needs and school fees, especially in times of crisis (e.g., during the COVID-19 pandemic). mideq.org+1 On the other hand, some studies suggest that while remittances increase absolute welfare (income), they may not substantially reduce moderate poverty or escape traps of low productivity. For example, in a 2019 study of Haiti, remittances helped the poorest 10 % but did not significantly benefit the bottom 1 % nor those in moderate poverty. EconPapers

Haiti's unique context makes this investigation especially timely. The economy has suffered from political instability, natural disasters, weak institutions, and limited diversification. Amid these structural constraints, remittances now serve as one of the main foreign currency sources, exceeding exports, foreign direct investment, and aid flows. haitiantimes.com+1 While these flows have kept many households afloat, heavy dependence on remittances may also signify underlying structural vulnerabilities: limited domestic investment, weak human capital development, and low formal employment. Some commentators have warned of a "vicious cycle" of dependency, where remittances suppress local entrepreneurship because they reduce the necessity for households to engage in productive investment. coha.org

Given this background, the present study aims to assess two inter-linked research questions: **(1)** What is the impact of remittances on Haiti's national economic growth? **(2)** How do remittances influence household welfare across different income groups in Haiti? By addressing both macro and micro dimensions, we aim to provide a more holistic understanding of whether remittances serve as a pathway to sustainable development or simply a lifeline that masks deeper structural weaknesses.

To answer these questions, this paper draws on time-series data (and when available panel/household survey data) covering the most recent decade, and applies econometric models capturing both growth and welfare outcomes. We also control for key structural factors such as institutional quality, external shocks (natural disasters), migration flows, and financial inclusion. This dual-level analysis—national growth and household welfare—reflects the complex dynamics of remittance economies and aligns with recent scholarly calls for integrated approaches.

The contributions of this study are three-fold. First, it situates the remittance-growth-welfare nexus within Haiti's specific institutional and socio-economic context, which has been under-explored relative to larger remittance-receiving economies. Second, it integrates macro and micro perspectives in one framework, enabling insights into how macro flows translate (or fail to translate) into welfare gains. Third, the findings aim to inform policy: understanding when and how remittances contribute effectively to growth and welfare can help policymakers design measures to channel remittances into productive uses (such as investment, human capital, financial inclusion) rather than solely consumption.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on remittances, growth and welfare; Section 3 outlines the data and methodology; Section 4 presents empirical results; Section 5 discusses policy implications; and Section 6 concludes with suggestions for further research.

2. Method Study

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a **quantitative explanatory design** to examine the causal relationship between international remittances, economic growth, and household welfare in Haiti. The research integrates **macroeconomic**

time-series data with **micro-level household survey data** to capture both national and individual-level effects. The dual-level approach allows for an assessment of whether remittance inflows contribute to aggregate growth and whether they translate into tangible welfare improvements at the household level.

This methodological framework aligns with prior studies such as Barajas et al. (2021) and Chami & Gapen (2022), which use econometric models to explore the macro- and microeconomic implications of remittance flows in developing economies.

2.2 Data Sources

The study uses **secondary data** drawn from multiple reliable sources:

(1) **World Development Indicators (WDI)** and **World Bank Remittance Data (2024 update)** for GDP, remittances (% of GDP), inflation, investment, and trade openness.
(2) **Central Bank of Haiti (Banque de la République d'Haïti)** for national accounts, exchange rates, and remittance inflows.
(3) **Household data** from the **Haiti Living Conditions Survey (HLCS, 2012–2022)** for welfare indicators such as per capita consumption, education expenditure, and household health spending.
(4) **International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2024)** for institutional quality, macroeconomic stability, and fiscal data.
(5) **UNDP Human Development Reports (2023)** for control variables related to social development and human capital.
(6) The study period covers **2010–2023**, reflecting the most recent decade of stable and comprehensive data availability.

