
Report on Dialogue 1:

Innovations in Poverty Reduction and Economic Development

January 19, 2011, 6:30 - 8:30 PM

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street

1: Overview

On January 19, 2011 the Engaging Diasporas in Development (EDD) convened the first in its series of five public dialogues. 150 participants attended the dialogue.

Agenda

The dialogue was entitled *Innovations in Poverty Reduction and Economic Development* and the agenda (see Appendix 1) covered three core themes:

- (1) responding to basic needs through grassroots mobilizations,
- (2) business and economic development, and
- (3) tapping the potential: learning from the diaspora.

In order to frame the dialogue participants and members of the public were provided access to a background paper -- *Poverty and What to Do About It: A Briefing* -- prepared for the dialogue, by Dr. John Harriss, Director, School for International Studies at SFU (see Appendix 2).

Media

The poverty briefing paper was part of a series of six blogs that were posted on the Vancouver Observer site (see Appendix 3).

There were several members of the media present, including Kathleen Flaherty, who is recording all five sessions for the CBC Ideas series. In addition, Radio Canada conducted interviews of francophone diaspora participants.

The event was webcast and a video recording of the event is available on the website – http://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/event_poverty_reduction.htm. In addition, there was a live Twitter feed - @SFU_Diaspora

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Summary of Proceedings

The dialogue was moderated by CBC radio personality Margaret Gallagher. Project co-director Dr. Joanna Ashworth and academic lead Dr. James Busumtwi-Sam provided introductions, with Dr. Ashworth providing background information on the project while Dr. Busumtwi-Sam drawing attention to some conceptual considerations underlying discussions of diaspora and development.



The first substantive session of the dialogue focused on “responding to basic needs through grassroots mobilization.” After a brief introduction to the topic by the moderator, three ‘storytellers’ shared their experiences with the assembled participants.



The first, Kaye Kerlande, shared her experience as a second generation Canadian of Haitian decent and her struggle to formulate a meaningful response to the overwhelming disaster that befell Haiti in January of 2010.

The second storyteller, Sumana Wijeratna, described how she, as a Sri Lankan immigrant to Canada, is able to leverage her local knowledge, networks and experience in both Canada and Sri Lanka to affect positive change through her work as a development project manager and community organizer.



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Finally, Lorie Corcuera of ENSPIRE shared her experiences in organizing with other members of the Filipino diaspora and partnering with an organization in that country to create long-term housing solutions for low income and marginalized families in Manila.

The floor was then opened to dialogue among participants. The first session closed with a response from SFU professor of Communications Dr. June Francis, who drew together cross-cutting themes that connected the three women's stories and comments from other participants. Professor Francis highlighted the ways in which being members of the diaspora informed participants' perspectives on development and their ability and willingness to actively redress poverty and deprivation.



The second session of the dialogue addressed “business as economic development.” It began with opening comments from the moderator, after which two ‘storytellers’ conveyed their experiences. The first was Miriam Egwalu, an immigrant to Canada from Uganda. Ms. Egwalu shared her experience of returning to her country of origin only to find a depth and extent of poverty that she had hitherto not fully appreciated. She explained how she began directly supporting a local woman without much hope of engendering any lasting improvement in the woman's situation. When she returned one year later she found the woman's life (and those of the children in her care) to have been significantly and enduringly improved. She went on to explain how this inspired her to continue

directly engaging with children and adults in Uganda to help them access education and establish small businesses.

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The second storyteller was Antonio Arreaga, Honorary Consul of Costa Rica in Vancouver. Mr. Arreaga related to the dialogue participants a number of sector-specific examples whereby “Canadian know-how” was “tropicalized” to improve the performance of Central American businesses. Furthermore, he pointed out how these connections also helped generate jobs in Canada and were of mutual benefit to all parties.



The session closed with a wide-ranging dialogue involving numerous participants. Topics included the transfer of market knowledge from Canada to developing countries, the effectiveness of small-scale projects, direct support to individuals and the specific challenges facing diaspora youth.

The dialogue closed with comments from SFU professor of History and Latin American Studies, Alexander Dawson. Professor Dawson invoked the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 5) to highlight the responsibility of countries like Canada to address poverty wherever it is found. In so doing, he cautioned the dialogue participants to avoid placing responsibility for poverty reduction at the feet of the diaspora. While acknowledging the specific knowledge and skills that diasporas bring to bear, Professor Dawson expressed discomfort with references to “home” and the question “where are you from?” He encourage the dialogue participants to avoid emphasizing the specific to the exclusion of the general, and asked what role the diaspora might play in affecting policy change both here in Canada and in the developing countries with which they identify.



2: Key themes and topics of discussion

Throughout the course of the dialogue numerous themes emerged. Participants drew upon a diversity of experiences and backgrounds to inform discussions that branched out from the core themes of the dialogue in a variety of directions. The following highlights storyteller, respondent and participant contributions to the discussion.

The Trans-local

One of the core concepts being explored through the EDD Project in that of “translocality” or ‘being’ and ‘acting’ in multiple locations simultaneously. One of the dialogues storytellers, Sumana Wijeratna, made implicit reference to this phenomenon while discussing her desire to make use of her networks and local knowledge in Sri Lanka while working in Canada. Another storyteller, Antonio Arreaga, spoke about “building bridges” between Canada and Central America, emphasizing the two-way nature of traffic on those bridges. Umeeda Switlo of CUSO-VSO noted that, while all members of the diaspora might experience the sense of connection to another place, each chooses his or her own way to engage with that connection. Finally, in his closing remarks, Professor Alexander Dawson downplayed the value of the word “home” while suggesting the possibility that members of the diaspora are from “here” and “there” at the same time.

Being Canadian Informs Views on Development

Professor June Francis characterized the situation of the diaspora in the developed world as being surrounded by plenty while all too aware of the poverty that exists elsewhere. She too suggested that the diaspora are a bridge between these two realities and that “[the diaspora] strengthen and are strengthened by being Canadian.” Having grown up amidst the Canadian plenty that Professor Francis described, Lorie Corcuera described the ways in which her parents—themselves immigrants from the Philippines—instilled in her the notion that she was very privileged and that others were not so lucky. She credited her ongoing concern for the world’s poor to these early lessons. On the other hand, as an adult immigrant to Canada, Sumana Wijeratna was already well aware of the conditions in her country of origin (Sri Lanka). She described the challenge of introducing the “Canadian way of working” to her partners in Sri Lanka, whilst not impeding their ability to act independently.

Others highlighted how ‘being Canadian’ or perhaps ‘being Western’ might misinform one’s view on development. Hawa Mire of Point Youth Media pointed out that Westerners who desire to “get involved” with development often do so with preconceived notions of what development is and what the outcomes should be. In her view, this approach undermines the agency of those who become the objects of development. This is also true for the diaspora. James Kamau of Youth Initiative Canada re-emphasized Ms. Mire’s point by suggesting that, when people in the diaspora go back

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to do work in their “home countries, they should go as students, not as teachers.” He went on to challenge the notions of “knowledge transfer from here to there” and reminded the dialogue participants to respect that “diasporas have local knowledge.”

Diasporas Affecting Development in Canada

In his welcoming comments, Professor James Busumtwi-Sam pointed out the sometimes-neglected fact that diaspora activities overseas affect development in Canada. He referred to a “looping effect” that several subsequent comments from dialogue participants illustrated. Sumana Wijeratna, for example, suggested that the work she and her husband do in raising money for projects and initiatives in Sri Lanka has the effect of promoting unity among the Sri Lankan diaspora in Canada. Lorie Corcuera noted that ENSPIRE sends Canadian students to volunteer in the Philippines, which at one and the same time contributes to meaningful development projects in that country while engaging young people and increasing interest in development initiatives here in Canada. Antonio Arreaga noted that many of the efforts to promote business development in Central America that he is involved with create jobs in Canada. Finally, in his closing comments, Professor Alexander Dawson asked what role diasporas here in Canada might play in changing Canadian policies with regard to our country’s role in maintaining a global system characterized by inequality.

