

OCTOBER 2020

The Guyanese Diaspora

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Michael Matera

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A Report of the CSIS Americas Program

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Introduction

Since Guyana gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1966, high levels of emigration have been driven by limited opportunities for employment locally, a high degree of political instability, periodic outbreaks of social unrest and violence, and relatively open doors abroad to its citizens, given their native English language and high levels of education. The most common destinations for this emigration have been the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and a number of other Caribbean and Latin American countries. As a consequence of steady emigration, especially beginning in the 1970s, approximately only half of Guyanese now live within the borders of Guyana, with the remainder scattered in diaspora communities across the globe.

There has been a long tradition of close diaspora contact and support for family members who have remained in Guyana and for schools and villages linked to diaspora members. There have been efforts by political parties and the government of Guyana in recent years to engage the diaspora, in part aimed at financial support for political parties and at encouraging greater remittances and increased direct investment in Guyana. There have also been some efforts over the years to enlist members of the diaspora in the economic development of Guyana, most directly by attracting diaspora members with particular skills back to Guyana and by encouraging investment. However, these efforts by successive governments have been inconsistent and of limited consequence.

With the discovery of vast reserves of oil and gas in Guyana in 2015, and with the potential for Guyana to become one of the largest exporters of energy in the Western Hemisphere in the coming

decades, the country is anticipating a dramatic economic and social transformation. Its GDP is projected to grow at double-digit rates beginning in 2020, with the first oil exports already underway. This transformation is expected to come with a dramatic increase in demand for skilled labor in many sectors, not just the energy sector, as increased GDP translates over time into an increasingly prosperous country and population.

As early as September 2016, the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) began to focus attention on Guyana, its history, its economy, its social makeup, and the dramatic transformation anticipated in the country given the discovery of large oil and gas reserves. Collaborating with the Embassy of Guyana in Washington, D.C. and with other public and private stakeholders, the Americas Program initiated an ongoing series of presentations and publications on Guyana as well as efforts to gather the growing group of individuals and organizations, public and private, with an interest in and commitment to Guyana, including members of the Guyanese diaspora living in the United States.

CSIS has undertaken an in-depth study of the Guyanese diaspora, with a close focus on the overall character, size, and skills of the diaspora and the degree of engagement between the diaspora and the public and private sectors in Guyana. As a part of this study, CSIS experts interviewed approximately 40 individual members of the diaspora, home-based Guyanese, and a selection of non-Guyanese who have been involved in one way or another with efforts to promote greater diaspora engagement in Guyana. As part of this effort, the project team also researched the diaspora engagement experiences of other countries, namely the Dominican Republic, India, Jamaica and Mexico, in order to assess if any of these experiences might serve as a useful model for Guyana.

Coming out of these interviews and research work, the CSIS Americas Program has also developed specific recommendations to promote and encourage a deeper and more mutually advantageous relationship between Guyana and the diaspora. Most of these recommendations require significant collaboration between the public and private sectors (including civil society organizations) of Guyana, with active roles for individuals and organizations of the Guyanese diaspora.

An Assessment of the State of the Guyanese Diaspora

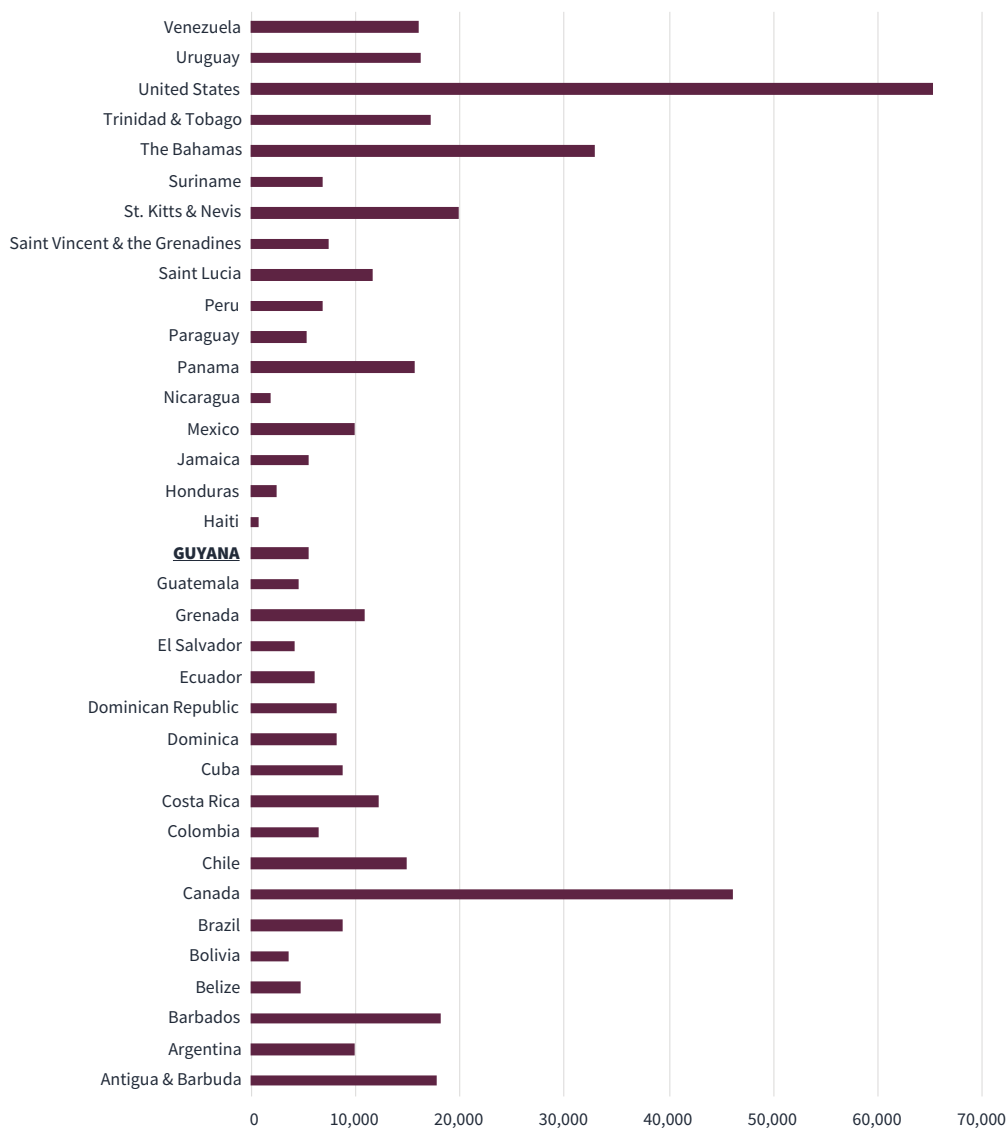
Background

While Guyana was colonized by the Dutch during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it became a British colony in 1814 and remained so until its independence on May 26, 1966. In 1970, it officially became the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.¹ As in many other countries in the region, a long period of colonization and slavery left behind ethnocultural divides that have persisted to this day. Originally brought in as indentured labor, South Asians (mainly from India) comprise the largest ethnic group in Guyana (39.8 percent), followed by those of African descent (29.3 percent), whose ancestors originally arrived as enslaved plantation workers. The country also has smaller populations of Chinese, Portuguese, and mixed races (19.9 percent) and nine indigenous groups (10.5 percent)—the Akawaio, Lokono (Arawak), Arecunas, Kalina (Carib), Macushis, Patomonas, Wai Wais, Wapishana, and Warraus—who inhabit the interior of the country.² Along with diverse ethnicities, a variety of religions are represented, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, the African-Guyanese religious culture of Cumfa/Komfa, and native Amerindian religious cultures.³

Guyana has a population of approximately 787,000.⁴ Population growth in Guyana has been either negative or at less than 2 percent in the past decades, as many citizens have emigrated from the country in response to political instability and violence or in search of greater economic opportunities abroad. The total population has never reached 1 million.⁵ Guyana's population is relatively young, with about 47 percent being under 25 years of age.⁶ While Guyana has a high literacy rate, its functional literacy rate is relatively low, reportedly because of inconsistent education quality, especially in rural areas.⁷ Almost 90 percent of