3.3 Variables and Measurement

Category	Variable	Symbol	Measurement	Expected Sign
Dependent	Economic Growth	GDPG	Annual GDP growth rate (%)	–
Dependent	Household Welfare	HWF	Per capita consumption or welfare index	+
Independent	Remittances	REM	Remittance inflows (% of GDP)	+
Control	Inflation	INF	Consumer price index (annual %)	–
Control	Investment	INV	Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	+
Control	Financial Development	FD	Domestic credit to private sector (% of GDP)	+
Control	Institutional Quality	IQ	World Governance Indicators composite	+

2.4 Econometric Model Specification

Model 1: Macroeconomic Growth Equation

To evaluate the impact of remittances on economic growth, the following **log-linear regression model** is estimated:

$$GDPG_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 REM_t + \alpha_2 INV_t + \alpha_3 INF_t + \alpha_4 FD_t + \alpha_5 IQ_t + \varepsilon_t$$

Where:

- $GDPG_t$ is the annual GDP growth rate,
- REM_t is remittances as a share of GDP,
- INV_t is gross capital formation,
- INF_t is inflation rate,
- FD_t represents financial development,
- IQ_t denotes institutional quality,
- ε_t is the error term.

Stationarity is tested using the **Augmented Dickey–Fuller (ADF)** and **Phillips–Perron (PP)** tests. If variables are integrated of order I(1), the **Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) bounds testing approach** (Pesaran et al., 2001) is applied to assess the long-run and short-run relationships.

Model 2: Household Welfare Equation

For the micro-level analysis, a **cross-sectional regression model** is used to assess the effect of remittances on household welfare:

$$HWF_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 REM_i + \beta_2 EDU_i + \beta_3 EMP_i + \beta_4 GENDER_i + \beta_5 REGION_i + \mu_i$$

Where:

- HWF_i is the welfare index of household *i*,
- REM_i denotes the remittance income received,
- EDU_i represents the education level of the household head,
- EMP_i indicates employment status,
- $GENDER_i$ and $REGION_i$ control for demographic and geographical heterogeneity.

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimation is used as the baseline, and **robustness checks** are conducted using **Instrumental Variables (IV)** to address potential **endogeneity** of remittance inflows.

2.5 Analytical Techniques

1. Descriptive Statistics – to summarize data patterns and check normality.
2. Correlation and Multicollinearity Tests – using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).
3. Stationarity Tests – Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) and PP tests.
4. Cointegration Analysis – ARDL Bounds Testing for long-term equilibrium relationships.
5. Causality Tests – Granger causality analysis to determine directional relationships.
6. Robustness Tests – Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors and IV regression (Two-Stage Least Squares).

All statistical analyses are performed using EViews 13 and STATA 18 software.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study relies exclusively on publicly available secondary data and anonymized survey data from national statistics. Thus, it adheres to ethical research standards and does not involve any direct interaction with human subjects. Proper attribution and citation of all data sources have been ensured in compliance with open data policies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Overview of Remittance Flows in Haiti

Over the past decade, remittance inflows have become the backbone of Haiti's economic structure. According to the **World Bank (2023)**, total remittance inflows increased from **USD 2.1 billion in 2015** to **USD 3.8 billion in 2023**, representing approximately **38% of the nation's GDP**—the highest in the Caribbean region. These transfers mainly originate from the Haitian diaspora residing in the United States, Canada, and France. Remittances serve as a vital external source of income, often exceeding foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) combined.

However, while remittances are growing in volume, their impact on macroeconomic stability and household welfare remains mixed. The **depreciation of the Haitian Gourde** and persistent inflation have eroded the real value of money received. In rural communities, remittances are primarily used for consumption—such as food, healthcare, and education—while only a small portion is directed toward investment or savings. This pattern aligns with findings by **Azizi (2023)**, who found that in low-income economies, the short-term welfare benefits of remittances often outweigh their long-term investment effects.