Small Scale Development

A recurrent theme throughout the dialogue was the effectiveness of small-scale diaspora-led development initiatives. One of the evening’s storytellers, Miriam Egwalu, recounted a touching story of providing a Ugandan woman with several children under her care 100 dollars to open a shop. She recalled a having a degree of pessimism herself that such a small sum of money could make any lasting difference in the lives of that woman and the children. One year later she reconnected with the woman and found her running a successful small business and sending the children to school. She has taken it upon herself to support one or two women each year in a similar fashion and her teenaged daughter works to sponsor one Ugandan child every month to buy a new school uniform.

Amos Kambere of Umoja Compassion Society described a micro-finance system set up by his organization that, with a humble capital base of one thousand dollars, has provided loans to 30 Tanzanian women in three years. He recalled how his son had raised 1000 dollars through dance events to build a mess hall for children in Uganda. He contrasted projects like these with large-scale projects funded by organizations like CIDA, which, in his opinion, funnel money to bureaucrats and officials while achieving very little in terms of improving the lives of the poor.

Another example of small-scale development initiatives was provided by Sumana Wijeratna, whose son raised 500 dollars and inspired a matching donation from the Sri

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Lankan community in Vancouver to provide clean drinking water to 15 families in Sri Lanka. A volunteer with the African Canadian Continuing Education Society spoke about buying a sewing machine for a woman in Kenya and being surprised when she parlayed that assistance into a successful small business.

Kaye Kerlande shared with the dialogue participants her plans to set up a small micro-finance project to provide 50-dollar loans for small commerce activity to Haitian women. At the same time, Professor June Francis highlighted the importance of remittances and called diasporas “the original micro-financers.” Professor Francis noted that in Jamaica, remittances account for 13% of the country’s GDP.

Toward the end of the dialogue, James Kamau raised an important drawback of having so many small initiatives. With so many organizations within the diaspora doing such similar things, there is a lack of interconnection and instead of being partners in development these organizations often become competitors. If they came together as a collective, he suggested, they might be more successful in accessing funding from organizations like CIDA.

The Importance of Local Partners

In sharing their experiences, several of the dialogue participants made reference to their strong partnerships in the countries wherein their development work takes place. Lorie Corcuera called her organization’s partnership with a Filipino NGO “essential” and noted that it was this partnership that allowed them to focus in a high needs area and carry out a long-term plan to relocate several families. Sumana Wijeratna spoke of the importance of her partners who “share the same vision” and pointed out that in today’s world, communication is no barrier to partnerships. Dr. Mohammad Iqbal of the Maria-Helena Foundation indicated that his informal partnerships with local “strong men” (land owners, etc.) were essential to overcoming resistance from local Mullahs to using mosques as classrooms for co-education.

Two non-diaspora development practitioners, one with a project in Liberia and another involved with the African Canadian Continuing Education Society, highlighted the importance of having local people as partners. The latter gentleman recounted his organization’s move away from having a Canadian representative on the ground in Kenya to having an entirely Kenyan administration team. This not only spoke to the “credibility of the organization” in Kenya, but also served to bolster the credibility of the organization in Canada, particularly in the eyes of potential donors.

Promoting Business Development from a Canadian Perspective

Professor June Francis contextualized the discussion of business promotion for development by pointing out that businesses don’t just create jobs, they create dignity: people who work for a living have greater self-esteem and a stronger sense of self-worth. The diaspora, she noted, are in a particularly strong position to promote business

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development in developing countries. Professor Francis highlighted the example of the Indian diaspora in the United States and its role in the IT boom that has been such an important factor in India's recent economic growth. She pointed out that diaspora have intimate knowledge of the markets in at least two localities, and can therefore overcome what marketers refer to as "the liability of foreignness." She illustrated this point with two examples: a spa in St. Lucia and a handicraft business in Jamaica. In both cases local entrepreneurs and producers lacked sufficient knowledge of the demands of their potential customers (primarily north American tourists). Through guidance from tourists themselves, both businesses were able to refine their products and better serve their customers wants. Though not strictly an example of diasporas promoting development, these stories do illustrate the potential for diasporas to play a bridging role in facilitating the flow of information and overcoming market failures.

Antonio Arreaga provided numerous examples of initiatives he had been involved with that aimed to "tropicalize Canadians know-how." These initiatives were intended to improve the management and performances of Central American businesses through the dissemination of best practices honed in Canada. Some involved training and skills development for hoteliers and tourism operators in Central America. Mr. Arreaga also spoke of an ICBC-sponsored initiative to promote road sense in Central America (where the rate of traffic accidents is very high). As a member of the diaspora in Canada, Mr. Arreaga has been acting as a conduit for the transfer of knowledge, and he is quick to point out that this transfer is by no means unidirectional.

Family

Several participants noted the importance of family. Kaye Kerlande highlighted the importance of family for members of the diaspora raised outside of the "home country". For her, her mother and grandmother acted as cultural teachers and it was their teachings that allowed her to "evolve" and "be [her]self." This knowledge and the collaboration she has developed with her sister empower her to make meaningful efforts to help the country with which she identifies (Haiti). As noted above, Umeeda Switlo raised the point that, although all the members of her family feel a connection to the diaspora and an interest in supported development overseas, each individual acts in her own way. Professor June Francis characterized the diaspora connection as a "gift that keeps on giving": the connection continues from generation to generation.

Empowering Women

Although the dialogue did not explicitly focus on issues specific to women, all but one of the evening story tellers were women and several of the stories and comments heard throughout the evening highlighted the role of women in development. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, founder of the Maria-Helena Foundation, shared his organization's experience with supplying bicycles to female teachers in Pakistan. He pointed out that in Pakistan it can be difficult and indeed dangerous for women to travel independently between

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villages. Bicycles allowed these women to overcome these challenges. Dr. Iqbal also shared the experience of another organization working in Morocco to promote adult education for women. He highlighted the importance of employing female teachers in order to temper resistance from conservative circles.

Challenges Facing Young People

Towards the end of the dialogue two participants brought forward their concerns regarding younger members of the diaspora. Hawa Mire, a co-founder of Point Youth Media, noted that many young people have different views and perspectives on development. Many young people, in her view, are looking for ways to connect with the diaspora and to “get involved.” James Kamau, founder of Youth Initiative Canada, picked up on this point and argued that many young people face negative perceptions when they try to engage with development issues. According to Mr. Kamau, young people often have difficulty accessing funding in many cases because the stipulations and conditions attached to funding are inherently exclusive of young people. For example, some funding agencies require that applicants already have substantial funding in place before their application for further funding is approved.

Recognizing Diaspora Contributions to Development

A major objective of the dialogue and the EDD project is to highlight and bring recognition to the contributions members of the diaspora make to international development. Shaheen Nanji, co-director of the project, identified “sharing the stories” as the first step in achieving better recognition and support. Professor June Francis noted that a great deal of change has already occurred in that regard. She recalled having raised the issue of diasporas to a CIDA conference some 20 years ago only to be greeted with silence. The dialogue, in her view, was testament to how much has changed. At the close of the dialogue, however, Professor Dawson posed a challenging question: by focusing on the role of diasporas, are we transferring responsibility for development and poverty alleviation away from humanity as a whole and the rich world in particular and on to the shoulders of the diaspora?

