

DIASPORAS IN DEVELOPMENT

October 12, 2016

Session Title: Evidence Review: the Development Impact of Diasporas

Presenter:

- Dr. Liesl Riddle, Associate Professor of International Business, George Washington University
- Sonia Plaza, Senior Economist, Global Indicators Group, World Bank
- Manuel Orozco, Senior Fellow & Program Director, Migration, Remittances & Development, The Inter-American Dialogue
- Brett Johnson, Project Director, Partnerships Services Program, SSG
- Moderator: Anna Nikolova, Center for Transformational Partnerships, USAID

Session Summary:

There is an increasing demand for data on the impact diaspora groups have in their communities. We need this data to help inform our decision-making and policies. With diaspora engagement, the sticking point is often with the impact of knowledge sharing and transfer, where data on remittances and economic impact is more readily available. Still, there is an overall need for improved evidence on the impact of diasporas in development.

Key Themes:

- **Theme 1:** There is no uniformity among the approaches to mapping diaspora networks and impacts. We need to develop ways to share our methods and results and to perform cross-studies, to arrive at generalizable but also qualitative data that is multidimensional. We need to share what has worked and what has not. Once sensitized, money transfer companies may be able to create a clearinghouse of data for dissemination, which would be helpful particularly for mining data on productive bases in local economies.
- **Theme 2:** Measuring the impact of skills and knowledge transfer is particularly difficult, in part because thus far we've used a general approach for all migrants, without rigorous impact assessment. We call for new approaches to address this problem. Note also that this area is often overlooked – sometimes we spend too much effort on more

easily quantifiable elements like remittances and investment. We need to recognize the importance of soft power like how to incorporate skills and knowledge.

- **Theme 3:** Comparing studies may prove a useful tool in building evidence, for example in the case of Syrian refugees. We can compare their case with other conflict situations, looking at how best to train refugees with skills they can use in their host communities as well as in their home countries. We can also use this comparison to understand the problems developing communities have in leveraging their refugee flows and use these studies to develop a framework.

Best Practices/Recommendations/Suggestions:

- We need to use metadata to develop a systematic framework we can all agree on. There needs to be a correspondence between needs and wants, and our general approach should be replicable and sustainable.

Discussion Topics/Audience Questions:

- Based on your research, why is it such a challenge to assess the impact of diasporas?
- Why is soft power (skills, etc.) particularly difficult to measure?
- What measures of success have you had with civil society partnerships? How would working with diasporas be different?
- Where are we seeing the evidence for diaspora engagement?
- How do we get from anecdotal to concrete evidence?
- How do you foresee the impact of Syrian refugees on the Syrian economy? Can you compare/contrast to other cases?
- What is the role of remittance companies like Western Union in developing evidence, especially in sharing information?