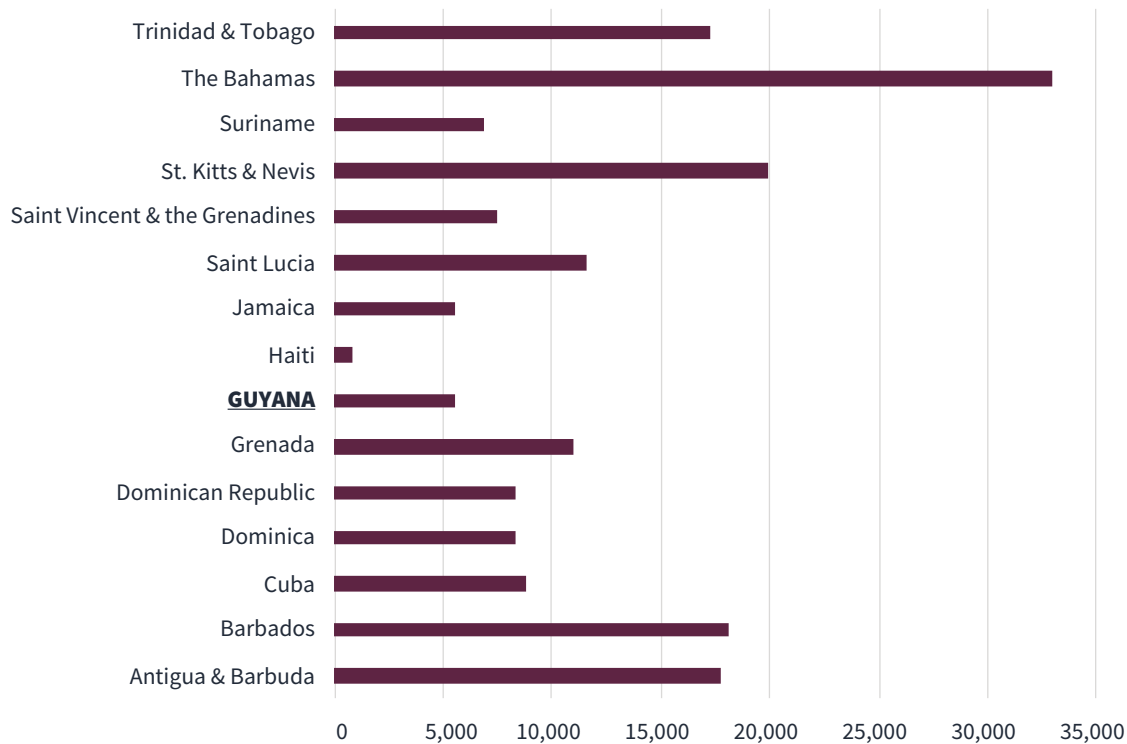
Guyanese nationals with a tertiary-level education and 40 percent of those with a secondary education emigrated from Guyana between 1965 and 2000.⁸ Many others seeking tertiary education and employment opportunities outside of Guyana have emigrated in recent decades, establishing significant diaspora communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States (see diaspora details below). Based on these statistics, Guyana is thought to have one of the highest levels of “brain drain” of any country on Earth. Remittances from diaspora members abroad, mostly to their family members at home, have been a main contributor to Guyana’s economy for many decades. With remittances representing about 8.6 percent of GDP in 2018, Guyana has been one of the largest remittance recipients relative to GDP among Latin American and Caribbean countries.⁹ As of 2020, youth unemployment is high, at around 21 percent, with overall unemployment rates also high at 11.8 percent.¹⁰ Guyana, which in 2019 had a GDP per capita of \$5,468.40, ranked second to last among the countries of the Caribbean—only Haiti ranked lower.

GDP per Capita in the Western Hemisphere (2019)



Source: “GDP per capital (current US\$),” The World Bank, accessed July 28, 2020, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?name_desc=true.

GDP Per Capita in the Caribbean (2019)



Source: "GDP per capita (current US\$)," The World Bank, accessed July 28, 2020, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?name_desc=true.

Two major political parties have dominated Guyana's politics since independence in 1966, with the parties organized rather clearly along ethnic lines. The People's Progressive Party (PPP) overwhelmingly represents Indo-Guyanese, and the People's National Congress (PNC) overwhelmingly represents Afro-Guyanese, though small numbers of members from other ethnic groups are associated with each of the two leading parties.¹¹ The PNC held power from 1964 until 1992, when the PPP won elections as the new People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), allied with business groups and civil society.¹² The PPP/C held power until 2015 when it was defeated by a coalition consisting of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), dominated by the PNC, the Alliance for Change (AFC), which identifies itself as a multiracial party, and led by presidential candidate David Granger.¹³

Almost every election in Guyana since independence has been marked by serious charges of election fraud and vote buying, often with extended periods of judicial challenges serving to undermine the legitimacy of election results. The March 2, 2020 elections were no exception. International observers from the Commonwealth of Nations, the European Union, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) declared Guyana's Elections Commission's (GECOM) vote tabulation process in Region 4 as "lacking credibility."¹⁴ In July 2020, the United States imposed initial visa sanctions on members of the Granger government in an effort to convince it to step aside in favor of the PPP/C, which all observers had deemed to be the winner of the elections, and sanctions by other nations were expected to be imposed if the situation was not normalized.¹⁵ After five months of controversy and legal battles, and finally a recount of Region 4 votes, Mohamed Irfaan Ali of the PPP/C was declared the winner of the election and sworn in as president on August 2, 2020.¹⁶

Serious recurring disputes over power, such as the one in 2020, have helped to exacerbate ethnic and political tensions, undermine social stability and cohesion, and stand in the way of the country achieving the kind of economic progress that might otherwise have been possible. Efforts to promote a broad unity government over the years have not been successful, and there is a growing consensus that fundamental constitutional and electoral reform is essential to be able to move beyond the instability and ethnic tensions that have characterized the country both before and since independence.

Oil Discovery

With the ongoing discovery of reserves of oil and gas in Guyana, the country anticipates a significant increase in demand for skilled labor in many sectors beyond energy, as increased GDP translates over time into an increasingly prosperous country and population. With this projected growth in national income, the country will have the opportunity to develop modern health and education systems, construct other major public infrastructure projects, and potentially develop new sectors of energy and non-energy related industries. There is even the possibility of reviving the country's agricultural sector and developing agro-industrial production and export of both basic food commodities and value-added food products.

Guyana will face the same kind of difficult challenges that other countries have faced as they have come into sudden wealth. The predominant challenge is to wisely manage this new wealth by carefully planning a sensible development strategy and ensuring that this new wealth is not misappropriated by a few but shared equitably with the entire population and with future generations of Guyanese. The transformation of a small country such as Guyana through such oil discoveries will be historic, with some experts referring to Guyana as potentially the “new Qatar” of South America.¹⁷ Part of the challenge will be to avoid the “resource curse,” a malady which has left many countries rich in oil and gas resources (such as Venezuela, Nigeria, and others) with authoritarianism, corruption, and poverty.

Guyana's GDP is expected to increase significantly in 2020 as a result of its first exports of oil. The country is expected to have an average annual growth of 28 percent between 2020 and 2024, doubling its GDP to \$8.1 billion and per capita income to over \$10,000 over the same period.¹⁸ Guyana is projected to be among the world's largest per-capita oil producers by 2025 and has the potential of becoming one of the wealthiest countries per capita in the hemisphere within the next generation.¹⁹

Guyana: Definition of “Diaspora”

Institutions such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) broadly describe “diaspora” as “emigrants and their descendants who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry, either on a temporary or permanent basis, yet still maintain affective and material ties to their countries of origin.”²⁰ However, a diaspora can also be understood as a “state of mind . . . a psychological belonging to a collective culture, host-land or homeland.”²¹ The latter understanding puts an emphasis on the importance of having a psycho-cultural connection to the homeland, regardless of maintaining material ties to the home country.

Given Guyana's history of being inhabited before independence by multiple diasporic ethnicities (in addition to its indigenous population that today comprises approximately 10 percent of the country's population), some Guyanese now living outside of the country can be identified as “doubly diasporic,”

as they identify as part of the Guyanese diaspora abroad but also as part of the broader global community of South Asians, Africans, Chinese, Portuguese, or other groups.²² In simple terms, the Guyanese diaspora is comprised of temporary or permanent migrants and their descendants who have, or wish to have, emotional, psychological, cultural, or material connections to Guyana. Three terms referencing generations of diaspora will be used throughout this report: “first generation diaspora,” those born in Guyana who emigrated; “second generation diaspora,” those born abroad with at least one Guyanese-born parent; and “third generation diaspora,” generations who do not have Guyanese-born parents but have Guyanese ancestry.

Although the Guyanese government does not have an official definition of its diaspora, the constitution defines a citizen as someone born in Guyana, except in cases where neither parent is a citizen. One is also eligible to be a citizen if at least one of their parents is a Guyana-born citizen, even if they themselves have been born overseas.²³ Many Guyanese residing abroad hold dual citizenship. In addition, if former citizens have voluntarily renounced their Guyanese citizenship in order to acquire another citizenship, they are still eligible for “re-migrant” status, which entitles them to numerous concessions that the government has put in place to attract Guyanese to return.²⁴

Emigration from Guyana

Guyana’s emigration rate is one of the highest in the world, numbering about 30,000 annually, a sizable portion for a country with a total population that has never reached 1 million.²⁵ Since the 1960s, the Guyanese emigrant population has increased due to difficult economic conditions, a tense social and political environment, a weak educational system, high levels of insecurity, and an inefficient healthcare system.²⁶ Simultaneously, favorable immigration laws first in the United Kingdom, and later in Canada and the United States, and better job and education opportunities abroad have helped to motivate high levels of emigration among Guyanese.²⁷ As the number of Guyanese living abroad has increased since the 1960s, the pull factor represented by a growing number of diaspora family members has only helped to keep the emigration flow steady.

