IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE AFRO-PERUVIAN COMMUNITIES OF SAN LUIS DE CAÑETE, PERU

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“The people of African descent and the indigenous peoples have been marginalized, banished, and systematically excluded, and are thereby among the poorest in a region that has the highest rate of inequality in the world.”

— Francisco Campbell President, Center for Human, Civil, and Autonomous Rights (Nicaragua)

Valuing the Past, Participating in the Future

Local pastries, crafts and other goods were displayed on a table in a recent workshop held in San Jose, Costa Rica. Workshop attendees, from across Latin America, were able to taste, touch and feel the results of a project that allowed Afro-Peruvian communities of San Luis de Cañete portray their culture, creativity and entrepreneurship potential. These were only a few of the results of a World Bank capacity and identity building project in Peru.

When asked what he thought of the experience of working with the World Bank in a project involving the municipality of San Luis de Cañete in Peru, Antonio Quispe, the ex-mayor said, “The experience in Peru was at first, an extraordinary challenge. There are opportunities in which we do not know what can be done or what we ourselves can offer. I admire the capacity and the potential of my community.” This capacity and potential was seen in the energy and willingness with which the municipal authorities, community organizations and the community worked together on this development project and engaged in a dialogue for the betterment of the community.

San Luis de Cañete, has over 10,000 people. From past census data, however, one would think that only 5 of those more than 10,000 inhabitants were afro-descendants. This was in large part due to the problem of self-identification. San Luis is a town full of pride and traditions that wants to reinforce existing capabilities as well as create new ones. The project, “Identity and Leadership of the Afro-Peruvian Communities in San Luis de Cañete,” has helped its inhabitants value their past and actively participate in the creation of the town’s future development.

The municipal development program was an innovative project whose aim, at first, was strengthening the leadership capacity of afro-descendants and later grew to include several community organizations. A small workshop on “Development with Identity” was the first facet of the project. As a result of this workshop, the community of San Luis de Cañete and the municipality developed and implemented a number of actions. These included: building a cultural center with a photo exhibit of the community and its most prominent local leaders (cooks, singers, musicians, etc); developing campaigns to beautify the city; and, organizing fairs where all projects, initiatives and peoples could show the community what they did and what they could offer. This last project, the fair, involved all kinds of organizations and people; from food sellers and musical groups to theater groups; and even municipal police officers were present with a stand where local groups and the police discussed issues of citizenship among others. The project, and the initiatives that stemmed from it, helped the community rescue its multicultural roots, reaffirm its identity and empower them to demonstrate what the community as a whole was capable of.
Mr. Quispe best described the municipal development project in a workshop, dealing with gender and development, in Costa Rica, when he said: “Compared to the other projects with regional or national scope that we heard here today, our project was very small. Notwithstanding this, the project helped create an important influence in the leadership strengthening and self-identification process at par with our work developing concrete and immediate capacities, such as bettering the quality of life and income in our communities. This process that was worked in Cañete, in San Luis in particular, I think is serving so that other Afro-Peruvian organizations will be able to revise their methodology and their strategy, and focus on the subject at hand.”

Building Capacity

The first capacity building workshop held, as part of the municipal development project, dealt with leadership and identity. Using leadership traits that had been identified by the workshop’s participants, forty community leaders were chosen and charged with constructing a social development plan for afro-descendants in San Luis de Cañete. This first workshop gave San Luis’ citizens the opportunity to recognize their capacities as leaders as well as the town’s growth potential. It allowed them to become the protagonists of their future development. Speaking about this workshop, Mr. Quispe marveled at what had been produced. “Organization,” he said “is the main weakness of our community, and the fact that there is organization present today is a triumph. Information is power, it is culture, it is the key to growth and development.”

The result of this workshop was the expansion of the project into 12 leadership strengthening workshops in the district of San Luis, a workshop for the construction of an institutional mapping, an information fair and the gallery of art, Nicomedes Santa Cruz.

Reaching a Community

The “Identity and Leadership of the Afro-Peruvian Communities in San Luis de Cañete” project grew to encompass a variety of initiatives on the part of afro-descendant organizations and the municipality of San Luis. One initiative was the “Information Fair” organized by the nongovernmental organization, APEIDO (Asociación Plurietnica Impulsora del Desarrollo Social y Comunal), and the municipal authorities. Over 20 information booths were set up at the fair; which enjoyed the participation of dance groups, women’s groups, musicians as well as many other groups. The objectives of the information fair were fourfold: promote and strengthen afro-descendant organizations; prepare these organizations so that they can appropriately handle problems that may arise within the community; create a participatory methodology that would effectively help recuperate the values of Afro-Peruvian communities; and, inform afro-descendants of their rights by making them see that they can decide their future.