3: Feedback

Dialogue participants were asked to provide feedback to the project team. The feedback cards asked:

- (1) ‘How did you hear about the dialogue?’,
- (2) ‘What are the most important ideas that you are taking away with you tonight?’,
- (3) ‘What would you have liked to see addressed but did not?’,
- (4) ‘Do you have any recommendations for future dialogues?’ and
- (5) ‘Comments’.

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The following will summarize feedback to questions 2, 3, 4 and 5.

What are the most important ideas that you are taking away with you tonight?

The most common response to this question (9 responses) indicated that the most important idea participants came away with was that individuals can make important impacts on development and/or that promoting development is “easier than I thought.” The next most common response (3 responses) related to James Kamau’s comment that members of the diasporas should “go as students, not as teachers.” Two participants each listed the most important ideas as being ‘diasporas are not solely responsible for development in their home countries’, ‘Canada’s policies and practices contribute to creating poverty’, ‘the importance of dialogue and creating space/using IT for sharing ideas’, ‘go around governments to reach people/listen to people to overcome inefficiencies in aid’, ‘recognizing the contribution of diasporas’ and ‘new ideas/connecting to the diaspora to help my own project’. Other responses included “there is a lot of potential in Vancouver”, “the power of diversity”, “How can the potential of diasporas be directed in a focused way?”, “questions about place/trans-locality”, “the exchange of business ideas”, “the important work of SFU in engaging diasporas”, “what can be done in the global south without giving money?” and “diasporas create bridges. Development is two-way.” An additional comment stated that the “goals were unclear”.

What would you have liked to see addressed but did not?

The most common responses to this question (4 responses) surrounded the question of “how to proceed” or how to “achieve goals.” Two participants each responded that they would have liked to hear more about macro-level development rather than micro-projects, that smaller group discussions organized according to region of focus would have been helpful, how groups can connect, support and benefit from each other outside of large forums like the dialogue and how to affect policy change in developing countries. Other responses included ‘the problems faced by diaspora groups in Vancouver’, ‘have any of these initiatives lead to institutional or systemic change in Canada or developing countries?’, ‘what does it mean to live translocally?’, ‘how can NGOs connect to diasporas’, ‘more in-depth analysis of diaspora’ activities’, ‘the language of “mainstream Canada” vs. diasporas was polarizing’ and ‘how to foster diaspora connections’.

Recommendations for future dialogues

Dialogue participants produced a diverse set of recommendations. Two participants recommended that more time be allocated for non-scheduled participation. Another two suggested that the project team overbook the room further to anticipate no-shows. One participant recommended a workshop on the logistics of aid projects, while another

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recommended workshops on “capacity building.” On the other hand, one participant recommended less emphasis on projects and more on macro policies while another recommended a more critical discussion. One participant recommended that future dialogues be longer while another recommended that more time be given to academics. One recommendation was that a more balanced and diverse set of viewpoints on development should be heard and that the participants should be a more diverse group. One participant recommended establishing a forum for diaspora activists in the lower mainland and another that the next dialogue should address ‘how we can benefit from each other’s experience.’ One recommendation was that at the next dialogue, representatives from funding agencies should be on hand to connect with people who have projects in need of funding. A recommendation came from one participant to raise awareness of organizations involved in micro-finance and another that discussions should focus on diasporas and private sector development. Another suggested that the UN-style conference room was too intimidating and that a more humble setting would be preferable. A participant recommended that paper use could be reduced if program details were all made available online and another recommended that discussions of politics, personal beliefs and religion should be avoided.

Comments

Comments from participants were overwhelmingly positive, with 10 of 15 comments containing some form of ‘thank you’ or ‘job well done’ statement. Other comments included appreciation for the closing comments presented by Professor Alexander Dawson, an appeal for more attention to “social enterprise” and “fair trade”, a request for contact information from members of the diaspora, a request for more discussion time and a recommendation that the discussion be “more diaspora specific”.

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Appendix I: Agenda



SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD

ENGAGING DIASPORA in development

Tapping Our Trans-local Potential for Change
www.sfu.ca/diasporas

Dialogue Program Innovations in Poverty Reduction and Economic Development

Moderated by: Margaret Gallagher, CBC Radio
January 19, 2011, 6:30 - 8:30 PM, followed by a reception
SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, 580 West Hastings Street



Photo courtesy of: VanLanka Community Foundation

Project Co-Directors

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Centre for Sustainable Community Development, SFU

Shaheen Nanji
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Department of Political Science, SFU

Alexander Dawson
Dept of History/Latin American Studies, SFU

John Harriss,
School of International Studies, SFU

Joe Knockaert
Former Director of CIDA, Pacific Region

Umeeda Switlo
CUSO-VSO

Artist: **Melanie Schambach**
Graphic Design: **Franciska Hidayat**
Project Coordinator: **Mignon Alphonso**
Researcher: **Douglas Olthof**
CUSO-VSO Intern: **Rolando Abando**
Music: **Vanessa Richards**

www.sfu.ca/diasporas

Dialogue Purpose

This dialogue is part of an ongoing public engagement series that examines the unique role of the diaspora resident in Vancouver who are committed financially and personally to development activities in the global south. Diaspora-driven development efforts have a powerful impact in the global south that reverberates here in Metro Vancouver. While often informal or grassroots, these initiatives demonstrate the benefits and unique strengths of the diaspora – cultural awareness of communities of origin and residence, fluency working in dual cultures, awareness of local issues and concerns (trans-local), and long-term personal commitment to projects and communities.

This dialogue foregrounds the innovative ways diaspora-driven initiatives are contributing to poverty reduction and economic development.

Program

6:30 pm Welcome, Setting the Stage for Dialogue on Diaspora in Development

- **Margaret Gallagher**, CBC Radio Moderator
- **James Busumtwi-Sam**, Associate Professor of Political Science, Simon Fraser University
- **Joanna Ashworth & Shaheen Nanji**, Project Co-Directors, Simon Fraser University

Dialogue: What brings you here?

Responding to Basic Needs Through Grassroots Mobilization

- **Kaye Kerlande**, Hearts Hands Minds for Haiti – Emergency Response in Haiti
- **Sumana Wijeratna**, VanLanka Community Foundation – Grassroots Community Development in Sri Lanka
- **Lorie Corcuera**, Enspire Foundation – Housing in the Philippines

Dialogue: Sharing Experiences of Diaspora in Development; What is the unique position of the diaspora to engage in innovative poverty reduction initiatives?

Respondent: **June Francis**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, Simon Fraser University

Business as Economic Development

- **Miriam Megwalu**, Investing in Small Business in Northern Uganda
- **Antonio Arreaga**, Connecting Across Sectors and Networks in Latin America

Dialogue: What are the potential benefits of diaspora business ventures in the economic well-being of Canada and communities in the Global South?

Final Reflections: Tapping the Potential: Learning from the Diaspora

Respondent: **Alexander Dawson**, Associate Professor, Department of History and Director, Latin American Studies, Simon Fraser University

8:30 pm Adjourn/Reception in Atrium

Note: This program is being photographed and videotaped. Please notify one of our organizers if you do not wish to be photographed or/and videotaped.

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Canadian International Development Agency



Agence canadienne de développement international



Canada

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CUSO-VSO

with special thanks to Bruce and Lis Welch Community Fund.

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Speakers

ANTONIO ARREAGA is a founding member of the Ethno Business Council of BC and the Canadian Latin American Business Association. He is also the Director of Grupo Latino Americano de Exportaciones (GRULEX), Director of the Canadian Council for the Americas BC Chapter, Honorary Consul of Costa Rica in BC, and recipient of the Capilano University Service President's Award 2010.