Worldwide labor shortages after World War II meant that both the United Kingdom and the United States recruited large numbers of foreign workers. Canada’s anti-discriminatory policies also allowed for the entry of immigrants looking for education and employment opportunities. As Caribbean countries established better regional relationships through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in the late-1980s, another significant wave of skilled Guyanese migrated throughout the Caribbean, providing immigrants with a cultural and environmental context similar to that of Guyana (e.g., weather, language, religion, heritage) with greater political and economic stability.²⁸

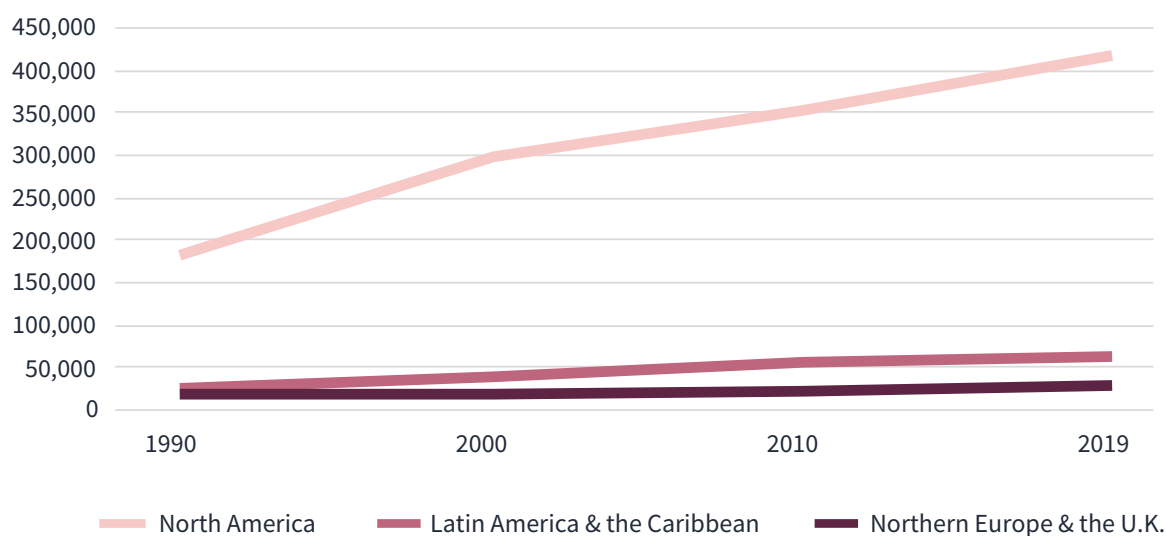
In the early-1990s, investment in Guyana declined, the economy deteriorated, wages remained extremely low, and the country experienced a period of negative growth.²⁹ This combination of factors contributed to another wave of emigration, as many skilled and educated citizens such as doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, and technicians chose to leave.³⁰ In the early-2000s, political and ethnic tensions contributed to a countrywide crime wave, a perceived increase in discrimination and corruption, and a rise in protests, resulting in further emigration.³¹

The first-generation immigrant Guyanese diaspora today is estimated to be approximately 550,000 worldwide, not including their descendants.³² The regions with the highest numbers of Guyanese

immigrants in 2019 were: North America, accounting for 80 percent of Guyanese immigrants worldwide; the Caribbean and Latin America, with 12.4 percent, the majority of whom reside in the Caribbean; and Northern Europe and the United Kingdom, with 5.9 percent (approximately 30,000).³³ Very small Guyanese diaspora communities also exist in Asia, parts of Africa, and Oceania.

Guyana's diverse ethnic, racial, and religious cultural heritage is reflected in its diaspora. Settled Guyanese communities abroad often originate from close-knit communities in Guyana, mirroring ethnic and religious clusters in Guyana. Guyanese migrants tend to gravitate to well-established Guyanese communities abroad, which leads to larger population concentrations in relatively few locations.

Guyanese Migration since 1990

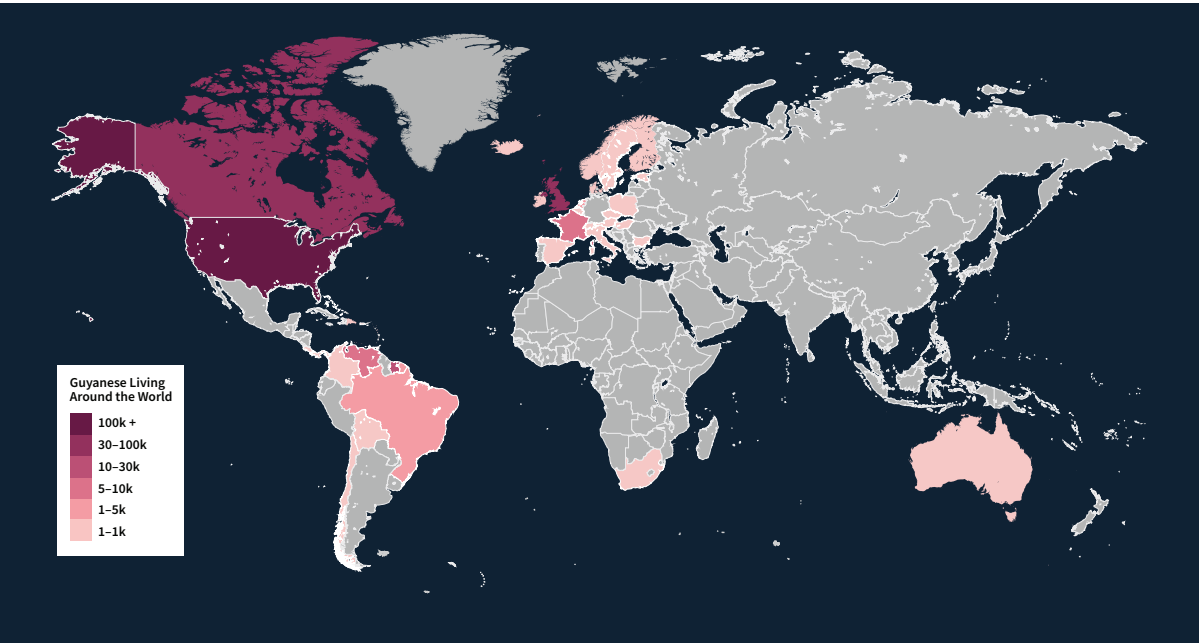


Source: "International migrant stock 2019," UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, International Migration, Accessed April 2, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.

The United States continues to be the most popular destination for emigrating Guyanese. It is estimated that over 400,000 people in the United States are Guyanese or of Guyanese ancestry. Most Guyanese in the United States live in New York, New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, and Maryland, though smaller communities exist in other places, including Illinois, Minnesota, and California.³⁴

Canada has been another popular destination for Guyanese emigrants since the 1980s. In 2016, 88,570 people living in Canada reported Guyana as their country of birth, although some members of the diaspora estimate that Canada could be home to as many as 120,000 to 200,000 Guyanese.³⁵ Although most members of the Guyanese diaspora live in Ontario (mostly in Toronto), there are also significant populations in Alberta and Quebec (mostly in Montreal).

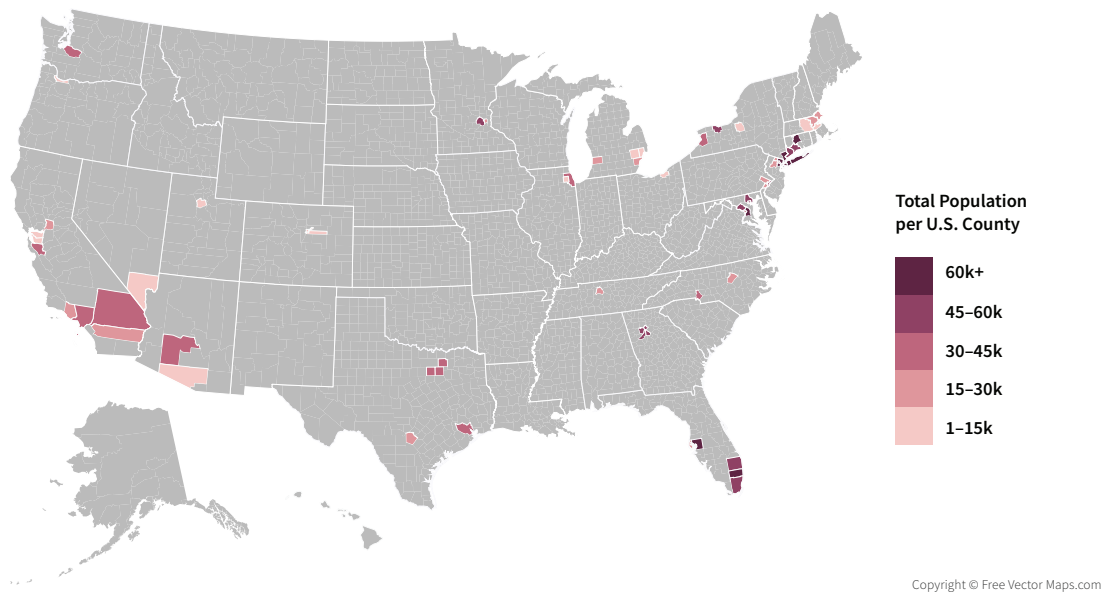
Guyanese Diaspora Worldwide



Note: The number of Guyanese living in the United States differ slightly on these maps as statistics were compiled from a variety of sources.

