

Feature Article

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TURNING DIVERSITY INTO AN ASSET: HOW MOSAIC PARTNERSHIPS HELPS COMMUNITIES ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

By Dash Douglas



ETHNIC DIVERSITY IS A MINE RICH WITH POSSIBILITIES. The wealth of world views and experiences of a diverse community gives rise to varied ideas, perspectives, knowledge and skills that can significantly enhance a community's ability to prosper. However, the realization of the potential benefits of diversity on development depends on the degree to which a community is cohesive.

Diverse societies that achieve a high level of social cohesion are well-positioned to realize their full social and economic potential.



In too many places, however, ethnic diversity has become the source of civil disorder and unrest rather than a force for social and economic development. Globally, ethnic tensions are on the rise. The division of society into competing adversarial factions, segmented by perceived differences, is having a baneful impact on the functioning of our communities. Recent events in the Middle East offer a prime example of the effects of disunity and its impact on the functioning and development of a region.

Although ethnic diversity has often led to civil strife and destabilization, the cause of the conflict is not the diversity itself, but rather the underlying lack of social cohesion between ethnic groups. Ethnic diversity is in and of itself neither helpful nor harmful for development purposes; it provides the potential for both the growth and deterioration of a community. Unfortunately, most societies have demonstrated a lack of competency in building and sustaining sufficient social cohesion to prevent disintegration and capitalize on the positive potential of their diversity.

Ethnicity-based conflict is emerging as a key factor contributing to social and economic disintegration in many areas of the world. Much research has been devoted to studying the impact of social cohesion on sustainable economic development—the process whereby future generations receive at least as much capital per capita as the current generation. Traditionally, the term capital has included

natural, physical and human capital; these forms, however, constitute only partially the process of economic development. What has been overlooked is the manner by which economic actors interact and organize themselves to generate growth, that is through social capital, which refers to the level of social cohesion and the norms that govern interactions among people and institutions. In a paper produced by the World Bank, social capital is described as “the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being”.¹

A wide variety of specific social and economic benefits is derived from social capital. Studies show that communities with high levels of social capital experience social conflict reduction, greater academic achievement, reduced levels of crime and violence, greater governmental efficiency, healthier citizens, poverty alleviation, and faster economic growth. Social commentator Francis Fukuyama says that economies whose citizens have high social capital will dominate the twenty-first century.

Turning for a moment to the United States, research indicates that the United States has experienced an erosion of social capital over the past few decades; its citizens and various ethnic communities are becoming increasingly disconnected from each other. People of all races and ethnicities are feeling disappointed and frustrated by what each group perceives to be a failure of efforts in recent decades at effecting progress in the relations between ethnic and racial



A cluster group gathering.

groups. To rationalize this failure, many people have been retreating to the more familiar ground of racial and ethnic separation. Consequently, as some researchers have shown, the United States is currently suffering from the greatest segregation between races within the last century.

To combat the growing ethnic polarization in the city of Rochester, New York in 2001, Mayor William A. Johnson initiated the Mosaic Partnerships Program.² It was not designed to resolve social conflict, but rather to prevent conflict through creating, developing and nurturing the foundational building blocks of a community—that is, trusting relationships among individuals and groups of individuals. The Program's success in fostering social cohesion across racial and

ethnic barriers has led to replication in two other United States cities: Greensboro, North Carolina and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Its goal is to stimulate a cultural shift in a community—a shift in common values from an exclusive to an inclusive culture, and from social isolation to social integration. Because creating systematic and sustainable change requires leadership with a new vision, the Mosaic Program focuses on the opinion leaders in a community, those respected and trusted members with dense social networks over which they have substantial influence. They are the permission givers for the community and serve as tipping points for the diffusion of the Mosaic concept and its transformative impact.

The Mosaic Program pairs leaders across ethnicity and guides them through a one-year process of relationship development and trust-building, which encourages leaders to extend beyond their comfort zone and connect with people with whom they typically would not interact—those of another ethnicity. It affords them the opportunity to view the world through the eyes of another leader, whose perspective is likely very different from their own and changes how the participants engage other relationships in their life—friend, family, professional, etc. The participants begin to recognize, understand and even rally around their commonalities, as opposed to allowing their differences to hinder the development of a relationship. When a trusting relationship develops, leaders open their social networks to each other, allowing for the integration of the ethnic groups that were previously siloed in the community.