JOANNA ASHWORTH is Associate Director for the Bolivia Community Economic Development project and advises community organizations throughout BC on multicultural dialogue planning. She is a senior research associate at the Centre for Sustainable Community Development. Joanna is also co-director of the Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change project.

JAMES BUSUMTWI-SAM is an Associate Professor specializing in International Relations and Comparative Development in the Department of Political Science at SFU. His primary interests include International Organization, the Political Economy of Development and Security, and International Relations theory. His regional specialization is African politics and development. He has published on international organizations and regional security, the political economy of macroeconomic policy reform and financial liberalization in developing countries, and international financial institutions.

LORIE CORCUERA is a Co-Founder and Director of Enspire Foundation and has been an active member since its inception in 1999. She earned a BA in Commerce and Business Administration from the University of British Columbia, where she served as the President of the Filipino Students Association and Vice President of the Industrial Relations Management Club. She currently manages the Human Resources operations of a Vancouver based mobile entertainment company. Through Enspire's initiatives, individuals have the opportunity to grow themselves, whether through education, travel, or volunteer work. For more details, please visit <http://enspireme.org/>

ALEXANDER DAWSON is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Latin American Studies program at SFU. He earned a PhD in Latin American History from SUNY-Stony Brook in 1997 and came to SFU in 2003 after spending five years at Montana State University. During his time teaching in the US he also spent periods at the University of Florida and Yale University.

JUNE FRANCIS is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Business Administration and an Associate of the Latin American Studies program at SFU. Her interest include the determinants of export success for information technology and high technology firms, the role of cultural values stereotyping and intergroup relations in business activities, and the policies that undermine the development of business in the global south, particularly in countries affected by security issues. Originally from Jamaica, June moved to Canada to earn her MBA at York University and to the United States to earn her PhD at University of Washington.

MARGARET GALLAGHER is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. Her search for stories has taken her over mountains, down back alleys, and through the heart of the city. She has been a regular part of CBC Radio One's the Early edition since 2001. Last year, Margaret also took over the reins as the host of Hot Air, Canada's longest running jazz program. Margaret graduated from SFU in 1990 with a degree in Anthropology and Sociology. She has a keen interest in community and development issues.

KAYE KERLANDE was born and raised in Montreal and moved to Vancouver 10 years ago. Her parents are Haitians and she has learned her cultural heritage from her family. Kaye founded Hearts Hands Minds for Haiti to raise funds and awareness for the people suffering in Haiti following the earthquake one year ago. For more details, please contact kerlandes@gmail.com.

MIRIAM MEGWALU emigrated from Uganda to Canada in 1996. She is the mother of three girls and very passionate about the care, nutrition and upbringing of children. She works in a pharmaceutical firm that specializes in natural vitamins and minerals as a senior quality assurance inspector. After visiting her village in Northern Uganda in 2005 for the first time since settling in Canada, she saw many mothers and grandmothers taking care of young children with no resources and much adversity. She found a way to help.

SHAHEEN NANJI is Director of International Development and Faculty Engagement at SFU. She co-directs Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Trans-local Potential for Change and oversees CIDA projects in China and Kenya. Shaheen is working on a Masters of Arts in International Studies, with a focus on diasporic influences on development. Born and raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Shaheen moved to Vancouver in 1989 and has firsthand understanding of the ways diaspora communities seek to give back to their birth nations.

SUMANA WIJERATNA is an urban planner from Sri Lanka. She has been the Project Manager at the International Centre for Sustainable Cities (ICSC) and has worked as a project specialist in sustainable community development projects for many years in Sri Lanka. She recently founded the VanLanka Community Foundation as a way to involve the larger community in her activities. For more details, please visit <http://vanlanka.com/index.html>

Next dialogue in the series:

Improving Health

March 16, 2011, 6:30 – 8:30 PM
Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Upcoming Diaspora Leaders Workshop:

March – July 2011

Submit your application at www.sfu.ca/diasporas

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Trans-local Potential



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Appendix 2: Poverty Briefing

Poverty, and What To Do About It: A Briefing

By John Harriss

(Director, School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University)

What is 'poverty'?

I can well imagine many readers of this note reacting along the lines of 'What a silly question. The person who wrote this must be a really bone-headed academic who has never looked out of his study window. Isn't it obvious?' Well, yes, it is, at least on one level. 'Being poor' surely means 'not having enough', or 'being deprived'? But not having enough of, or being deprived of what? The obvious answer to this question is probably 'Not enough money'. But then that only raises the question of 'Not enough money for what?'. 'Not enough money' for some people, clearly, might be a fortune for others. This is particularly obvious when we think across societies. Poverty in our own society might still mean having all sorts of things, like television sets, fridges and motor cars, that a poor woman in Lesotho, say, probably can't even dream of. So answering the question 'what is poverty?' really is a bit more complicated than we might think at first.

People working in international development have actually devoted a lot of time and thought to the question of 'what is poverty?'. The standard way of defining poverty – the idea of poverty that is referred to in the first of the UN Millennium Goals – is in terms of income. It says 'Halve, between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day'. Why \$1 a day? This is because a good many years ago now it was reckoned that one dollar a day, or its equivalent, was just about the minimum that an average person required to be able to live at all. The reasoning behind this idea of poverty is that a person needs to have at her disposal goods or money enough (with which to purchase those goods) to be able to consume food and other essentials so as to feed herself adequately. It's a very minimalist notion of 'having enough', and not quite clear whether it includes an allowance for clothing and shelter, or keeping warm (which can be a problem at some times of year even in very warm climates ... some people die of exposure every year, for instance in the North Indian winter).

In defining poverty, what economists do is to calculate how much it costs, in a given place, to purchase a 'basket' of essentials, to supply enough calories (which means dietary energy) for a person to be able to live. We think that it is calories that really count because if a person isn't consuming sufficient calories then protein-rich foods don't do them much good, because the body converts the protein into energy. Having worked out what the 'basket' costs the economists then take data, usually from consumer expenditure surveys – because data on expenditure is a bit more reliable than that on income – to measure what proportion of the population is unable to pay for the basket. This is what it means when we read that such-and-such a percentage of the

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population of a country is 'poor': they are the people who cannot afford the basket of essentials for supplying the minimum amount of food energy.

Although it is quite difficult to do, this is quite a straightforward way of thinking about poverty and of measuring it, at least in principle. But it involves all manner of assumptions and measurement problems, and so it is that even in India – the country in which most intellectual effort has gone into defining and measuring poverty – there are now several different more or less official measures of the numbers of 'poor' people in the country, ranging from about 27 per cent of the population to as much as 80 per cent.

But in any case, does income alone adequately define poverty? An Indian economist who studied villages around his home over a twenty-five year period found that according to the way of understanding poverty that I have just described, people got poorer. But when he talked to them about how they themselves thought of changes in their standard of living he found that in very many ways they reckoned they had got better off. They were able to eat a greater range of foods, for instance, their homes were more secure because they had locks on their doors, and they didn't depend any longer on landlords if they needed small loans. In these and many other ways they thought of themselves as being better off than they had been before. What this man's research showed was that people themselves in the villages he studied thought of poverty in terms not only of 'having enough income to survive', but also of 'having some assets (wealth in some form) that make for security over the longer run'. And last but not far from least they thought of poverty in terms of being independent – in terms that is, of having self-respect. So, not having to go along to a landlord and cringe and flatter in order to get a little help was for them a major step forward in their sense of well-being.

It is not enough, then, to think about poverty in terms of income alone. We need to think about other aspects of deprivation such as access to water, shelter, health services, education and transport. If people have access to clean water and good sanitation – which may be publicly provided – then the chances are that they will not suffer in the way that so many people in the world do, from intestinal diseases. Suffering from chronic dysentery means that people are unable to make use of a lot of the food that they eat, and so even if they do have sufficient income to buy that basket of essential foods, they remain 'poor' in the sense that they are unable to lead full lives. Similarly, if people are able to obtain good basic health care at low cost to themselves, then they will be better able to lead good lives even if they don't have much income.