Source: "International migrant stock 2019, " UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, International Migration, Accessed April 2, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.

Guyanese Diaspora in the United States



Source: "People Reporting Single Ancestry, " United States Census Bureau, 2018, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>;

"People Reporting Multiple Ancestry," United States Census Bureau, 2018, accessed April 2, 2020, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

Approximately 30,000 Guyanese live in the United Kingdom, mostly in the North East region, the East Midlands, and in the London metro area.³⁶ Unlike the United States and Canada, the United Kingdom's Guyanese immigrant demographic is mostly made up of well-established communities of older generations, given that its biggest immigration waves were in the early-1960s.

Other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean also have significant populations of Guyanese immigrants. Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados each have small Guyanese diaspora communities ranging in size from 5,000 to 15,000.³⁷ Once the CARICOM countries passed policies allowing for the free movement of skilled Caribbean nationals among CARICOM states, their proximity to Guyana as well as their similar culture and society made them an attractive home for Guyanese looking for better employment opportunities.³⁸

Historically, many indigenous Guyanese have moved across the border between Venezuela and Guyana. In the last decades, this movement has been mostly in search of employment in the oil and gas industry during Venezuela's oil boom years. The largest concentration of Guyanese in Venezuela has traditionally been centered in the far east of Venezuela in the city of Puerto Ordaz in the state of Bolivar. The number of Guyanese was highest during the years of political instability in Guyana in the 1970s and 1980s, reaching well over 100,000, with some estimates of almost 300,000.³⁹ In recent years, with Venezuela's slide into instability and crisis, the number of Guyanese in Venezuela has dropped as many Guyanese have returned to Guyana.

Diaspora Profile

The Guyanese diaspora is an educated and skilled community. In the United States, over half of working-age Guyanese are in professional, managerial, or sales occupations. Other Guyanese living in the United States work in the service, construction, and agriculture industries.⁴⁰ Key occupations and industries reported by the Guyanese population in Canada were sales and service; business, finance, and administration; retail trade; and healthcare and assistance.⁴¹

Unless the issue of "brain drain" can be addressed through convincing Guyanese with local tertiary degrees to remain in the country and through attracting diaspora members back to the country, development efforts in Guyana will remain undermined. The "brain drain" that has characterized Guyana since its independence has exacerbated Guyana's chronic shortages of skilled labor.⁴² Although higher education institutions in Guyana are trying to implement more targeted education and training programs, the country's persistent underdevelopment in recent decades and lack of professional opportunities continues to push many Guyanese to migrate overseas in search of better opportunities.

The Guyanese Government's Engagement with the Diaspora

Almost all government administrations since independence in 1966 have stated the need to define a structured policy that attends to diaspora concerns and provides a platform for mutual communication and information sharing. Successive governments, including the recent APNU/AFC government, have spoken of ongoing diaspora engagement as any activities that include members of the diaspora in Guyana's ongoing development efforts and have acknowledged the importance of these efforts in enhancing both the country's growth and development and the preservation of the diaspora's social

and cultural ties to Guyana.⁴³ The new PPP/C government, including President Ali himself, has already spoken positively of diaspora engagement.⁴⁴ A September 22 press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation detailed the intention of the new government to place a greater emphasis on engagement with the Guyanese diaspora and on “leveraging the skills and investment potential of the Diaspora.”⁴⁵ One specific measure announced was the establishment of a new Diaspora and Remigration Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Reportedly, the newly appointed foreign secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Robert Persaud, will have responsibility in his portfolio for diaspora matters.

For decades, the main contribution from the Guyanese diaspora has been through informal and individual engagement, including visits to the country by members of the diaspora and the sending of remittances and goods and services to friends and family members. While this continues to be an essential support for the people and the economy of Guyana, other efforts through organizations, associations, and institutions also have been key to driving diaspora engagement and identity development. More than through mere monetary support, members of the diaspora have been known for investing their knowledge and skills into the local Guyanese community through various means, including teaching, setting up sports or interest clubs, sending medical outreach missions, contributing to hospital and school supplies, rebuilding schools, facilitating literacy initiatives, improving local business enterprises, helping to address physical and mental health challenges, and promoting greater awareness and alleviation of domestic violence, particularly against women, among other efforts.⁴⁶ The diaspora also engages with the local Guyanese community through a variety of other channels, including hometown associations, alumni groups, faith-based organizations, and humanitarian organizations.

In 2012, Guyana’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs established a Diaspora Unit to promote and guide a structured diaspora engagement aimed at strengthening relations and dialogue with overseas Guyanese, with a related goal of seeing the diaspora contribute to national development.⁴⁷ Simultaneously, the government developed a Guyana Diaspora Project (GUYDP), implemented in partnership with the IOM. The program targeted “all Guyanese living abroad and all children of Guyanese parentage living abroad” and sought to collect data on skills and resources from the diaspora in order to develop a guide for an effective diaspora engagement strategy.⁴⁸ As a part of the GUYDP, the Center for International Migration and Integration, an Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO), was contracted to prepare a Guyana Diaspora Engagement Strategy and Action Plan, which was submitted confidentially to the Guyanese government in 2017.⁴⁹ However, no data or documentation of the results of the project, including the Strategy and Action Plan, have been made public or been discussed openly with members of the diaspora.

Limited, discrete projects related to the diaspora have been pursued by various government administrations in recent decades. Most recently, in May 2017, the government launched its first Go See Visit Project, a pilot program under the IOM’s Effective and Sustainable Diaspora Engagement for Development in the Caribbean (ESDEDC). The program brought together 10 Guyanese entrepreneurs and investors from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States in a forum to discuss business opportunities and cooperation in sectors such as technology, agriculture, financial services, tourism, health services, and more.⁵⁰ Overseas, Guyanese embassies and consulates engage the Guyanese community through social events and community outreach programs. Although some efforts attempt to compile data on Guyanese organizations and create linkages between Guyanese locals and diaspora members, most efforts focus on social, cultural, and fundraising events, especially during religious and national holidays, such as in Guyana’s 50th anniversary of independence in 2016.⁵¹

The Guyanese government has also worked with the most important diaspora host nations, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, to develop programs for intercultural exchange, professional development, and educational exposure. For example, the Embassy of the United States in Guyana has sponsored Guyanese Youth Ambassadors to travel to the United States, take part in youth projects, and replicate them for Guyanese youth upon their return to Guyana.⁵² Other projects, such as expanding the human resources capacity at the Foreign Ministry and including diaspora helpdesks at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, have also been discussed, but no effective structure has been put in place.⁵³ Despite these efforts, Guyana so far has failed to attract back any significant number of overseas Guyanese. Ever since overseas voting for Guyanese citizens was eliminated in the run-up to the 1992 national elections (after having been introduced in 1968), there has been no serious effort to reestablish the possibility of such voting for Guyanese citizens living abroad.⁵⁴ Although Guyanese citizens who are still registered to vote can fly back to Guyana to vote in national elections, this requirement serves as a serious limit on the number of Guyanese diaspora members abroad who can vote. Furthermore, worries about potential misuse of this right by both of the leading political parties make serious consideration of a concrete system for overseas voting unlikely at this moment.

For members of the diaspora who wish to return, the Guyanese government offers a remigrant status for Guyanese who have been residing overseas for no less than four years and want to return home and stay for at least three years. Information to help with the transition back to Guyana for those wishing to return to Guyana can be obtained at Guyana's embassies and consulates overseas and from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵⁵ There is no follow-up data on the results of this official program.