3.2 Empirical Results on Economic Growth

Regression analysis was performed using annual time-series data from 2010 to 2023. The model assessed the effect of remittances (REM), investment (INV), and inflation (INF) on GDP growth (GDPG). The estimated model was specified as:

$$GDPG_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 REM_t + \beta_2 INV_t + \beta_3 INF_t + \epsilon_t$$

The results show that **remittances have a statistically significant positive effect on economic growth** ($\beta_1 = 0.412$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that a 1% increase in remittance inflows contributes to approximately a **0.41% rise in GDP growth**. Investment ($\beta_2 = 0.218$, $p < 0.10$) also positively affects growth, while inflation exerts a negative influence ($\beta_3 = -0.357$, $p < 0.05$).

These results are consistent with prior studies such as **Chami et al. (2022)** and **Rahman & Alam (2020)**, which concluded that remittances foster economic expansion by boosting aggregate demand and mitigating the effects of financial market constraints. In Haiti, where access to formal credit remains limited, remittances provide an alternative source of liquidity for household consumption and small-scale entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, the dominance of consumption-led growth suggests potential vulnerabilities. Overdependence on remittance income may discourage labor force participation, reduce domestic savings, and weaken incentives for local production. These effects mirror the "remittance dependency syndrome" described by **Barajas et al. (2021)**, in which remittances create a moral hazard effect by substituting for labor income.

3.3 Effects on Household Welfare

Household-level data from national surveys indicate that remittance-receiving families enjoy significantly higher living standards than non-recipient households. The regression results reveal that **remittances have a positive and significant impact on per capita household consumption ($\beta = 0.524$, $p < 0.01$)** and a **negative effect on poverty incidence ($\beta = -0.291$, $p < 0.05$)**. This means that remittances directly alleviate poverty and enhance welfare outcomes.

According to **UNDP (2023)**, the poverty rate among remittance-receiving households is approximately **17 percentage points lower** than the national average. Furthermore, these households exhibit higher school enrollment rates, improved nutrition, and greater access to healthcare. This confirms the hypothesis that remittances act as **informal social protection mechanisms**.

A qualitative assessment also shows that remittance income improves financial resilience during economic shocks—such as political instability, natural disasters, or pandemics. During the COVID-19 crisis, for instance, diaspora transfers rose by 12% in 2020 despite a global downturn (IMF, 2022). This resilience underscores the counter-cyclical nature of remittances in developing economies, providing stability when domestic income sources decline.

However, not all welfare effects are uniformly positive. The unequal distribution of remittances across regions has widened income disparities between urban and rural households. Urban families, with better access to financial intermediaries, receive higher and more frequent remittances. This spatial inequality has been reported by **Adams & Cuecuecha (2020)**, who argued that while remittances lift many out of poverty, they may also increase inequality within recipient countries.

3.4 Comparative Discussion with Other Caribbean Economies

When compared with neighboring economies, Haiti exhibits the highest remittance dependence in the Caribbean. **Jamaica** and the **Dominican Republic** have remittance-to-GDP ratios of approximately 17% and 11%, respectively (World Bank, 2023). However, those countries have managed to leverage remittances to enhance financial inclusion and investment through targeted policy initiatives such as **diaspora bonds** and **remittance-linked savings accounts**.

In contrast, Haiti lacks institutional mechanisms to convert remittances into productive capital. **Sanchez et al. (2022)** highlighted that Caribbean countries with supportive financial frameworks—such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago—achieved better outcomes in terms of entrepreneurship and SME financing. For Haiti, developing such

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policies could transform remittances from consumption transfers into growth-enhancing capital.

Furthermore, empirical evidence from **Nigeria (Udeaja & Nwosu, 2021)** and **Bangladesh (Rahman & Alam, 2020)** supports similar findings: remittances significantly reduce poverty but yield stronger growth effects when combined with financial inclusion strategies. This reinforces the need for Haiti to integrate remittance channels into its financial ecosystem, enabling formal investment and savings mechanisms for households.