The Mosaic process has successfully bridged diverse networks of people within a community and proliferated the “weak tie” relationships that are foundational for a community’s social and economic advancement. Such relationships are more distant, whereas strong ties are with people with a sociological niche similar to their own, e.g., relatives, close friends, business associates. While strong ties have their benefit in a community in that they undergird solidarity, it is the weak ties that are the key mechanism for mobilizing resources, ideas and information, whether for finding or filling a job, solving a problem, responding to a crisis, launching a new product, locating a service, establishing a new enterprise, etc. Weak ties are also essential to the creative environment of a community, as they facilitate rapid entry of new people and absorption of new ideas. The social cohesion that weak ties engender will ultimately reduce the potential for ethnicity-based conflict and promote sustainable economic development.

We can no longer afford the social disengagement and estrangement of the diverse elements of societies. Ethnically fragmented societies are prone to civil disorder and strife, which break down the social and economic functioning of our communities and undermine sustainable development. The resolution of this most fundamental social problem requires an organic change, one that rests ultimately on the common recognition of our human oneness. The purpose of the Mosaic Partnerships is to foster that recognition and build unity in diversity, two people at a time, as the foundation for social transformation. Such a transformation requires that the social and emotional distance that exists among people of different ethnicities be bridged by close association and fellowship. Communities that intentionally and systematically strengthen the bonds of trust between people of different ethnic backgrounds elevate their level of social cohesion, enabling themselves to reap the benefits of diversity while reducing the potential for destructive conflict.

Policy makers cannot legislate social cohesion and trusting relationships. At the same time, the impact of social cohesion on minimizing the likelihood of conflict and promoting sustainable development is too evident to be ignored. Therefore, policies aimed at promoting the development of social capital must be of priority. It calls for policy makers to thoroughly integrate innovative ways of building social capital into its community development planning so that it becomes tightly interwoven into all aspects of community life.

Notes

- 1 Grootaert, C. 1998. *Social Capital: The Missing Link?* Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 3, World Bank.
- 2 Robert Rosenfeld, President and Chief Executive Officer of Idea Connection Systems, Inc. created and designed the Mosaic Partnerships.

Author

Dash Douglas, as Director of the Mosaic Partnerships Program, is responsible for providing leadership, vision and direction for all aspects of this project. A civil rights attorney by training, he litigated fair housing cases for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and has done extensive research on race and its relation to inner-city social and economic development.

Progress Reports

United States

Milwaukee Launches Mosaic Partnerships!

In September, Milwaukee became the third Mosaic community. Spearheaded by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Program launched with 230 community leaders participating in the opening Orientation. The event was held at the Milwaukee County War Memorial on the city’s beautiful lakefront.



The Milwaukee Mosaic Program is off to a great start. The participants have now experienced the first three of six cluster group gatherings. Douglas Jansson, President of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, said that “the Program has been more successful than we had hoped... we have

received a lot of anecdotal feedback praising the program to date. Many participants comment how much they value the rich, meaningful dialogue in the cluster group gatherings with a



diverse group of people with whom they may not have ever otherwise interacted.”

The Milwaukee Mosaic Partnerships Program is planning for at least 700 community leaders to participate in the Program over its first three years.

Rochester Completing Phase IV



In December, Rochester Mosaic Partnerships participants and coaches will hold their seventh (and final) cluster group gathering. During this gathering, participants in each of the 12 cluster groups will explore the possibility of continuing to meet to engage in a community challenge.

On January 26th, the participants will come together in a Celebration of Difference. During the finale, they will get an opportunity to meet all of the Phase IV participants, as they celebrate their year and its successes. Current and prior Mosaic participants will share their Mosaic experience and the coaches will be honored for their selfless dedication and for the critical role they played in the success of the Program.

Launching Commitment Campaign



Rochester Mosaic is convinced that focused, measured, and sustained attention to social capital building is a critical part of creating a future in Rochester. To this end, they are working vigorously on a long-term strategy. Part of this strategy is stepping back and learning from the last

five years of implementing Mosaic Partnerships. Another part of the strategy involves a community-wide commitment campaign. The goals of the campaign are to: 1) gain commitment from leaders of key community sectors; 2) set and reach Program participation goals for each sector; 3) build a sustainable annual giving base; 4) strengthen and rebuild relationships with past participants; and 5) gather letters of support, quotes, stories, and pictures. Rochester Mosaic is currently creating materials and identifying champions to lead the campaign in each sector.