We need to think about poverty, too, in terms of debt and dependence – like those Indian villagers I described – and of vulnerability. The simple fact of having locks on their doors made those Indian villagers feel less vulnerable and more secure. But of course the idea of 'security' means more than just that simple physical security. Having some insurance against the bad times is also, quite obviously, very important, and very many people in the world don't have assets enough to provide them with any kind of insurance. Their livelihoods and their lives are therefore vulnerable. This is another very

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important aspect of poverty. There are others, too – such as the social disadvantage that many people experience because of some aspect of their identity – that are from a low caste, perhaps, in the Indian villages I have spoken of. Elsewhere it might be because they come from an indigenous social group that has been marginalized through colonization. Most generally, perhaps, we need to think about poverty in terms of powerlessness – or the inability to make meaningful choices and to lead a fulfilling sort of a life. All of the factors I have been talking about relate to this fundamental concern. This is where literacy is so important, too – because being literate enables people to cope much better with the state, perhaps actually to participate in running public affairs, and, generally, to be able to make meaningful choices

And what is it that makes people poor?

Well, we know from lots of research that poverty – whether understood in terms of income alone, or in the much broader sense that I have suggested is necessary - is very often associated with being dependent upon particular types of jobs. Being in a family that depends upon a single, illiterate or only poorly literate, adult member who carries on daily-paid casual labour, whether in the country, or in the town, is commonly associated with being poor. Those who are casually employed have little or no security and may go for long periods without work when they have no income. In the rural societies that still account for a large share of all the poor people in the world those who have only very small plots of land – who are commonly the great majority - are in a very similar position to the casual labourers, and they will probably depend heavily for their livelihoods on casual laboring jobs in any case. When these households are headed by women, who have been widowed – perhaps as a result of HIV – or deserted, then things are likely to be even worse. And the fortunes of all such households, whether female-headed or not, are likely to depend a great deal upon the health of the adult workers. We know from detailed research that what drives people into chronic poverty – poverty that endures over a significant period of time – is very often episodes of ill-health, that deprive people of income and at the same time make for significantly increased costs that lead them to sell off such assets as they possess, and, often, to incur debts that become crippling. They get into a downward spiral from which it is very difficult ever to recover.

And what makes a difference – what brings about the reduction of poverty?

These are some of the most important conditions that make people poor. Being poor or becoming poor is not, in general, because of choices that people make, but because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The sort of economy that is growing and as it grows generates more secure jobs, so that fewer people depend upon casual labour, is very likely to make for less poverty. But much depends upon whether or not ‘good jobs’ are created – and one of the very worrying aspects of the growth of many ‘developing’ countries at the moment is that relatively few such jobs are being created. India, for example, is said to be suffering from ‘jobless growth’ because there are actually fewer people in secure jobs now than there were five years ago, in spite of the

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country's very high rates of growth. People have to depend upon a whole variety of casual and irregular wage work, or upon self-employment. Indeed, in India, about half of all livelihoods are based upon self-employment.

Isn't this a good thing? Isn't self-employment better than casual work? Doesn't it show enterprise, and mean that people have a fair chance of improving their life-chances? Well, possibly so. But we know that quite a lot of the time self-employment, whether in agriculture or outside it, really is the last resort for poor people. They are definitely 'reluctant entrepreneurs'. And what happens sometimes to the self-employed is that they exploit their own bodies quite ruthlessly, drawing down their physical reserves in order to make a living. This is one of the reasons why the micro-finance projects that have been seen as being 'the answer' to problems of poverty are not necessarily as effective as many have hoped – and can even mean that poor people are actually subjected to a lot of self-exploitation, as they struggle to make repayments of interest and principal.

In sum, economic growth is essential for the reduction of poverty. But it needs to be economic growth that generates productive and reasonably stable employment. It needs to be supported by the public provision of education that equips people to take on more productive work – and to deal effectively with the state so that they can secure what they are entitled to as citizens, from the state. Hence the second MDG: 'Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling'. And it needs to be supported by the public provision of basic health care, so that poor people have greater protection against those episodes of ill-health, and their consequences, that we know are so crippling for them. The MDGs concerned with child health and maternal health, and that aimed at combating HIV/AIDS, all relate to this further, vital, aspect of the tackling of poverty. And in all of this, MDG 3, about promoting gender equality and empowering women – 'Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015' – is of fundamental importance. Female literacy pays very high dividends, we know, in terms of children's health and education, and in terms of civic action. Gender equality is of basic significance in the fight against poverty.



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD

**ENGAGING
DIASPORA**
in development
Tapping Our Trans-Local Potential for Change

Starting the conversation

Douglas Olthof

Posted: Jan 11th, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website

<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/engagingdiasporas/2011/01/11/starting-conversation>



Panther Kuol speaks at the Engaging Diasporas in Development Project launch.

This post is by guest contributors Joanna Ashworth and Shaheen Nanji

Simon Fraser University, with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), is convening a public dialogue series called Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping Our Translocal Potential for Change to explore the unique role of diaspora living in Metro Vancouver and the impact of their continued connection to the global south.

The first dialogue will be held on January 19th at SFU's Wosk Centre for Dialogue (580 West Hastings Street, Vancouver) and will focus on diaspora-led efforts to reduce poverty and stimulate economic development. Subsequent dialogues will examine health, education, peace and security and the overall impact and potential of diaspora in

<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/engagingdiasporas/2011/01/11/starting-conversation>

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development. The dialogues are organized around the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) themes.

As the project directors (Dr Joanna Ashworth is the former director of dialogue programs at SFU and now a senior research associate with the Centre for Sustainable Community Development and Ms Shaheen Nanji is the director of international development with SFU International) we bring our own unique skills and experiences to the planning and are also well guided by a dynamic project advisory group of community and academic leaders who you will meet through these blog posts and through their active involvement in the community dialogues.

The term diaspora is protested by some, and embraced by others. While there are several definitions of diaspora, most have an explicit or implicit assumption of commonality based on ethnicity and nationality, a strong and shared sense of 'home' and a, sometimes mythical desire to return to that location. Diasporas are groups who have, through their history and often over several generations, migrated to more than one other place, reconstituted themselves as a community in their new locale, and who maintain social networks with their counterparts in other locales. Their sense of community can be formed by various commonalities, such as geographical origin, ethnicity or ancestry, or religion. What is at the core of the diasporic experience is a diversity of experience and hybridity of identity, and it is this core that forms the basis of the unique diasporic perspective on development.

Development is also a contested and sometimes contentious term. What we mean for this series of dialogues is simply this: Development refers to social processes of change, primarily in the Global South. When we speak of the translocal potential of the diaspora it infers that social networks here in Vancouver inform the local actions taken by diaspora in global south communities. An example. Canadian born poet and artist Nadia Chaney (with a Muslim father and Catholic mother from India) has worked with street youth in Vancouver for a very long time. Most recently she has taken this local

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knowledge and expertise to her work with Partnerships for Youth Empowerment <http://pyeglobal.org/blog/author/radia/> in Bangalore, India. Another example. Southern Sudanese refugee and SFU student Panther Kuol (pictured above) is deeply connected to his Canadian community and university. And he is actively engaged with his Sudanese diaspora in the historic referendum that he hopes will pave the way for southern independence. While he will continue his studies he aims to develop a business here in Canada that will in some way help others in his homeland.