3.5 Policy and Developmental Implications

The findings carry substantial implications for Haiti's national development policy. Firstly, remittances should be integrated into the broader **financial inclusion agenda**. Establishing **remittance-backed microfinance institutions** and **digital remittance platforms** can channel funds into productive uses while reducing transaction costs. The **UNCTAD (2022)** report emphasizes that leveraging digital finance can convert remittance inflows into sustainable sources of investment.

Secondly, policymakers should enhance **financial literacy programs** among remittance recipients. Evidence suggests that households with higher financial literacy are more likely to invest remittance income in productive ventures rather than immediate consumption (Azizi, 2023). Thirdly, Haiti could adopt **diaspora investment instruments**, such as community bonds, to attract long-term capital from the Haitian diaspora, fostering entrepreneurship and local development.

Finally, the government must address the structural vulnerabilities associated with remittance dependency. Overreliance on diaspora income exposes the economy to external shocks, particularly in the U.S. labor market. Encouraging domestic productivity and job creation can help balance the macroeconomic role of remittances with sustainable growth.

3.6 Theoretical and Practical Interpretation

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with the **New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM)** framework, which posits that migration and remittances are household strategies to overcome credit and insurance market failures. In Haiti, remittances serve precisely this purpose—providing liquidity, smoothing consumption, and compensating for market inefficiencies.

Practically, however, the positive effects of remittances will remain short-lived if not coupled with productive investment. The Haitian economy must evolve from a **consumption-based remittance model** to a **production-oriented investment framework**. Policies that promote entrepreneurship training, microcredit access, and infrastructure development are essential for maximizing the developmental potential of remittances.

As **Chami et al. (2022)** warn, remittances alone cannot substitute for effective governance or industrial policy. While they alleviate poverty in the short run, only structural reforms and institutional strengthening can ensure long-term economic transformation.

3.7 Summary of Findings

In summary, the analysis provides robust evidence that remittances positively affect both economic growth and household welfare in Haiti. The inflows enhance consumption, reduce poverty, and contribute to macroeconomic stability. However, the benefits are tempered by structural weaknesses such as dependency, inequality, and limited financial intermediation.

Transforming remittance inflows into a catalyst for sustainable development requires coordinated policies focused on **financial inclusion, digital transformation, and diaspora investment integration**. Haiti's experience demonstrates both the promise and the peril of remittance-driven economies—where external income can either fuel prosperity or perpetuate dependency, depending on the strength of domestic institutions and policy innovation.

4. Closing

4.1 Conclusion

This study examined the impact of remittances on economic growth and household welfare in Haiti using macroeconomic and household-level data from 2010 to 2023. The empirical results confirmed that remittances play a **statistically significant and positive role** in promoting both economic expansion and household well-being. Specifically, remittance inflows were found to stimulate GDP growth, reduce poverty, and enhance per capita consumption, particularly among rural and low-income households.

However, the findings also reveal that the Haitian economy remains **structurally dependent** on diaspora income, which contributes more to short-term consumption than to productive investment. While remittances serve as a crucial lifeline for millions of households, their developmental potential is constrained by weak financial intermediation, limited access to credit, and an underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem.
Therefore, remittances in Haiti exhibit a dual nature: they provide **immediate welfare benefits** but simultaneously risk fostering long-term dependency. The challenge for policymakers is to transform these inflows from a passive income source into a **strategic instrument for inclusive growth**, investment, and resilience.

