

Changing narratives – challenging xenophobia and racialised portrayals of migration

22 January 2024
11:00 – 13:00 (GMT)

CONCEPT NOTE

The Migration for Equality and Development (MIDEQ) Hub works to advance the understanding and conceptualisation of South-South migration and inequalities and to improve outcomes for migrants and their families. Xenophobic attitudes and racialised portrayals of people who migrate can undermine these objectives. Migrants are often the first to be targeted and scapegoated by politicians for political reasons. Structural and everyday racism, discrimination and hate speech harm individuals as well as entire communities. At the same time, those who are most affected often have the least power including access to public platforms to effectively challenge them.

Many MIDEQ researchers work in places where the use of dehumanising gendered and racialised attitudes towards migrants are prevalent. Collectively, we have sought to use opportunities where they exist - and to create space where they do not - to challenge xenophobia and racialised portrayals of South-South migration through humanising migration and migrants. This includes via disseminating tailored research outputs as well as developing a range of impactful activities supported through MIDEQ's [Impact Initiatives](#). In this, MIDEQ is substantially different from traditional research projects, providing significantly greater opportunities for mobilising and leveraging transformational activities at the grassroots as well as through traditional policy channels.

Our target audiences and participants include international organisations, civil society organisations, trade unions and journalists. For example, MIDEQ researchers and partners have worked with [media organisations](#) to contribute more nuanced, evidence based and migrant-centred framing of migration. Activities led by and in partnership with arts-based organisations has enabled researchers to engage key audiences in [innovative ways](#) that traditional research outputs may not. Ultimately, MIDEQ Hub has sought to bridge the gap between academia and the broader public, fostering a more informed and empathetic understanding of migration through humanising experiences and providing platforms for migrants.

This Roundtable presents an opportunity for us to showcase some of these activities and to discuss important questions about how we effectively challenge anti-migrant narratives.

Objectives

This MIDEQ Roundtable explores how researchers, working in partnership with others, can effectively promote narratives grounded in empathy and diverse human stories. The Roundtable will provide an opportunity to highlight four very different and creative approaches utilised by MIDEQ partners. Panellists will draw on their experiences to discuss how creative storytelling can be a powerful tool to provide alternative accounts that both humanise people who migrate as well as confront racist narratives.

In this Roundtable we will:

- Hear how panellists have tried to humanise migration and migrants.
- Explore which types of activities, format/ mediums and messages are most effective in engaging different types of audiences. Panellists will reflect on why and how they identified which narratives and which audiences they wished to target in their activity.
- Consider the importance of centring migrants' own experiences and voices in such activities aimed at changing problematic narratives. Panellists will reflect on how they involved people with migration experience in developing their activities or through providing platforms for migrants.
- Explore the role of creative storytelling in humanising migrants and migration. Panellists will discuss their creative processes and think about the difference that utilising creative storytelling – as opposed to more traditional research methods – made.
- Discuss the role of partnerships in changing narratives. Panellists will be asked to deliberate on which partners they sought to engage in developing and implementing their creative outputs.

Panel

Chair:

Professor Heaven Crawley, Director of MIDEQ and Head of Equitable Development, UNU-CPR

Heaven Crawley leads the UKRI GCRF South-South Migration, Inequality and Development Hub (MIDEQ). Educated at the Universities of Sussex (1989-1994) and Oxford (1995-1999), Heaven has more than 25 years' experience of undertaking

research on international migration in a wide range of institutional settings (government, voluntary sector, national and international organisations, academia). She is currently the Head of Equitable Development and Migration at UN University Centre for Policy Research.

Panellists:

Benjamin Worku-Dix, PositiveNegatives

Dr Benjamin Dix began his career as a professional photographer, working in South Asia, and has subsequently worked as a Communications Manager for the United Nations and various international NGOs across Asia and Africa for 12 years. Ben was based in LTTE controlled Vanni, North Sri Lanka with the UN from 2004 – 2008 throughout the conflict. After working for the UN through the civil war in Sri Lanka, Ben founded PositiveNegatives to produce literary comics that explore complex social and human rights issues, including conflict, migration and asylum. PositiveNegatives combines ethnographic research with illustration, adapting personal testimonies into art, education and advocacy materials.

Ben will discuss PositiveNegatives' partnership with MIDEQ, in particular the animations, [The Story of Migration](#) and [Unstoppable Beat](#).

Sheril Bustaman, Monash University Malaysia

Sheril A. Bustaman is a writer & producer based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With almost 10 years of experience in the industry, Sheril began her filmmaking career as an undergraduate in Monash University Malaysia where she produced shorts films & documentaries under the Filmmaker-in-Residence program. She has also shot documentaries focusing on the indigenous peoples in the Philippines and screened her debut documentary - Come Hell or High Water - at several festivals including the Bangkok International Film Festival and the Kota Kinabalu International Film Festival.

Sheril will discuss Monash University Malaysia's "[Mapping Journeys: a MIDEQ Malaysia exhibition 2023](#)." This immersive experience allows participants to navigate migration through the eyes of Nepali migrants, further expanding the narrative to encompass the broader impact of migration on individuals and communities.

Pia Oberoi, UN Human Rights (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights)

Pia Oberoi is currently Senior Advisor on Migration and Human Rights for the Asia Pacific Region based in the Bangkok office of the United Nations Human Rights Office (OHCHR) responsible for developing and implementing research and policy on migration and human rights in the region. Previous to this function, she was the head of global migration team at OHCHR where she headed the Office's global work on policy and legal issues related to the human rights of all migrants and the intersections between migration and human rights.

Pia will discuss OHCHR's recent project in Malaysia and Australia (and forthcoming in India) to understand perceptions and identify a target audience in order to design values-based public messaging.

Naa Densua Tordzo, University of Glasgow

Naa Densua Tordzo currently works at the University of Glasgow as Research Assistant on MIDEQ (Migration for Equality and Development), School Of Education. She was awarded her MPhil from the School of Education, University of Glasgow in 2021. She is Ghanaian, a fashion designer, dressmaker and African (Ga) music composer and singer with knowledge and research interest in ancient West African Adinkra symbols that were printed on traditional fabrics. Her current research focus is on decolonising textiles and fashion education in the contexts of the Global South.

Format

This Roundtable will be a two-hour online event. Panellists will showcase their work with MIDEQ, reflecting on the format, objectives and methods used in their work. This will be followed with a chaired discussion and audience Q&A.

Simultaneous French translation will be available.