Phase IV of the Rochester Mosaic Program has been generously supported by Rochester Area Community Foundation, the City of Rochester, and private donors. Rochester Area Community Foundation recently committed \$50,000 to support the development of Phase V in Rochester, as part of its Civic Engagement Fund.

Greensboro, North Carolina: Launching Phase II



Greensboro completed its first of three phases and is now gearing up for phase II. The Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro has taken the lead in moving Greensboro Mosaic Partnerships into Phase II, which is expected to launch by March 2007 with another 180 leaders of the Greensboro community.

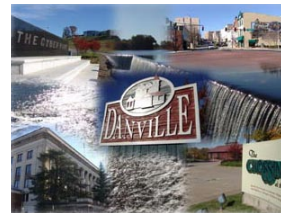
South Hampton Roads: Building Momentum



Cheryl Marks and Bobbie Hart of the YWCA of South Hampton Roads continue their efforts to bring the Mosaic Program to South Hampton Roads (a five-city region in Southeast, Virginia including Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Portsmouth and Suffolk). As part of that effort,

the City of Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim and Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf have agreed to champion the Program. Also, they are formalizing an Advisory Council and have the support of several leaders from various organizations in the community including Tidewater Community College, Old Dominion University, the Urban League of Hampton Roads, Norfolk United Facing Race, the Virginia Conference for Community and Justice, Norfolk State University, Virginia Wesleyan. (The Advisory Council is looking to expand and to include more sectors of the community

Danville, Virginia



Debbie Fletcher of the YWCA is actively garnering support for Mosaic Partnerships in Danville. A core advisory committee has been established that is looking to learn more about how to implement the Program from their neighbor—the City of Greensboro.

International

Durban, South Africa: First International Mosaic Community?



In October, Mosaic staff members spent two weeks in Durban as guests of eThekweni Municipality (City of Durban). We were privileged to meet many key leaders in the community, including senior government officials (Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chief Whip, and heads of various City departments), City Councillors,

leaders in the not-for-profit sector, the educational sector, the business sector, community activist groups, the faith community, and the Greater Durban Community Foundation.

During the visit, Durban's leadership saw the potential of Mosaic Partnerships to help build the social infrastructure necessary for sustainable development. The Program is a tool to promote a healthy social fabric by facilitating relationships and trust between the individuals and entities involved in addressing the region's challenges.

The development of personal relationships at the leadership level is the foundational step toward being able to communicate and collaborate on addressing the challenges in an integrated, comprehensive, and inclusive manner—not in isolation from one another.



We are currently seeking funding to implement the Durban Mosaic Program in 2007.



“The rewards are spectacular. It takes us out of our normal routine. Insanity is doing the same thing and expecting better results. Well, if we want better results, we better do things differently... and this is a great example of that.”

~ Danny Wegman,
CEO of Wegmans Food Markets

Mosaic Links

Rochester Mosaic Partnerships

www.rochestermosaic.org

Greensboro Mosaic Partnerships

www.ci.greensboro.nc.us/mosaic

Milwaukee Mosaic Partnerships

www.ci.mil.wi.us/display/router.asp?docid=17602

General information about Mosaic Partnerships

www.innovating.com/ser_mosaic.html

Notes

- **Please feel free to send this issue of Mosaic Update to anyone who may be interested in the Program.**
- Each Community relies on donations to implement the Mosaic Program. If you are interested in supporting any of the existing programs or supporting Mosaic in another community, please contact Dash Douglas, Director, Mosaic Partnerships Program using the information provided below. Dash will be able to direct you to the appropriate person in each community.
- If you prefer not to receive the Mosaic Update (distributed quarterly) please e-mail Debbie Rosenfeld (drosenfeld@innovating.com) to be removed from our distribution list.

Contact Information

If you have any Mosaic news for the next edition of Mosaic Update or would like more information on the Program, contact Dash Douglas at 585.442.4110 Ext. 3108.

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