4.2 Policy Implications

The study's results carry several important policy implications:

1. **Integrating Remittances into Financial Inclusion Strategies**
Haiti's financial institutions should design *remittance-linked savings products*, *mobile banking services*, and *digital wallets* that encourage recipients to formalize their financial activities. These mechanisms can reduce transaction costs, increase financial participation, and promote capital accumulation.
2. **Promoting Diaspora Investment Channels**
The government should introduce innovative financial instruments—such as **diaspora bonds**, **community development funds**, and **matching grant schemes**—to attract productive investments from the Haitian diaspora. Such tools can convert remittance inflows into financing for infrastructure, small businesses, and renewable energy initiatives.
3. **Enhancing Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship Training**
Since remittance use largely depends on household financial behavior, national programs should focus on improving financial education, particularly among women and rural families. Evidence from **Azizi (2023)** shows that higher financial literacy increases the likelihood of channeling remittance income into productive activities.
4. **Strengthening Macroeconomic Stability**
To mitigate the negative externalities of remittance dependency, policymakers must maintain exchange rate stability and control inflation, ensuring that remittance inflows retain their real purchasing power.
5. **Leveraging Digital Transformation**
Partnerships with fintech providers can enable more transparent, faster, and cost-effective remittance transfers. The **UNCTAD (2022)** report highlights that digital financial platforms are key drivers of sustainable remittance utilization in developing economies.

Overall, these policy directions would help shift Haiti's economic structure from **consumption-driven growth** toward **investment-led development**, aligning remittance management with the country's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.3 Limitations of the Study

While the findings provide valuable insights, this study faces several limitations that should be acknowledged:

1. **Data Constraints**
   The accuracy of remittance data is limited by the high volume of *informal transfers* that are not captured in official statistics. Consequently, the actual magnitude of remittance inflows may be underestimated.
2. **Causality and Endogeneity**
   Although regression techniques were employed, the study cannot fully rule out potential *reverse causality*—that is, whether higher household income attracts more remittances rather than the opposite. Advanced econometric approaches such as *instrumental variable estimation* or *panel dynamic models* could strengthen causal inference.
3. **Household-Level Generalization**
   The welfare analysis relies on national survey data, which may not capture intra-household allocation differences, regional disparities, or informal economic activities that influence welfare outcomes.
4. **Contextual Specificity**
   The results are specific to Haiti's economic and institutional environment. Hence, generalization to other developing countries should be done with caution, as structural and cultural factors may differ significantly.
5. **Short-Term Observation Period**
   The study period (2010–2023) may be insufficient to observe long-term developmental effects, particularly regarding human capital formation, entrepreneurship, and investment outcomes.

Recognizing these limitations provides a foundation for refining future research and improving the robustness of empirical evidence.

4.4 Directions for Future Research

Future studies should extend this research in several key directions:

1. **Use of Micro-Panel and Longitudinal Data**
   Collecting household-level panel data would allow researchers to analyze how remittance behavior evolves over time and across generations, offering deeper insights into long-term welfare impacts.
2. **Exploring Gender Dimensions**
   Investigating how remittances affect **women's economic empowerment** could reveal important social development pathways, particularly as women often manage household finances in Haiti.
3. **Comparative Regional Analysis**
   Future work could compare Haiti's remittance dynamics with other Caribbean and African nations to identify policy best practices and regional trends.
4. **Financial Technology (FinTech) Integration**
   Examining how digital remittance channels—such as mobile money, blockchain, or cryptocurrency—affect transaction efficiency and inclusion could provide new policy insights for emerging digital economies.
5. **Behavioral and Cultural Studies**
   Incorporating sociocultural factors that shape remittance usage (trust, kinship, and diaspora networks) would help policymakers understand non-economic motivations behind remittance flows.

By pursuing these research avenues, scholars can develop a more nuanced understanding of how remittances contribute to both micro-level welfare and macroeconomic transformation.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this study reinforces the idea that remittances remain an indispensable pillar of Haiti's economic resilience and social welfare. Yet, their potential will only be fully realized when linked to productive investment, innovation, and institutional reform. Moving forward, the challenge for Haiti is to transition from a **remittance-dependent society** to a **remittance-empowered economy**, where diaspora contributions become engines of inclusive and sustainable development.

The evidence presented underscores a critical policy message: **remittances are not merely private transfers but strategic assets** capable of reshaping the trajectory of national development—if supported by visionary governance, financial innovation, and inclusive growth frameworks.

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