So you see, Metro Vancouver is rich in diasporas originating from the Global South, from the established Chinese and Indian diasporas to the newer Afghan and Bhutanese diasporas. Members of the diaspora engage their communities, here in Vancouver and around the world, to facilitate change in their places of origin in a variety of ways. Remittances of funds to help support family members abroad, diaspora-led awareness- and fund-raising during crises like the recent Haitian earthquake, and smaller initiatives, that include community financed start up funds for small businesses or

fundraising to build schools receive periodic attention in the media. But what is the advantage that the diaspora bring to these efforts to reduce globally inequality? And what is the potential? There are so many stories of Canadians (yes, most diasporas ARE Canadians) doing awe-inspiring projects, and we want to hear them. So that we can understand, and we can ensure that we, as Canadians, are making the most of the tremendous resource that exists as we engage with the world.

These blog postings aim to jumpstart a dialogue with metro Vancouver's citizens about the little discussed role of many of our translocally connected citizens, particularly from

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the global south, who are actively involved and representing Canada in their development work.

Flow this link to see the video from our project launch:

<https://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/launchvideo.htm>

Watch for the postings noted below leading up to the January 19 public dialogue. For more information on "Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping our Translocal Potential for Change" see our project website at <https://www.sfu.ca/diasporas/>

#2 Doug Olthof, Development Specialist, James Buswumtwi Sam, Professor of Political Science, SFU: Sharing the stories of diaspora in development in Metro Vancouver

#3 John Harris, Professor and Director of the School for International Studies, SFU: What is poverty and what to do about it

#4 Sumana Wijeranta: Mobilizing the Sri Lankan diaspora and starting up a Foundation to create change

#5 Miriam Egwalu: Small economic hand up changes a village in Uganda



Vancouver's diasporas promote development around the world **Douglas Olthof**

Posted: Jan 16th, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website

It is an understatement to call Vancouver a diverse city. Take a ride on the Skytrain during peak hours and you are likely to overhear conversations in four or five different languages. Explore the city's restaurants and you can sample cuisines from around the globe. Cruise the summer festival scene and you will experience cultural delights from every continent. It is undeniably the case that the cultural milieu of our city draws substance from as many regions of the world as there are seats in the UN assembly.

As residents of this pluralistic metropolis we can easily recognize the contribution that the diaspora— have made to our city's development. What is less obvious, however, is the contribution that members of the diaspora make to development around the world. One of the objectives of Engaging Diasporas in Development Project is to identify and highlight diaspora involvement with international development. This effort is already turning up some remarkable stories:

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal—an Emeritus Professor at UBC—was born in a Pakistani village. Over more than a decade, he and his wife have worked tirelessly to promote health and education in Pakistan through the Maria-Helena Foundation, which they established. Their first major success came when Dr. Iqbal offered life-long financial support to his sister in exchange for the donation of their family home. He then converted the home in to an outpatient hospital. Dr. Iqbal's Maria-Helena Foundation subsequently established 11 self-sustaining co-ed primary schools and three vocational schools in Pakistan.

Another UBC Professor, Dr. Shafique Pirani, was visiting his childhood home in Uganda

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when he became aware of large-scale tragedy of clubfoot: a debilitating congenital defect that affects 1 in 1000 children worldwide. Dr. Pirani set out to adapt therapeutic corrective treatments for clubfoot to the local context and initiated a program that revamped the Ugandan health care system's approach to the disease. His project has become a model for several other countries around the world.

The Surrey-based organization Umoja, headed up by Ugandan-born couple Amos and Edith Kambere, has partnered with the Surrey Pacific Academy, the Dunamis Education Society and an NGO in Uganda to establish an elementary school in that country. In addition to helping establish this school, Umoja has helped other members of the diaspora engage with development in their countries of origin. They recently assisted a Vancouverite of Kenyan origin who returned to his home region and constructed a well providing water for an entire village. This project was completed at the surprisingly low cost of \$2500.



Village wells, like this one in Mozambique, are vitally important to the health and quality of life of hundreds of millions of the world's impoverished people. Photo: Douglas Olthof

Also in Uganda, sisters Nasra and Hawa Mire have, over the past four years, operated educational programs for young people that focus on expression and story telling through digital media. The sisters, who emigrated from Somalia to Vancouver while in their early teens, established Point Youth Media to engage with young people in Vancouver and in East Africa. They plan to expand their programs into Tanzania, Kenya

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and hopefully one day into Somalia as well.

Diaspora contributions to development are not exclusively of the philanthropic variety. Members of the diaspora also promote development overseas through trade and investment. Vancouver's SUCCESS (a non-profit multi-service organization with strong historical ties to the Chinese community) has worked to facilitate Canadian trade and investment with East Asian countries in order to promote economic development both here and overseas. Diaspora investment in East Asian economies has made an important contribution to their rapid growth, which has in turn been instrumental in lifting unprecedentedly large numbers of people out of poverty.



Villages like this one north of Beijing linger in poverty despite incredible growth occurring elsewhere in the Chinese economy. Photo: Douglas Orhof

Development within the diaspora here in Vancouver can also affect development overseas. Along with a few colleagues, a young woman of Afghan origin named Hila Wesa has established B.C. Young Afghans, an organization that aims to help young Afghan immigrants achieve success in education. Like many others, Ms. Wesa has observed how divisions that exist in the country of origin can reproduce themselves

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within the diaspora. By overcoming these cleavages within the diaspora, Ms. Wesa hopes to contribute to the promotion of peace in Afghanistan.

Similarly, for new Canadians, achieving success here in Vancouver can be a precondition for promoting development overseas. Latincover is an organization that promotes networking amongst Canadians of Latin American heritage and others interested in Latin America. The organization's founder, Paola Vivian Murillo, highlights the importance of *mesadas*: money remitted from members of the diaspora back to their families in the country of origin. Her organization works to help Latin American immigrants to Canada succeed here, thus providing them with an opportunity to give back to their country of origin.

These stories represent a small sample of the myriad ways in which members of the diaspora in Vancouver engage with development around the world. As Vancouverites we all benefit from the manifold cultural influences that characterize our city. These cultural influences come to us by and large through the numerous and varied diaspora groups that make up such a significant part of our community. At the same time, we may overlook the roles that members of the diaspora play in promoting development overseas.

When we begin to recognize the important knowledge and skills that members of the diaspora bring to the table we might also begin to ask ourselves how we, as a city and as a nation, might better make use of that knowledge and those skills to promote development in all the places with which people in Vancouver are connected. That is to say, everywhere.

This blog is part of a series related to a public dialogue series called Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping Our Translocal Potential for Change, at Simon Fraser University. Further information can be found [here](#).

What is Poverty?

John Harriss

Posted: Jan 18th, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website



A farmer in West Bengal returns from ploughing the fields. Photo: Douglas Olthof

I can well imagine many readers reacting to this question along the lines of 'What a silly question. Isn't it obvious?' Well, yes, it is, at least on one level. 'Being poor' surely means 'not having enough', or 'being deprived'? But not having enough of, or being deprived of what? The obvious answer to this question is probably 'Not enough money'. But then that only raises the question of 'Not enough money for what?' 'Not enough money' for some people, clearly, might be a fortune for others. This is particularly obvious when we think across societies. Poverty in our own society might still mean having all sorts of things, like television sets, fridges and motor cars that a poor woman in Lesotho, say, probably can't even dream of. So answering the question 'what is poverty?' really is a bit more complicated than we might think at first.

