As we gathered over lunch at the Diaspora, Sustainability, and Development: Meeting at the Nexus conference, we challenged ourselves to reflect on and discuss three key questions:

- diaspora as agents of change – what does this mean to you?
- what is at the nexus between diaspora, sustainability, and development?
- what can we do to advance and harness the power of this nexus?

What followed was a lunch hour filled with thoughtful and spirited discussions, where people shared their personal experiences, their insights, and their opinions. The conversations flowed around key areas, including who the diaspora is and the role they play and the change they can and do bring about in society. The following provides an overarching summary of these discussions.

DEFINING DIASPORA

The definition of diaspora was discussed and challenged, with some noting that there is an unsettled understanding of the term ‘diaspora.’ Some noted that certain groups do not define themselves as diaspora, while others wondered if their heritage counted them among the diaspora or not, and whether it even should. Though nation-to-nation movement is often referred to when discussing diaspora, some felt that diaspora as a term could be widened to include displaced or unsettled people and groups within a country. There were also discussions around how regional and cultural differences inside countries challenge certain groups of diaspora. The sheer diversity of diaspora was also discussed in relation to how that effects both, the type and impact of change they effect.

DIASPORA AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Though the range in their impact and their activities seems to depend on the individual person and the group, and how the term diaspora is defined, many discussed how the diaspora can and do effect change and impact sustainability and development. For example, there were discussions about how the diaspora could serve the communities they are involved in, through building a sense of belonging and providing a forum for discussion.
The idea that those in diaspora could safeguard, foster, and share their culture, values, and ideas was reflected upon. It was noted that, through bringing in and providing inter/multi-cultural perspectives to others, they could not only educate others, but also provide input into development and sustainability topics. Importantly, as the diaspora have an innate understanding of their original community, some felt that this knowledge could be used to inform development initiatives and potentially become the bridge or connection between cultures. As they bring in a diversity of skills and ideas, such as related to development and cultural sustainability, some felt this could potentially be leveraged in change making activities.

**CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS REGARDING DIASPORA AS AGENTS OF CHANGE**

The discussion of what change would look like and what change means was also dominant throughout the lunch session. Some noted that not all change is necessarily an ‘improvement,’ and that some groups could inadvertently or overtly entrench inequality through effecting change in a certain direction or undermining change altogether. Further, some noted that some groups in diaspora may be resistant to change or ideas, or impose their own ideas to the detriment of others. Others had the discussion as to whether it was opportunistic or fair to expect the diaspora to become involved in change.

There were also personal challenges noted. There were discussions around the tensions some feel between their identities, and the impact that has on belonging or not belonging in certain context. These identities and feelings of belonging were said to impact decision-making around activities and use of time, including whether to provide remittances, what activities to become involved in, and feelings about how that would be perceived by others.

As the lunch wound down, some discussions shifted to reflecting on questioning who is involved in change making activities, how are they involved, and whether or not they want to be involved, and how diaspora can and does change over time and over generations. The differing power and privilege between and within diaspora was noted, with reflection on historical and current power imbalances impacting who can and does effect change today, with certain groups seen as more connected to government groups, with the potential accompanying power differential. As all these issues were reflected upon, people wondered how all different types of people and groups in diaspora could become connected and how they could become involved in effecting change in society.