A number of projects were presented at the fair. One of them came from a woman’s group who got together and decided to make and sell local pastries as a way of both presenting local goods and helping with the community’s development process. APEIDO presented a project titled “The Afro-Peruvian Presence and Agriculture.” This project looked at the treatment received by Afro-Peruvians in Cañete by the Peruvian government when this entity was handing out land. The information booth noted that afro-descendants in Cañete did not receive any land.

Elsa Contreras, a member of APEIDO, said that, “this project has been able to reach our community directly. With little resources the identity of a community and the development of local economic capacities have been aided.”

The Nicomedes Santa Cruz Cultural Center, another spin-off project, has become an extraordinary reference point for the community as well as visitors. In the center are exhibits showcasing the role of Afro-Peruvians in San Luis. The cultural center, like the workshop before it, has prompted spin-off projects with the goal of rescuing cultural sites as a basis for community based eco-tourism. One such project was the book “Building our Future (Forjar Nuestro Futuro),” a collection of biographies of the town’s notable citizens.

Taking the First Step

The capacity building workshop was an important project for the people of San Luis de Cañete, but also for the World Bank. “I would like to divide the answer to this question in two parts,” said Antonio Quispe when asked about the role of the World Bank in this type of initiative, “firstly, I see the World Bank, a great and powerful institution, lacking a vision in favor of our communities, but I see another World Bank, a friend, I see your faces. I hope that one day you will be able to open more doors so that the institution can help alleviate so much inequality and poverty in our communities; and that this first capacity building project be understood by our communities as a first step, many others will follow.”

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Building Capacity - Projects and Initiatives

Since the beginning of 2002, the Latin America and Caribbean region Afro-Latin program has embarked on a series of capacity building projects. The projects have touched on a number of different issues. The Afro-Latin capacity building portfolio includes: community planning and skill development projects; leadership capacity strengthening workshops; and workshops on the dissemination of information. Some of these projects, and the countries where they have been implemented, include:

Uruguay: The NGO, Mundo-Afro implemented an educational program in Uruguay that promoted racial cultural diversity values in the school system in Uruguay. The program consisted of a series of workshops and training sessions for teachers, school supervisors and students. As a result of dialogues with the Ministry of Education, sets of materials for primary education that convey the multicultural reality of the country has been introduced in all primary schools in the country. Mundo Afro has produced teachers’ training material to support the training activities.

This project has become a model of best practice for other countries in the Southern Cone, particularly Chile, Argentina and Paraguay where inclusion of afro-descendant images in textbooks are being discussed with the ministries of Education in these countries.

Bolivia: The Afro-Bolivian movement is very young and its objectives were dispersed and unclear. Afro-Bolivians were able to take advantage of a World Bank grant clarify their role in the society and define their vision and aspirations as a movement. Four workshops with afro-descendant organizations resulted in the creation of a strategic plan for the movement and two community cultural centers in La Paz and Santa Cruz. These achievements are extraordinary if one takes into account the fact that Afro-Bolivian organizations had never received grant support before, engaged in strategic planning or reported on money expenditure.

Central America: Leadership strengthening workshops for afro-descendant women were held in Nicaragua, Guatemala, Belize, Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica. A core group of 20 women leaders were chosen in the first workshop that took place in Costa Rica. This core group identified areas that needed to be strengthened and later replicated the workshop in their respective countries. This program was developed and implemented in collaboration with the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Women’s Network.

Costa Rica: In April 23, an evaluation workshop was held in Costa Rica. The purpose of this workshop was to: (1) evaluate the work of the core group of afro-descendant women leaders that was chosen in the leadership strengthening workshop the year before, and (2) coordinate ways by which program and workshop information would be disseminated. Documents relating to the workshop and the capacity building projects are in the final stages of production.

Venezuela: The community planning and skill development project in Venezuela funded a strategic planning exercise of the Afro-Venezuelan movement led by a social scientist. This exercise, focused on self-identification, helped its participants from the Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations acquire a clearer vision of the movement and its mission statement as well as define its priorities. A publication with an overview of the cultural presence and inheritance of Afro-Venezuelans was produced by the Network of Afro-Venezuelan Organizations.