The standard definition of poverty – the idea of poverty that is referred to in the first of

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the UN Millennium Development Goals - is in terms of income. It says 'Halve, between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day'. Why \$1 a day? This is because a good many years ago now it was reckoned that one dollar a day, or its equivalent, was just about the minimum that an average person required to be able to live at all. The reasoning behind this idea of poverty is that a person needs to have at her disposal goods or money enough (with which to purchase those goods) to be able to consume food and other essentials so as to feed herself adequately. It's a very minimalist notion of 'having enough', and not quite clear whether it includes an allowance for clothing and shelter, or keeping warm (which can be a problem at some times of year even in very warm climates ... some people die of exposure every year, for instance in the North Indian winter).

In defining poverty, economists calculate how much it costs, in a given place, to purchase a 'basket' of essentials, to supply enough calories (which means dietary energy) for a person to be able to live. We think that it is calories that really count because if a person isn't consuming sufficient calories then protein-rich foods don't do them much good, because the body converts the protein into energy. A country's 'poor', then, are the people who cannot afford the basket of essentials for supplying the minimum amount of food energy.

This measurement of poverty involves all manner of assumptions and measurement problems, and so it is that even in India - the country in which most intellectual effort has gone into defining and measuring poverty - there are now several different more or less official measures of the numbers of 'poor' people in the country, ranging from about 27 per cent of the population to as much as 80 per cent.

But in any case, does income alone adequately define poverty? An Indian economist who studied villages around his home over a twenty-five year period found that according to the way of understanding poverty that I have just described, people got poorer. But when he talked to them about how they themselves thought of changes in

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their standard of living he found that in very many ways they reckoned they had got better off. They were able to eat a greater range of foods, for instance, their homes were more secure because they had locks on their doors, and they didn't depend any longer on landlords if they needed small loans. The people in the villages thought of poverty in terms not only of 'having enough income to survive', but also of 'having some assets (wealth in some form) that make for security over the longer run'. And last but far from least, they thought of poverty in terms of being independent – in terms that is, of having self-respect.

It is not enough, then, to think about poverty in terms of income alone. We need to think about other aspects of deprivation such as access to water, shelter, health services, education and transport. We need to think about poverty, too, in terms of debt and dependence – like those Indian villagers I described – and of vulnerability. The simple fact of having locks on their doors made those Indian villagers feel less vulnerable and more secure. But of course the idea of 'security' means more than just that simple physical security. Having some insurance against the bad times is also, quite obviously, very important, and very many people in the world don't have assets enough to provide them with any kind of insurance. Their livelihoods and their lives are therefore vulnerable. This is another very important aspect of poverty. There are others, too – such as the social disadvantage that many people experience because of some aspect of their identity – that they are from a low caste, perhaps, in the Indian villages I have spoken of.

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A villager's passbook in West Bengal shows mandatory weekly payments against a very high-interest loan. Photo: Douglas Olthof

Most generally, perhaps, we need to think about poverty in terms of powerlessness – or the inability to make meaningful choices and to lead a fulfilling sort of a life.

And what is it that makes people poor? And what makes a difference – what brings about the reduction of poverty?

Being poor or becoming poor is not, in general, because of choices that people make, but because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The sort of economy that is growing and as it grows generates more secure jobs, so that fewer people depend upon casual labour, is very likely to make for less poverty. But much depends upon whether or not 'good jobs' are created – and one of the very worrying aspects of the growth of many 'developing' countries at the moment is that relatively few such jobs are being created.



Women in Southern India work on hand-looms, far removed from the country's booming high-tech economy.

Photo: Douglas Olthof

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Economic growth is essential for the reduction of poverty. But it needs to be economic growth that generates productive and reasonably stable employment. It needs to be supported by the public provision of education that equips people to take on more productive work – and to deal effectively with the state so that they can secure what they are entitled to as citizens, from the state. Hence the second MDG: 'Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling'. And it needs to be supported by the public provision of basic health care, so that poor people have greater protection against those episodes of ill-health, and their consequences, that we know are so crippling for them. The MDGs concerned with child health and maternal health, and that aimed at combating HIV/AIDS, all relate to this further, vital, aspect of the tackling of poverty. And in all of this, MDG 3, about promoting gender equality and empowering women – 'Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015' – is of fundamental importance. Female literacy pays very high dividends, we know, in terms of children's health and education, and in terms of civic action. Gender equality is of basic significance in the fight against poverty.

To read the full version of the article please visit [this site](#).

This blog is part of a series related to a public dialogue series called Engaging Diaspora in Development: Tapping Our Translocal Potential for Change, at Simon Fraser University.

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ENGAGING DIASPORA in development

Tapping Our Trans-Local Potential for Change

My Canadian experience inspires my development work in Sri Lanka

Author: Sumana Wijeratna Posted: January 19, 2011



Members of the Sri Lankan diaspora gather at Trout Lake, BC.

Nine years ago I arrived with my family in Canada. In Sri Lanka I worked with the Urban Development Authority as an urban planner in the municipal offices for eleven years and for another six years as the deputy director for regional offices.

After settling in the community of Surrey in 2002, I established VanLanka Planning Consulting where I continued to seek opportunities to use my experience in the international development field. In this quest, I reached out to the Vancouver-based International Centre for Sustainable Cities (ICSC) where I was able to offer my networks and local knowledge of Sri Lanka. This collaboration soon led to ICSC developing three successful community environmental management and sustainable planning projects in Sri Lanka that were funded by CIDA. I learned so much about sustainability planning from this experience and also believe my experiences were valuable to the Centre.

Posted on Jan 19, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website
<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blog/engagingdiaspora/2011/01/19/my-canadian-experience-inspires-my-development-work-in-lanka>

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In 2007, when my younger son turned 13, he raised \$500 to commemorate the death of my mother and pledged it to a charitable cause. This is a cultural practice for Sri Lankan people. My friends in Richmond contributed another \$500 for the same. This small sum of money and the efforts of a volunteer youth group provided clean drinking water for 15 families and a computer resources center in a remote rural village in Sri Lanka.



Children pose in a "slum" area in Sri Lanka. Photo: Vanlanka Community Foundation.

In 2008, my husband and I used our combined Sri Lankan food preparation skills to engage the Sri Lankan diaspora in BC in raising \$10,000 for the Kidney Hospital Foundation in Sri Lanka. This successful fundraising effort inspired me to continue my efforts in community supported programs for poor and vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka, and to establish the [Vanlanka Community Foundation](#) in April 2010.

Through the Foundation I work with private, government and community level partners in Sri Lanka and attempt to involve the Sri Lankan community here in the Vancouver area and the larger Canadian community in the activities of the Foundation. In 2010, with the help of ICSC and our food catering service, VCF was able to raise over \$5000 towards our projects, which contribute to community economic development and education support programs.

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Currently we work with three communities; one remote rural settlement in Thambavita, a tsunami and war-affected fishing community at Kallarawa, and a low income urban slum community in Wilgoda. Our key work areas are education, small business for youth, and women and food security. We were able to send [Gregory Corcoran](#), a Canadian high school teacher, to Sri Lanka as the first volunteer teacher to deliver three free ESL programs for the poor children and one fee for service program to cover part of our expenses.



Members of a fishing cooperative in Sri Lanka haul in their catch.

Photo: Vanlanka Community Foundation.

My eldest son, who was also inspired by the land of his heritage, pledged to work as a youth coordinator and raised \$225 in 2010 that goes toward a project to research traditional irrigation systems in Sri Lanka.

My Canadian experience has given me a new way of being an urban planner. I have learned to get out and find out what people need. I am so privileged to be here in Canada where I can use my experience to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

To find out more about Vanlanka's programs, please visit their [website](#).

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Sumana Wijeratna is an urban planner from Sri Lanka whose networks back home and planning experience were valuable assets in her work as a project manager and the project specialist in sustainable community development projects in Sri Lanka. Sumana's experiences inspired her to start up community support programs for poor and vulnerable communities in Sri Lanka, and to establish the Vanlanka Community Foundation as a way to involve the larger community in her activities. For more information please visit: <http://vanlanka.com/index.html>

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The power of \$100

Author: Douglas Olthof Posted: Jan 21st, 2011



Photo: Doug Olthof

The following is a story by Miriam Egwalu...