Many Guyanese living abroad maintain financial ties to Guyana. Remittances from the diaspora have provided economic stability to many families in Guyana, as nearly all Guyanese, anecdotally, have at least one member of the family living abroad. In 2018, the diaspora sent about \$333 million in remittances, mostly from emigrants living in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.⁵⁶ The Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) within the Ministry of Business is also meant to facilitate investment for diaspora members.⁵⁷ In 2018, Guyana began to allow members of the diaspora to buy land for residential and commercial development without having to remigrate to the country.⁵⁸ Around 400 lots became available for diaspora purchase through the "Remigrants Scheme."⁵⁹

Furthermore, while Guyana has struggled to attract diaspora members to settle back in the country permanently, many Guyanese diaspora members continue to visit the country. Out of about 235,000 people visiting the country in 2016, 45.4 percent were Guyanese-born. The highest numbers of these diaspora visitors came from the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean (mostly from Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname).⁶⁰ Many of the visits from diaspora members are to visit family and friends, but diaspora members also travel for mission trips, business, and tourism.

Guyanese Civic Engagement Abroad

Members of the diaspora have tended to rely on informal personal channels to engage with Guyana. Increasingly, the diaspora engages through hometown associations (HTAs), alumni groups, and other formal diaspora organizations. HTAs are mostly composed of philanthropic and volunteer organizations, academic associations, and faith-based, religious groups.⁶¹ An estimated 400 HTAs exist just in North America, most of which work on community development and civic engagement focused on education, healthcare, infrastructure, and professional development.⁶²

Many first-generation Guyanese abroad maintain tight connections through alumni associations with the schools they attended back in Guyana. Although there is no precise data on the number of diaspora alumni associations, the Guyana High School Alumni Association Council was formed in New York to harness the engagement and educational efforts of at least 17 New York-based high-school alumni associations.⁶³ Prominent Guyanese academic institutions with active alumni associations include Queen's College, Bishops' High School, Tutorial High School, and the University of Guyana.⁶⁴ These organizations provide networking opportunities, reinforce Guyanese identity, and collect resources to invest in supporting these institutions.

The University of Guyana over the past several years has become actively focused on building bridges to the diaspora and promoting concrete initiatives to engage diaspora individuals and organizations. In 2017, the university hosted the first Diaspora Engagement Conference, which focused on Guyanese diaspora policy, challenges, best practices, entrepreneurship, and innovation.⁶⁵ This conference hosted stakeholders from the private and public sectors in Guyana and abroad, launched the Centre for Caribbean Diaspora Engagement, and published a book of essays by diaspora experts, *The Dynamics of Caribbean Diaspora Engagement*. A second Guyanese Diaspora Conference was scheduled to take place in 2020 but was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁶⁶

Many civic, charitable, and humanitarian organizations have been established both in Guyana and in the principal host countries to serve as channels for engagement both between Guyana and the diaspora and within the diaspora itself. These include the Guyana Foundation, the United Guyanese Diaspora Global Network (UGDGN), the Guyana Economic Development Trust, the Roraima Institute, the Guyana-Canadian Young Professionals Association, Guyana SPEAKS (UK), and a growing number of other organizations.

Especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, health organizations have taken on a greater significance. However, for many years Guyana's health care system, that has long been characterized by serious gaps in coverage, has spurred the creation of Guyanese diaspora health-related organizations, which have focused on sending doctors and nurses to volunteer in clinics in Guyana, train medical staff, and provide much needed medical equipment.⁶⁷ Some of the best examples of health and medical involvement by the diaspora have been the Midway Specialty Care Center, Guyana Medical Relief, and Bridges Medical Mission, all of which are based in the United States.

Younger members of the diaspora have also worked to develop their own organizations and initiatives to promote projects and programming aimed toward youth in Guyana. Two examples are the Guyana United Youth Development Association (GUYDA) and the Move on Guyana program.

Organizations like these have a wider network of connections among government and international institutions and greater outreach than smaller-scale HTAs. While their operations are focused especially on grassroots efforts on the ground in Guyana, the vision and commitment of the diaspora members behind these efforts is most impressive. Greater communication and collaboration among these organizations could play a role in promoting more effective engagement between the diaspora and Guyana (see the recommendations section for further discussion).

Guyana's Oil Boom, the “Resource Curse,” and the Diaspora

As already discussed, Guyana's recent discovery of oil and its first oil exports in early 2020 have the potential over the course of the next decade to transform the country from one of the poorest in the Western Hemisphere to one of the most prosperous in the region. Much will depend on how Guyana's leaders manage this process. The experience of many resource-rich countries indicates that huge reserves of energy resources are not in themselves a guarantee that national prosperity will be achieved. In fact, Guyana does not need to look any further than its nearest neighbor, Venezuela, to understand the challenge presented by the so-called “resource curse.”

It would be naïve to assume that Guyana will be immune to the resource curse, and in fact some of the historic characteristics of the political experience in Guyana since independence indicate that the country could be easily susceptible to this condition. Divisive politics, weak political institutions, persistent corruption and high levels of tension and latent conflict in the population mostly over ethnic divisions are a very quick indication of how Guyana could easily move in this direction. The problems surrounding the March 2, 2020 national election are a reminder of this reality.

Arguments over the threat posed by the resource curse go well beyond the scope of this report, but some connection needs to be drawn between the diaspora communities and the country with regard to this challenge. What is clear is that significant human, social, and economic resources are present not only in Guyana but also in the formidable Guyanese diaspora. Although the local population in Guyana can provide a workforce and certain skills on the ground, the diaspora offers many of the specialized skills and expertise that could contribute to the successful management of the new oil and gas sector and consequent downstream industrial development. The return of Guyanese experts in many fields, including in the energy sector, resource development, industrial engineering, health sector management, education, accounting, and environmental management, could assist the country in the complex process of planning and executing a well-conceived national development plan. Part of any such plan must include concrete public policy measures in many areas of development and governance, with specific attention being paid to avoiding the resource curse.⁶⁸ Using the diverse expertise offered by the Guyanese diaspora does not necessarily need to involve attracting individuals from the diaspora back to the country permanently. Many will be reluctant to do so, at least at present, given the country's high levels of insecurity, social divisions, corruption, inadequate health services, and political instability. However, new communications technology, short-term travel, and collaboration between international academic institutions and existing diaspora organizations could help create an initial path for the diaspora to share resources, skills, knowledge, and qualifications with locals. (See the Recommendations section for further discussion.) Offering opportunities to young and adult diaspora members through consultancies, temporary exchange programs or contracting work, investment plans, and mentoring programs can ease interested diaspora members into the new world of opportunities in Guyana. Additional steps such as building working groups of diaspora members to advise on the development of new and improved educational curricula, faculty training exchanges, and professional development programs can facilitate the sustainable development of skills and qualifications needed for Guyana's future generations.

Challenges in Engaging Guyana's Diaspora

While many members of the Guyanese diaspora have long been known for their eagerness to engage and contribute to the development of Guyana, there are many challenges that discourage long-term engagement and make any significant re-migration difficult. Many factors have undermined efforts over recent years by the government in Guyana and by diaspora members themselves to promote improved two-way engagement and cooperation:

On the part of successive Guyanese governments, it is clear that there has not been a clear understanding of the full extent of the human, social, and financial resources offered by the diaspora nor a deliberate strategy on how best to engage the diaspora. Very limited resources in the government to pursue organized engagement efforts with the diaspora community has been at times perceived by the diaspora as indicative of government indifference and even of poor treatment by government officials responsible for diaspora issues. Engagement efforts that have been made have been inconsistent, with very limited flow of information to and from the diaspora in a way that encourages greater mutual trust and interest. Where there has been serious efforts by the government in Guyana to engage diaspora groups and their concrete efforts to contribute to grassroots development efforts, there has often been a lack of effective collaboration and coordination with the diaspora sponsors of social and economic projects and initiatives, and even worse, the government has often been seen as putting bureaucratic barriers in the way of these projects.

On the part of the local Guyanese population, there is the enduring perception that members of the diaspora receive special privileges in Guyana due to their presumed academic, professional, or economic backgrounds, including easy access to large land concessions, higher-level positions than locals, and benefits such as tax exemptions⁶⁹; this has left a sense of distrust of diaspora efforts. The other enduring perception on the ground in Guyana is that diaspora members left the country during hard times and have paid little of the price that local citizens have in terms of social and economic difficulties, with a sense that members of the diaspora are interested in returning to their home country only now that Guyana appears to be on the verge of a significant jump in overall prosperity.

Where there has been serious efforts by the government in Guyana to engage diaspora groups and their concrete efforts to contribute to grassroots development efforts, there has often been a lack of effective collaboration and coordination with the diaspora sponsors of social and economic projects and initiatives.

On the part of individuals from the diaspora, many feel that that they are both admired and resented in Guyana and that they are treated simultaneously like strangers and as an asset to be exploited, or as wanting to return to Guyana only for their own benefit.⁷⁰ In thinking about returning to work and living in Guyana, diaspora members expect a significant gap with what they have come to know in

their adopted countries in terms of employment and education opportunities, gender equity, security, and healthcare possibilities should they return on a permanent basis to Guyana; they are deterred by the complications of renting or purchasing property—issues that are only getting more complicated and expensive as the energy era takes off.