Besides capacity building projects, the Afro-Latin unit co-sponsored, along with the Inter-American Development Bank, the second Todos Contamos (We All Count) conference in Lima, Peru on October 23-25, 2002. The conference, dedicated to revising progress in the integration of racial and ethnic questions in national censuses as a way of obtaining official disaggregated data on race and ethnicity in general, and afro-descendants specifically, brought together representatives from 18 Latin American countries. Attendees at the Todos Contamos conference included government representatives, census bureau directors, and members of afro-descendant and indigenous organizations. The discussions heard at the conference, indicated that progress had been achieved concerning the integration of ethnicity related questions in national censuses and household surveys. More work, however, still needs to be done.

Todos Contamos II, was another opportunity to explore the links between data and policymaking. In particular, policies related to inclusion of afro-descendants and indigenous peoples in national development plans and in poverty reduction initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals.

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“A Long Journey Towards Inclusion”

Shelton Davis

“The struggle for civil rights is a long journey”, Dr. Martin Luther King told the class of 1965 at Antioch, a small American college in Ohio. The enthralled audience heard King speak about his great dream of a world where all human beings would enjoy the same rights and opportunities; and they heard King subtly warn them that the United States had a long way to go before all its citizens would be truly equal. Among those intent new graduates that day was Shelton Davis. Davis, now the Sector Manager of the Social Development Unit in the World Bank’s Department for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development of the Latin America and the Caribbean Region, has devoted most of his professional life to studying and implementing development strategies with a social and human rights component. He explains that he remains profoundly influenced by Dr. King’s words that day in Ohio. “The opening-up process at the World Bank has started,” Davis says. “The challenge now lies in defining and implementing inclusion programs and policies for indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants.”

“Like many people in the Bank today,” Davis continues, “I fully support the struggle to alleviate poverty and counter social exclusion wherever it occurs.” Davis obtained his Ph.D. degree in Social Anthropology at Harvard University in 1970, following two years of anthropological research in a Mayan speaking Indian community in the highlands of Guatemala. After that, he taught anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, at Harvard University, and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1977, he published Victims of the Miracle: Development and the Indians of Brazil (Cambridge University Press), a book about the disastrous effects of the Brazilian military government’s highway construction and land settlement programs on the relatively isolated indigenous peoples of the Amazon region.

Davis joined the World Bank in 1987, forming part of the first regional Environment Unit in the Latin America and Caribbean Region and being responsible for the Bank’s regional work on behalf of indigenous peoples. His work at the World Bank has fostered the developmental projects funded by this financial institution, through strategies aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. The idea of respect for the land and the cultural rights of indigenous peoples is a critical part of these strategies.

Development with Identity

“Cultural identity is a basic human need,” states Davis, who stresses the importance that collective identity has for the individual, the community, and the social group to which a person belongs. “An individual is immersed in a wider social, cultural, and linguistic community which one inherits from one’s parents and passes on to one’s children and grandchildren. Cultural identities change, but they are always rooted in historical and social processes and are basic to the survival of communities, peoples and nations. Increasingly we are recognizing that development with identity is fundamental to an effective and sustainable development process, one based on respect for others and for the diversity and pluralism which comprises most of the world’s nations and societies.” Before becoming Sector Manager, Davis was a founding member of the Bank-wide Social Development Department. That Department was established in 1995 to strengthen the social soundness of Bank-financed investment projects and to incorporate a social development dimension into broader Bank policies and programs.

When focusing on development, we must refer to society, culture and values. There is always a social, cultural, and ethical dimension to development policies,” Davis emphasizes. One of the major assets of the poor, Davis explains, is their culture and values—a concept that is now integral to the design of the Bank’s new inclusion policies. Formerly, social inclusion policies were based on a standard approach that sought to counter deficits of the poor in terms of income or consumption. But in many countries, poverty exists in a robust correlation with race, ethnicity, the distribution of wealth, and other aspects of the social structure. The Bank’s social inclusion policies have come to recognize this and to take into account the idea that simple poverty reduction is not enough. The social inclusion perspective the Bank now takes is a multi-dimensional approach. This institutional vision is described in the book Social Exclusion and Poverty Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean, published in August, 2001 by the World Bank’s Latin America and Caribbean Region’s Social Development Unit and the Latin American Graduate Faculty on Social Sciences (FLACSO) in Costa Rica.

“The voices of the poor and the traditionally excluded are growing,” says Davis. “It is not possible to include communities in the process of development without having their voices heard and their presence in decision-making. Intermediaries such as NGOs can assist the poor, but the real challenge is to listen to the poor and to have them participate actively in the development decision-making process. There are no better qualified experts than the poor themselves.”

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