My story started when I went to Uganda in March, 2009 after my Mom passed away. During the burial and afterwards, I noticed that there were more women than men. Most of the women were either very old or very young single mothers. The men were also very old or very young. I later realized that most of the men had been killed in the 25 year war that had ravished Northern Uganda and that the others had moved to towns and cities to try and find work, leaving behind wives to take care of the kids and grandparents.

Posted on Jan 21, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website
<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/engagingdiaspora/2011/01/21/power-100>

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When I interviewed one of the older ladies, she informed me that most of the women get no support from their husbands who have moved to cities and some are widowed with numerous children to support. She was one of the widowed. She was left with 6 kids to take care of. Her oldest daughter was not going to school because she needed her to help in the garden and other chores. The other 5 kids were being supported by a charity organization in order for them to go to school.

I asked her what I could do to help her be self-sufficient. She informed me that since she was now old, she could not do farm work like the younger women, and asked for 200,000 Ugandan shillings (an equivalent to \$100.00 Canadian) so that she could open a store. I gave her the 100 dollars and went back to Canada.

I returned to Uganda last March with my 12 year old daughter to see how my Dad was doing and also to attend my mom's last funeral rights. I was amazed at how much the 100 dollars I left had helped this lady. She had a small stall by the road side and was busy selling small grocery items. She was also now renting a sewing machine and was earning money as a seamstress.

My daughter, who had never been to Africa before, wanted to see how kids her age were living and the schools they went to. She asked me why kids were going to school with ripped school uniforms and no shoes on. I told her that they could not afford new uniforms, so she immediately pulled out \$25.00 Canadian dollars and offered it to the girl she had seen with a ripped uniform. She promised the head teacher that when she returned to Canada, she would baby-sit and walk dogs in order to help more kids get school Uniforms.

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Photo: Doug Olthof

When we arrived back here, we started saving money for kids who did not have school uniforms. I felt so good be doing something that my young daughter noticed and vowed to address. Today, we have managed to dress over 20 kids with school uniforms and thereby helped them stay in school.

I am planning to go back to Uganda this year in April and see how the project is proceeding. My goal is to help all the kids who cannot afford school uniforms to be dressed up and go to school because, although there is free elementary education in Uganda, no kid is allowed in class without a uniform and this is the main thing that makes kids drop out of school. Most of these kids live with aging grandparents or single mothers who have no way of getting any income.

I also plan to help one woman a year start some money generating project in order for her take care of her children.

I appeal to all who can help to join me in this project of dressing kids with school uniforms so that they can get the basic education needed by all.

Miriam Egwalu can be reached at: mcballim2000@yahoo.ca

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Vancouver's diasporas share development stories

Author: Douglas Olthof Posted: Mar 1st, 2011



Dialogue story tellers gathered together before the Engaging Diasporas in Development dialogue.
Photo: Greg Ehlers

On January 19, 2011 the Engaging Diasporas in Development Project convened the first in its series of public dialogues. The dialogue was entitled "Innovations in Poverty Reduction and Economic Development" and covered three core themes: responding to basic needs through grassroots mobilizations, business and economic development, and tapping the potential: learning from the diaspora.

Participants began filtering into the Morris J. Work Centre for Dialogue amid considerable buzz. Soon thereafter, as the sounds of dozens of conversations mingled above the assembly, a single voice cut through the din and invited everyone to join together in conversation and collaboration. Vanessa Richards urged the participants to join in song and for the next few minutes the diverse crowd became a united chorus. With melody and harmony still reverberating through the room, the dialogue had begun.

Posted Mar 1, 2011 on the Vancouver Observer website
<http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/engagingdiasporas/2011/03/01/vancouver-diasporas-share-development-stories>

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Vanessa Richards leads the group in an inspirational chorus. Photo: Greg Ehlers

The first session got underway with a focus on “responding to basic needs through grassroots mobilization.” Three ‘storytellers’ shared their experiences with the assembled participants. Kaye Kerlande, conveyed her experience as a second generation Canadian of Haitian decent and her struggle to formulate a meaningful response to the overwhelming disaster that befell that country in January of 2010. Sumana Wijeratna, a Sri Lankan-Canadian, was the second storyteller and her story can be found in one of previous blogs [here](#) (insert hyperlink). Finally, Lorie Corcuera of ENSPIRE shared her experiences in organizing with other members of the Filipino diaspora and partnering with an organization in that country to create long-term housing solutions for low income and marginalized families in Manila. What followed was an open dialogue covering topics including the role of women in development, the varied nature of diaspora identity and the importance of local partnerships, to name a few. SFU Communications professor June Francis tied the first session together by highlighting common themes and providing thoughtful insights on the empathy and visceral connection that diasporas bring to their development work.

The second section of the dialogue addressed “business as economic development.” Two storytellers, Miriam Egwalu and Antonio Arreaga, constructed a compelling launch pad for the discussion. Miriam Egwalu is an immigrant to Canada from Uganda and her story can be found in one of our previous blog posts [here](#). Antonio Arreaga is Honorary Consul of Costa Rica in Vancouver. He related to the dialogue participants a number of sector-specific examples whereby “Canadian know-how” was

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"tropicalized" to improve the performance of Central American businesses. The session continued with a wide-ranging dialogue covering topics including the transfer of market knowledge from Canada to developing countries, the effectiveness of small-scale projects, direct support to individuals in developing countries and the specific challenges facing diaspora youth.



Antonio Arwaga and Miriam Egwali shared stories that highlighted the bridging potential of diasporas. Photo: Greg Ehlers

The dialogue closed with comments from SFU professor of History and Latin American Studies, Alexander Dawson. Professor Dawson invoked the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 5) in highlighting the responsibility of countries like Canada to address poverty wherever it is found. In so doing, he cautioned the dialogue participants to avoid placing responsibility for poverty reduction at the feet of the diaspora. Furthermore, he urged participants to avoid emphasizing the specific to the exclusion of the general, and asked what role the diaspora might play in affecting policy change both here in Canada and in the developing countries with which they identify.

As the dialogue came to a close, participants began filtering out to the reception area and the conversation continued. In a dozen or more small circles people exchanged ideas and contact information. Some reflected on the ideas raised by Professor Dawson, others on how they could better engage with the diaspora in their own development initiatives and still others on how they might use their own diaspora connections to start engaging with development. Many were heartened and invigorated through connecting

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with others who are doing the same thing. This was the start of a conversation the Engaging Diasporas in Development project hopes to help sustain over the months ahead.

The January 19 dialogue was only the first in a series of 5 that will take place over the next 7 months. The next dialogue "Improving Health" will be held at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue (580 West Hastings) on March 16, 2011. This dialogue will take as its starting point the question "What does being part of a diaspora mean to you and how does it affect your experience and understanding of health?" Participants will be encouraged to contribute to a discussion of the particular skills, knowledge and networks members of the diaspora can draw upon to improve health, both in Canada and in the other countries with which they identify. Through inclusive exchanges, the assembled group will explore the various efforts and initiatives currently underway and, crucially, will address the potential that may yet lie untapped. The goal will be to better understand how the connections or "bridges" diasporas form between one place and another facilitate change and improvement in health at both ends.

The Engaging Diasporas in Development project is looking for members of various diasporas in the lower mainland who are interested or engaged in health initiatives either here or overseas to participate in the "Improving Health" dialogue. For more information click [here](#) or go to www.sfu.ca/diasporas/dialogueseries.htm