

Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping Our Trans-Local Potential for Change (2010-2012)

Executive Summary

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the potential of diaspora from the Global South to impact the development of their country of attachment. These communities are a formidable, often unrecognized, and largely untapped resource in raising awareness of international issues, mobilizing and facilitating engagement in development discussion and action, increasing understanding of international development policies and practice, and casting light on cultural and identity issues of today's transnationals. While diaspora-driven development is often carried out informally, new opportunities for local development in developing nations are taking root through the power of trans-local leaders operating globally and acting locally.

From July 2010 to February 2012, SFU International Development and the Centre for Sustainable Community Development at Simon Fraser University (SFU), with support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), led an innovative public engagement project entitled *Engaging Diaspora for Development: Tapping Our Trans-local Potential for Change (EDD)*. The goal of the project was to increase active awareness and global citizenship in support of Canada's contribution to the development of a more secure, equitable, and prosperous world.

This was achieved through the establishment of a stakeholder network of organizations and individuals. Informed by the findings of an environmental scan of current diaspora-driven development in Metro Vancouver, SFU engaged this network to convene a series of five public dialogues based on the UN Millennium Development Goals and structured around powerful stories of trans-local experiences in the areas of poverty reduction, health, education, human insecurity and peacebuilding, and diasporic contributions to development. Through these dialogues, parallel research, and engaging our network, we identified priorities for learning for a series of five workshops for trans-local leaders. Concomitantly, the powerful personal narratives of diaspora-led development experiences uncovered through the project were compiled into a book of stories called *Diaspora Voices*.

Participants' feedback from the EDD dialogues and workshops, revealed: (1) a need for a space for diaspora stories and experiences; (2) an appreciation for the new partnerships that were forged and knowledge of diasporas that are making a difference; (3) an increased motivation to continue addressing the challenges of their development initiatives; (4) an increase in support and shared values; (5) strong opinions that there is inadequate institutional and financial support dedicated to harnessing diaspora potential; (6) a desire for greater public, government, and university recognition and support – individually and collectively; and (7) a need for established organizations such as SFU and CIDA to take a leadership role and build on the momentum.

For project details, please visit the EDD website at: <http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/>