Diaspora members' trust and willingness to engage in Guyana are undermined by continuing ethnic conflict, political and economic instability, and corruption, some of the key reasons that motivated Guyanese to leave their home country in the first place decades ago. Furthermore, with years of residence abroad and the resulting cultural adaptation of diaspora members to their host countries, especially of second- and third-generation diaspora members who have never even visited Guyana, cultural differences and gaps between local Guyanese and diaspora members serve further to undermine trust on both sides. Diaspora members often perceive locals as inherently inefficient and underqualified, and in some cases, they are perceived to talk down to local citizens, further complicating the likelihood for local-diaspora cooperation.

Finally, effective diaspora engagement is complicated by the reality that it is mostly first-generation Guyanese emigrants who have the greatest sense of commitment, belonging, and identity to Guyana, while the second- and third- generations are already so far removed that real and meaningful engagement is much less likely as the years pass.⁷¹ Involvement by younger generations in diaspora engagement initiatives is limited, threatening the long-term sustainability and survival of these efforts unless the dynamics and the means of engagement can be adapted to the lifestyles and habits of the younger generations.⁷²

Diaspora Engagement Case Studies

Introduction

As an important part of this study, CSIS reviewed the diaspora engagement experiences of other countries that could serve as examples for how deeper and more effective engagement of the Guyanese diaspora might be approached. After a review of a broad range of diaspora experiences, especially those living in the United States, the program examined the cases of the Dominican Republic, India, Jamaica, and Mexico. A number of other experiences might have been included, but the decision to focus on these four cases was based on some similarities between Guyana and these four countries, given the relative sizes of these diasporas, common language (in the cases of Jamaica and India), geography of the home countries (in the cases of Jamaica and the Dominican Republic), ethnic background (in the cases of India and Jamaica), and the longevity of official government engagement with diaspora communities (in the case of Mexico).

Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic has a substantial diaspora, mostly concentrated in the United States, that has significant emotional, political, and financial ties to the home country. Up to 12 percent of the Dominican population lives abroad, and the United States is by far the most important destination for Dominican emigration, with 1.1 million Dominican-born people in the country.⁷³ Spain and Italy

are other major destinations for the diaspora. Most migration from the Dominican Republic to the United States began in the 1960s, and over half of emigrants have been women. Dominican-Americans now represent the fifth-largest Hispanic population in the United States, with 1.9 million people identifying as Dominican or as of Dominican descent.⁷⁴ Dominican emigration continues, driven by high unemployment and economic inequality in the Dominican Republic and by strong transnational networks between the diaspora and the home country.⁷⁵

For many Dominicans living abroad, the connection to the Dominican Republic is strong and multi-layered. Remittances from abroad (mostly Spain and the United States) represent about 8 percent of the Dominican Republic's GDP.⁷⁶ Dominicans abroad also have high levels of participation in social or professional home-nation associations or political clubs and home-nation politics, and many attend Dominican cultural or educational events in their communities.⁷⁷ For example, the Dominican Day Parade is a major event in New York City that celebrates Dominican culture each year, attracting 10,000 marchers annually, and honors Dominicans and diaspora members who have made significant achievements.⁷⁸ Dominicans living abroad return to the Dominican Republic more often than 10 other groups of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants for vacation, business, and retirement and more frequently make long-distance phone calls back to the Dominican Republic, indicating more regular engagement with family members and friends living abroad.⁷⁹

The Dominican government has made a significant effort to engage members of its diaspora through cultural events, diaspora-specific resources, and long-term political engagement. Since 2004, Dominican citizens residing abroad have been able to vote in Dominican presidential elections if they register with the Central Electoral Board (Junta Central Electoral). Almost 590,000 Dominican citizens in 58 countries are registered to vote in the Dominican elections, most of them residing in the United States and Spain.⁸⁰ The government of the Dominican Republic seeks the consultation of Dominican communities living abroad at two levels. At the national level, the government established the National Presidential Council for Dominican Communities Abroad (El Consejo Nacional para las Comunidades Dominicanas en el Exterior, or CONDEX) in 2006, based in Santo Domingo.⁸¹ CONDEX was originally established to ensure that the Dominican government incorporated the diaspora's needs and contributions in its national development plan. The board of directors of CONDEX includes the president of the Dominican Republic, members of the cabinet, an executive vice president of CONDEX (appointed by the president), and the director of the Dominican Republic's Center for Exports and Investment. CONDEX liaises with Dominican communities abroad, makes recommendations to the government, and helps implement programs, plans, and projects aimed at the diaspora on a national level.⁸² For example, CONDEX opened an immigration counseling office in 2017 to complement the Dominican government's legal aid hotline for members of the diaspora after President Trump announced new immigration measures.⁸³

At a local level, the government also created the Presidential Consultative Councils for Dominicans Abroad (CCPDE), which exists in 20 countries and cities with prominent Dominican communities. Like CONDEX, individual CCPDEs also consult with the national government on policies and programs that impact the diaspora, but the councils are more closely linked with local communities.⁸⁴ Local presidents of the CCPDE do interact with CONDEX during their annual assembly in the Dominican Republic, but this meeting is largely symbolic. While CONDEX has been active in recent years, the activities of the CCPDEs are less clear, and many still appear to be in the development stage or in an inactive status. Finally, the Dominican embassies and consulates play an important role in connecting

with the diaspora. The Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Washington regularly hosts cultural events for diaspora members, including their children, and consulates provide counseling and information about deportations to deportees and their relatives.⁸⁵

India

With nearly 18 million citizens living in other countries, India has the largest diaspora in the world.⁸⁶ The government of India engages that diaspora through a number of official channels, including the India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians, a not-for-profit trust promoted by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to facilitate philanthropy from abroad.⁸⁷ The government also collaborates with several public and private partners—including USAID, the UK government’s Department for International Development, and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry—on the Millennium Alliance, which supports social enterprises in India.⁸⁸ In the private sector, the nonprofit The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) supports businesses through mentoring, incubation, networking, investment, and education.⁸⁹ Though not explicitly limited to Indian entrepreneurs or organizations, TiE was founded in Silicon Valley in 1992 by tech entrepreneurs who are members of the Indian diaspora and has created over \$200 billion in wealth through mentors and networks with strong Indian ties. While TiE’s leadership is based mainly in the United States and India, its 15,000 members are organized in 61 chapters across 14 countries. This includes chapters in Canada, the Middle East, Australia, Africa, and across India and the United States; there is currently no chapter in Guyana. TiE’s annual flagship event, TiECon, is the largest entrepreneurship conference in the world.⁹⁰

Like other large diasporas, the Indian diaspora is not homogenous, and within each country there are multiple different communities that hold distinct practices, professions, and levels of connection to the homeland. Indian communities overseas often engage with India based on their home state, ethnic identity, and religion; for example, the government of the state of Gujarat in India has homeland associations and programs specifically intended to draw investment from the overseas Gujarati business community, and in the United States, religious groups are the largest category of Indian-American transnational organizations.⁹¹ At the same time, there are prominent Indian diaspora organizations in many countries based on profession rather than identity, such as TiE and the nonprofit Global Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (GAPIO).⁹² The government of India supports these business and professional organizations and has undertaken additional efforts to encourage cohesion within the diverse diaspora community, such as the semi-annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), a day to celebrate the diaspora’s contributions to India through conferences and conventions that encourage networking among the diaspora communities in various parts of the world.⁹³

Jamaica

Similar to Guyana, Jamaica has a large share of its citizens living abroad, with 1.3 million Jamaicans living outside of Jamaica, about 36 percent of the population.⁹⁴ Jamaicans abroad live mostly in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, with smaller populations spread throughout the Caribbean, Western Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.⁹⁵ Jamaica’s economy relies on the contributions of its diaspora; 15.9 percent of its GDP comes from remittances.⁹⁶ While Jamaica has a large population abroad and is very connected to that population through financial remittances, the Jamaican government is concerned about brain drain, as most of its emigrants are young people.

Since 2005, Jamaica has celebrated Jamaica Diaspora Day, which revolves around a biannual diaspora conference that takes place in Jamaica and discusses and promotes various forms of diaspora engagement, as well as features cultural activities.⁹⁷ Although now discontinued, Jamaica implemented the Return of Talent Programme during the 1990s to attract back 50 highly-qualified diaspora members to work in the public sector for at least two years. The program included several generous financial incentives, including a one-time reentry subsidy, airfare, and medical insurance.⁹⁸ While this was a small-scale program, it reflected the government's concern about brain drain even some 25 years ago.

