



Engaging migrants and diaspora as social actors and policy advocates in development

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Action theme 3: Human development, diaspora action

Buenas tardes a todas y todos; Good evening everyone. My name is Claudia Lucero, my experiences as immigrant is the source of my motivation and passion to work with immigrant communities. My family was forced to migrate to the U.S. in the 1990's because of a lack of economic opportunities in Mexico. Unfortunately, even though my parents were eventually able to get legal status, because I was already over 21 years of age, I was not able to regularize my status and lived as an undocumented immigrant for many years. So I know what it is to live in fear of being undocumented and how broken is the U.S. immigration system is. I also knew from relatives back in Mexico the desperate conditions there that forced so many to make the difficult decision to migrate.

My first experience with leadership was with my own hometown association Durango Unido. After years of helping to build the organization I eventually had the opportunity to be the president. I also became president of a local Mexican network of hometown associations in Chicago called CONFEMEX. But I had the feeling that it was not enough and I started to build along with others a national network of Mexican community organizations promoting sustainable development in Mexico. This became what is now known as Red Mexicana. I also wanted to unite the entire Latino immigrant community and so joined as a board member of a transnational network of organizations called NALACC advocating for the rights of Latino migrants and their families. This network allows me to extend my work internationally.

As migrants we are capable of being social subjects of sustainable development in both our countries of origin and in the places we have built our new homes. Our experiences teach us what is needed to change economic policies so that people are not forced to migrate. And we desire to be engaged in changing these policies. But we face many challenges to this engagement. For one we are also workers working day jobs and the only time we have for our communities is during the evening or on the weekends. Another major barrier is that we are often not respected as important voices in these discussions. Even organizations in the immigrant rights movement often do not ensure immigrants themselves have a voice. Since many of us remain undocumented, the fear of deportation is ever present. This often hampers our ability to work openly in the public. These fears have only increased with the increased criminalization of migration. If the UN and home governments really want to engage us they need to address the structure of barriers such as prejudices, discrimination and criminalization.

Even though we were forced to leave our countries of origin, we are still a part of those countries and we want to have the right to be social actors with all of our civic and political rights. We send money to our

home countries in the form of remittances, which has become an important source of development funding. But we do want to be seen just as economic contributors. It is important for us to define development; what it means and to see it from all of its facets: education, health, environment and politics. We need to be allowed to participate fully as actors in the policy making process and to be a development advocates, but it also has to be a development model that will assure us a full access to education, health, civic, economic and political participation. A key element of real participation is political rights in both our countries of origin and in the countries we now call home. Some examples include things like dual citizenship, voting abroad mechanism and forms of political participation regardless of citizenship. Migrants are not just sources of funding for their home countries; they are also the source of valuable ideas, especially in regards to changing the economic models in our home countries, expanding human and labor rights, improving the lives of women, etc.

As I migrant women I had different challenges that I have been able to pass but we as women still have a long way to work to incorporate the gender topics at this level.