

Call for Papers

Diaspora and Development: South Asian Diaspora Engagement in South Asia

Organiser

Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS)
National University of Singapore, Singapore

Date

25 – 26 September 2012

Venue

National University of Singapore

Current thinking by academics as well as policy makers and donor agencies is to foster diaspora engagement to stimulate development in their countries of origin. This thinking has been further reinforced by the increasing endorsement from policy makers and state actors at the international level. Two international diaspora events: the formation of the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) at the first ever Global Diaspora Forum, in Washington, D.C., held on May 17-19, 2011, and the South Asian Diaspora Convention (SADC) in Singapore, organised by the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, on July 21-22, 2011, are exemplary and worthy of mention. Both initiatives point to heightened recognition and a keen interest by state authorities, scholars and policy makers alike, in pursuing the potential of diasporic communities on a regional and global level.

The Institute of South Asian Studies or ISAS is a research institute situated in the South Asian diasporic hub of Singapore and dedicated to the study of contemporary South Asia. With the convention in July 2011, ISAS spearheaded the effort to connect the global South Asian diaspora and promote economic integration between these overseas communities and Asia. In line with this emergent and growing interest in South Asian diaspora studies, the institute is now organising an academic workshop to understand the roles that these diasporic groups play as a resource for development in their countries of origin, i.e. in South Asia. In other words, how do South Asian diasporic groups engage South Asia and what implications does such engagement have for the development of South Asian countries and the region as a whole?

The global South Asian diaspora is over 50 million strong and continues to grow. Many of its members maintain strong social, economic and cultural connections to their countries of origin while others vie for political rights such as dual citizenship and the right to vote. They also engage in various causes and institutions that directly benefit their home countries and the people. Oftentimes, these connections are mediated and sustained through extended family, kinship, Regional Associations (RAs) and 'Home Town Associations' (HTAs) amongst other avenues. The diasporas' engagement has tremendous development implications for the South Asian countries individually and for their regional integration. For instance,

eminent South Asian economist Shahid Javed Burki notes that only the US-based South Asian diaspora has the capacity to invest as much as US\$130 billion annually in projects designed for the economic integration in South Asia.

Diaspora engagement involves a myriad of dedicated activities directed toward the origin country where the two entities – the ‘diaspora’ and the ‘origin country’ should be understood neither as necessarily fixed in nature nor should their relationship be conceived as one-way or even simply bilateral but much more complex and dynamic. For instance, the term ‘diaspora engagement’ is widely used in three contexts: first, it refers to the grassroots, trans-local activities of migrants and their associations; second, it refers to the policies of migrant-sending states towards their diasporas; and finally, it is used in the context of top-down attempts by donor agencies and international organisations to encourage this kind of engagement. Thus, we can identify three levels of vertical engagement (e.g. local, national and international) that interact with each other and promote development in the engagement process. However, there are certainly more layers – formal and informal, that lie in between, and many horizontal forms of engagement for consideration as well.

This workshop seeks to shed light on these various forms and fields of diaspora engagement that include entrepreneurship, philanthropy, international relations, portfolio investment, remittances, advocacy, peace-building, trade such as in ethnic goods, political engagement, socio-cultural linkages and religious or spiritual movements, amongst many other categories. Any form of these engagements is potential to advance growth and development in the origin country and merits scientific inquiry. However, despite immense development potential, there is little systematic work on development engagement of the South Asian diaspora groups. This workshop attempts to address and close this gap in the existing literature.

Some specific questions that this workshop aims to address are: what is the relationship between diaspora engagement and development? What is the structure of diaspora engagement in South Asia? What are the existing diaspora engagement policies in South Asian countries individually and how could they be regionally integrated? What are the patterns of diaspora engagement across different diaspora corridors, i.e. across bilateral engagement efforts between two zones, regions or countries? What role do different spheres of diaspora engagement play in stimulating development in the countries of origin? What sorts of conditions are necessary in order to create an enabling environment for diaspora engagement in their countries of origin? And, what implications would these changes in the environment and increased engagement have for the origin countries and South Asian regional integration?

We welcome papers which tackle the multi-faceted issues of South Asian diaspora engagement and are interdisciplinary in nature. The workshop targets empirically based papers involving South Asian countries (i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and South Asian diaspora members/communities/groups living and working across the globe. Case studies may focus on any individual country in South Asia and its members in a host country/region. We also welcome efforts on broader scale analysis such as diasporic coalition engagements and development

implications going beyond individual South Asian countries that instead address pertinent concerns of regional development and integration. Research conducted with mixed methods, two-way fieldwork, multi-site and/or multi-level survey is especially encouraged.

Interested scholars (senior and junior scholars, including graduate students and recent doctorate holders) are invited to send extended abstracts of 500 words that provide a clear and sufficient outline of their proposed paper. The abstract must be accompanied by a one-page academic curriculum vitae highlighting affiliation, contact address and selected publications. ISAS will provide selected paper presenters with return airfare (economy class) and accommodation for the duration of the workshop.

A selection of papers presented at the workshop may be considered for a special issue publication in a reputable journal. All manuscripts should be original work that has not been published or is not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Important Dates:

Submission of Abstract February 15, 2012

Notification of Acceptance of Abstract February 29, 2012

Submission of Full Length Paper August 1, 2012

Kindly e-mail your abstract and other required information to:

Mamta Sachan Kumar: isasmsk@nus.edu.sg and Hema Kiruppalini: isashk@nus.edu.sg

Please copy to Md Mizanur Rahman: mizan@nus.edu.sg

Please title the subject of your e-mail as follows:

'Proposal for ISAS Diaspora and Development Workshop 2012'

Institute of South Asian Studies

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