While the Jamaican government has taken some steps to engage its diaspora over the decades, it recently has worked to implement a long-term, sustained engagement strategy. In March 2020, the cabinet approved the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade's National Diaspora Policy, which was presented as part of Jamaica's 2020-2030 national development plan. The policy aims to create a multi-pronged engagement strategy focused on strengthening inclusive outreach to the Jamaican diaspora. Proposed policies include engaging local diaspora groups, tracking diaspora professional networks, facilitating diaspora investment, and encouraging return to Jamaica. The document suggests the creation of a diaspora-specific ministry that would handle all outreach and programming. While the programming listed is still somewhat non-specific (the policy still needs to be approved by Jamaica's parliament), the Jamaican government clearly plans to take serious steps to engage Jamaicans living abroad in a more sustained and comprehensive way than has been the case in the past.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the Jamaican government unveiled the Global Jamaica Diaspora Council in January 2020, which was developed and finalized during the 2019 diaspora conference. The council is made up of 28 members who advise the Jamaican government on diaspora issues and engagement. The council is still being rolled out, but elections were held in December 2019 for 14 council members from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Jamaican government appointed an additional 14 members representing smaller Jamaican diasporas in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe and representing the following sectors: arts, sports, culture, citizen security, commerce, development issues, education, the faith-based community, and health and wellness. The council also has several youth members who represent young Jamaicans.¹⁰⁰

Similar to the Guyanese diaspora, the Jamaican diaspora is engaged through dozens of NGOs around the world. This includes alumni associations, such as the Alliance of Jamaican Alumni Associations in Canada and the Union of Jamaican Alumni Associations in the United States; regional charitable organizations, such as the Jamaica Awareness Association of California and the Jamaica Diaspora Legacy Foundation in Florida; and global umbrella associations, such as the JAHJAH Foundation and the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations, Inc. Jamaicans living abroad also organize cultural, social, educational, and fundraising activities through country-specific associations around the world, including in Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, France, Ireland, and the Cayman Islands.

Mexico

The Mexican diaspora is one of the largest in the world, with about 10 percent of the country's total population of 127 million living abroad.¹⁰¹ Many generations of Mexicans now live outside of Mexico, with 11.2 million of them in the United States, the country's largest immigrant population, and with

around 124,000 new immigrants arriving each year.¹⁰² In 2019, Mexicans living abroad sent a record \$36 billion in remittances back to Mexico, representing about 3 percent of the country's GDP.¹⁰³

In Mexico, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handles diaspora-related affairs, with about 6 percent of the ministry's annual budget earmarked for diaspora issues.¹⁰⁴ Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) was created in 2003 to promote the involvement of Mexican communities worldwide in Mexican domestic affairs. The IME interacts with the Mexican diaspora through several channels. It provides resources to Mexicans living abroad, such as instructions about learning English as a second language, literacy workshops, financial education, and information desks (located in some of Mexico's 50 consulates spread throughout the United States) that help Mexicans navigate the sometimes complex state bureaucracies, including complicated healthcare systems in the United States.¹⁰⁵ The IME is also the main way that the Mexican government communicates directly with the diaspora (most recently by providing vital information related to Covid-19).¹⁰⁶

Hometown associations (HTAs) also play a significant role in relations between Mexico and the diaspora community. There are close to 3,000 HTAs in the United States that are set up by diaspora members to provide a cultural link between Mexicans from the same municipality. Some larger HTAs have boards and are registered nonprofits, but the majority are run by small groups of volunteer diaspora members. Beyond providing a cultural connection, Mexican HTAs often raise money to improve life in their hometowns (e.g., providing projects on potable water and improving roads). Since the 1980s, the Mexican government has matched funds raised by HTAs to incentivize giving. In what is known as a "3 for 1" or "3x1" program, for every dollar raised by an HTA, the federal government, the state government, and the local government in Mexico each matches the donation, generating three additional dollars per dollar raised by the diaspora community.¹⁰⁷ Hundreds of HTAs have participated in these 3x1 programs, resulting in thousands of basic infrastructure projects in 27 states, though mostly concentrated in states with the highest number of Mexican emigrants: Jalisco, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas. The program operated at the state level in Zacatecas until President Vicente Fox converted it into a federal program in the early-2000s through the Ministry of Social Welfare (Secretaría de Bienestar).¹⁰⁸ Although the amount raised by 3x1 programs is significantly less than remittances sent each year (in 2018, the federal government matched 517 million pesos, or approximately \$25 million), the program encourages direct investment back into Mexican communities and provides an opportunity for the Mexican government to connect directly with the diaspora.¹⁰⁹ President Andrés Manuel López Obrador recently ended the 3x1 program due to budget cuts, and it is unclear if and when it might be reinstated at the federal level.

In 2009, the Mexican government created an investment program known as "1x1" that matches funds from individual diaspora members for business projects in Mexico. Funds can only come from Mexicans living abroad (they must provide their consular identification card) and the government (through the Agriculture and Social Development ministries) provides a matching loan of up to \$25,000 to migrant entrepreneurs. Instead of paying back the loan directly to the government, the loan recipients repay through the 3x1 program mentioned above, and the funds go directly into investment projects approved by the HTA. The 1x1 program not only encourages Mexicans living abroad to make business investments in Mexico but also reinvests government money back into Mexican communities.¹¹⁰ However, the future of programs such as 1x1 is unclear, given the current administration's massive budget cuts.

Conclusions

While every diaspora experience is unique, some methods of engagement have overlapped. Lessons learned from the many years of structured engagement with diasporas in the cases noted above could provide valuable insight for the government of Guyana and the Guyanese diaspora.

Most significantly, the Guyanese government, in organizing new efforts to better understand the experience of its own diaspora, would be well advised to consider organizing a more serious effort to integrate diaspora issues and resources into the country's bureaucratic structure. The Diaspora Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has in recent years involved a relatively small commitment of human and financial resources, and as a result, its engagement with diaspora communities has been extremely limited and not particularly effective. The country should weigh the differences between a stand-alone ministry as seen in India and some formal structure such as a "diaspora advisory council" as seen in the Dominican Republic. That the diaspora engagement strategy paper drafted in 2017 ended up being left in limbo after reportedly being shared with the cabinet of President Granger is a sign of an absence of commitment in recent years to changing in any effective way the approach of the government in Georgetown to the diaspora communities. Other methods of encouraging and amplifying the support of diaspora communities for HTAs in Guyana (perhaps modeled after Mexico's "3x1" investment program) might also be looked at by the government, in particular as the government revenues are set to increase dramatically in the coming years thanks to the energy industry's development.

Perhaps more promising in the case of Guyana could be new private sector and civil society efforts to develop more effective methods of connecting the diaspora and its human and financial resources with the home country. The model presented in the case of the Indian diaspora by the nonprofit The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) would appear to be a potentially promising model to inspire closer engagement by the Guyanese diaspora communities with Guyana. It might even be possible to explore the opening of a TiE chapter in Guyana as a first step to developing a similar institution linking the Guyanese diaspora with Guyana through diaspora business support in the form of mentoring, incubation, networking, investment, and education.

For many reasons since independence, the diaspora communities outside of Guyana have not been well organized nor engaged in a deliberate and consistent way by the government. The efforts of engagement have been significant in some very specific cases, as seen in the discussion in Section 1 about links between diaspora communities and hometowns or schools in Guyana and efforts by civil society and private business leaders from the diaspora community to promote stronger ties and connections. However, what has clearly been missing has been a coordinated effort in either the public or private sectors to engage the diaspora more directly in the development of Guyana. As Guyana now sits on the threshold of a new era of potentially greater national wealth, the incentives for more sustained joint efforts (public-private and diaspora-home country) are clearly stronger than ever. Especially with the new reality of the Covid-19 pandemic and its uncertain impact, Guyana would be well advised at this particular moment to consider carefully how best to enlist in its national development efforts the very significant human, social, and financial resources represented in its large and talented diaspora.

The final section of this report aims to develop some concrete ideas of how diaspora engagement might be approached in the coming years, with a primary focus on bridging the gap between the public

and private sectors and between the diaspora communities and the home country. This approach takes the diaspora experiences of Guyana and other countries into consideration in crafting creative recommendations for the future.

Especially with the new reality of the Covid-19 pandemic and its uncertain impact, Guyana would be well advised at this particular moment to consider carefully how best to enlist in its national development efforts the very significant human, social, and financial resources represented in its large and talented diaspora.

Key Recommendations

The relationship between Guyana and the Guyanese diaspora is a unique one in terms of both the large size and the high level of education of the diaspora. While there has been extensive contact between members and organizations of the diaspora and their families and communities at home in Guyana, there has been no consistent official effort to promote the more formal, mutually advantageous two-way relationships seen between some diasporas and their home countries in the region (e.g., in Mexico, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic) and outside of the region (e.g., in India, Israel, and China). Guyana is now entering a new period where its economic and social development will be significantly advanced through a significant increase in government revenues, thanks to rising exports of oil and gas resources which began in early 2020. It is reasonable to think that an enhanced relationship with the diaspora, both in the public and private sectors, could be a major positive factor in promoting the country's growth and development.

The political, economic, and social reality that has characterized Guyana during its modern history has resulted in low levels of trust between the diaspora and the home country. While all governments since independence have recognized the potential represented by the diaspora in terms of human, social, and financial capital, efforts to tap that potential have been inconsistent and mostly ineffective. Similar efforts by diaspora organizations and individuals have aimed to contribute to the country's development, taking place mostly at the grassroots level. While many of these efforts have been well-conceived and executed, their ultimate impact has been limited. The current context,

because of both Guyana's new resources and the tremendous challenge of Covid-19, demands greater creativity and action.

The absence of trust and Guyana's deep ethnic divide, which is replicated in large part in diaspora communities around the world, have complicated efforts to promote a more effective relationship between Guyana and its diaspora. Further complicating this situation is similar distrust and cynicism in the relationship between the people of Guyana and their political leaders, with the perception that their leaders are engaged, primarily across the ethnic divide, in a zero-sum struggle for power. This struggle is more critical now that the expected resource flow from oil exports is set to increase dramatically in the coming months and years. The five-month-long dispute over the result of the March 2, 2020 national election was only the latest reflection of this tension.

It is reasonable to think that an enhanced relationship with the diaspora, both in the public and private sectors, could be a major positive factor in promoting the country's growth and development.

The capacities and expertise of the Guyanese diaspora, if properly understood and engaged, could become an important factor contributing to the growth and development of Guyana. Guyana's population, including the country's civil society, private sector, and political leaders, as well as the large diaspora community, have a shared mutual interest in increasing formal links between the country and the diaspora and in exploring means to increase cooperation and collaboration. The recommendations detailed below take these basic assumptions into account.

The recommendations in this section focus on how best to improve the relationship between Guyana and the Guyanese diaspora, emphasizing not just what the Guyanese government can do but what diaspora individuals and organizations, as well as members of civil society and the private sector in Guyana, can do. These recommendations are based on more than 40 interviews with individuals based in Guyana and outside of the country who are focused on Guyana and the diaspora. This report's most important recommendation, referred to as our Key Recommendation, is a further reflection of months of intense discussions between the Americas Program and a small group of individuals who emerged during the study as some of the most creative and committed of our Guyanese interlocutors. The program is very grateful to these individuals, who hopefully will continue to play a role in developing this key recommendation.

The Americas Program hopes that the effort made as part of this diaspora project to bring a diverse group of individuals and organizations to the table will generate the kind of discussion and consideration that might make a difference at a time when Guyana is clearly at a turning point in its history and development. This effort and discussion need to be agreed on, led, and "owned" by Guyanese.

Key Recommendation

The key recommendation of this report, directed at both the public and private sectors in Guyana and at Guyanese diaspora communities around the world, is to work collectively and deliberately to establish broader communications, engagement, and collaboration between Guyana and the diaspora through a “Guyana Global” initiative. Given the global dispersion of the diaspora and the current landscape brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, this initiative should be based on a comprehensive digital strategy to harness the human capital within the Guyanese diaspora as a resource to be tapped in Guyana’s development. A cloud-based “portal,” including an online “community/platform” of diaspora experts, could serve as a framework and a formal means of communication between Guyana and the diaspora community.

ELEMENTS OF THE INITIATIVE

Building such a portal and online diaspora community would be an innovative means to facilitate more agile two-way communications and collaboration between Guyana and the diaspora than has existed to date. This portal/platform could be accessed directly on the internet through an app and would take advantage of state-of-the-art technology, including: (1) contact management software for building effective communications with the identified stakeholders; (2) discussion and information boards to enable building and linking together the community of stakeholders; and (3) software that would enable project development, tracking, reporting, training sessions and workshops. This “Guyana Global” portal also would leverage virtual communications software (e.g., Constant Contact, Zoom, Webex, Vimeo, and CRM) as to enable a single point of access with seamless navigation. Development of this portal would be guided and managed by experts in the field of systems software and information technology (IT), both from the diaspora and from Guyana. Such experts from the diaspora have already been engaged in the early discussions and planning of this initiative.

OPERATIONALIZING THE INITIATIVE

This initial effort would need to be defined carefully and led by a group of committed individuals, both from diaspora communities abroad and Guyana. A leadership/steering group would need to be established to agree on and guide the process of organizing the Guyana Global initiative. The initiative’s leaders would need to establish their own goals, objectives, code of ethics, and means of operation, as well as its own makeup. The group could include a combination of some of the individuals and organizations that collaborated in the CSIS diaspora project, in addition to other individuals who want to be involved. The group would also need to consider including, as partners in the initiative, senior representatives of the Guyanese government and Guyanese diplomatic representatives in key capitals, as well as representatives from each of the country’s political parties (meeting a minimum baseline, based perhaps on votes obtained in national elections). Depending on the group’s decision, a CSIS representative could remain involved as an honest and neutral broker, possibly playing a role in the early stages of the effort in convening and facilitating this initiative. The steering group would also need to consider establishing an on-the-ground presence in Guyana to facilitate activities of the initiative and engagement with the Guyanese public and private sectors. The steering group would also need to lead efforts to find funding to support the establishment and sustained operations of the Guyana Global initiative, including for the online portal, on-the-ground presence in Guyana, and other administrative elements, as defined by the steering group and any sub-groups formed.

Possible applications of this portal/online community platform were discussed in conversations with CSIS diaspora project interlocutors in summer/fall 2020. Initial ideas discussed that might generate early success and support for the initiative could include:

- A skills, talent, and expertise database to facilitate an online and direct exchange of expertise among Guyanese individuals wherever they might live in the world, as well as a complementary database of the multiple diaspora organizations and institutions throughout the world.
- A database of opportunities/projects in Guyana within the public, private, and civil society sectors, to be targeted by Guyanese and non-Guyanese in efforts to attract greater human, social, and financial capital to Guyana and its development efforts.

Specific issues to be addressed as a part of the Guyana Global initiative and the portal/online community/ platform would need to be discussed, defined, and prioritized by the initiative's steering group. The format for approaching specific issues, if defined in a flexible way, could provide the foundation for substantive efforts by stand-alone working groups of Guyanese and non-Guyanese experts on selected issues in a way that could contribute directly to addressing some of the most pressing political, economic, and social development issues facing Guyana in the years ahead.

Below is a list of priority issues on which expertise in Guyana and within the diaspora could be combined as possible stand-alone projects for the initiative, coordinated by project/working groups formed for each selected issue. The list below is meant to serve only as an illustration of possible topics which fall into three broad domains (sectoral development; national/local governance issues; and effective use of technology):

- Promote an advanced, cutting-edge health sector, with a key focus on primary care.
- Promote a world-class twenty-first-century education system at all levels, with a focus on broad coverage of the entire country and with strong links to the best institutions of higher learning abroad.
- Explore approaches to integrating indigenous peoples more directly and effectively into the development process in Guyana using diaspora expertise and experience.
- Promote effective approaches to address critical environmental issues, including Guyana's low coastal plain (9,000 square kilometers of territory that lie below sea level and in almost constant threat of flooding).
- Explore the development of an expanded agro-industrial sector with export potential.
- Explore ways to empower young people, especially marginalized youth, to play a more active role in contributing to and benefitting from national development, including through engaging younger generations in the diaspora through effective use of technology and social media, as well as innovative approaches to mentoring.
- Explore innovative approaches to promoting multiethnic social cohesion, drawing from the experience of Canada's policy of multiculturalism as well as other experiences.
- Promote entrepreneurship and investment, including by diaspora members, in information and communications technology (ICT), as well as in other sectors.
- Promote efficiency and transparency of government operations, including e-government initiatives that are not yet well-established in Guyana.

- Explore possible approaches to constitutional electoral reform.
- Promote civil service reform in order to establish a professional and non-political government service.
- Promote a more effective approach to issues of civic education and citizenship, drawing on collaboration with international experts, including from UNESCO, the OAS, IOM, bilateral partners, and others.

This report's key recommendation to launch the Guyana Global Initiative is an ambitious one and an effort that will need close collaboration and goodwill of a broad range of public and private stakeholders in Guyana and in the diaspora communities. Many of the issues included in the illustrative list above are already part of the new government's agenda for development. Some are also issues that have been worked on by previous governments, as well as in the past and currently by NGOs both in Guyana and outside of the country, including many diaspora organizations. It will be imperative for those who might get involved in promoting and leading this initiative to coordinate closely with these other public and private efforts.

The Guyana Global Initiative would serve a variety of purposes, all related one to the other. First, the initiative and the online portal and its activities would contribute to uniting the diverse elements of the global Guyanese diaspora, dispersed as it is physically, not to speak of ethnically and generationally. The initiative and its portal would promote a two-way flow of education, art, culture, health care, business, and other resources between the diaspora communities and Guyana. This would contribute to addressing Guyana's critical development issues at a turning point in the country's history. This exchange would also serve to strengthen the ties of the diaspora to Guyana as well as vice versa. Finally, the initiative and its portal and activities would elevate the visibility, the understanding, and the stature of Guyana within the regional and global community at a time that the country is at a significant turning point in its history and development.

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