Guyana is an anomaly. There are more Guyanese living abroad than in Guyana. It is recognized that the Guyanese diaspora has tremendous resources.

The Diaspora Conference sponsored by the University of Guyana broke new ground. It was the first gathering of persons from different backgrounds, and on such a scale, to discuss the impact of the diaspora on national development.

It was fitting that the representatives of the highest levels should address the Conference. The Mexican and Indian top diplomats to Guyana outlined their country’s approach to the diaspora.

One reason for this is that India and Mexico have two of the biggest diaspora populations in the world and Guyana can learn from them. The Mexican Ambassador Mr. Ivan Roberto Sierra Medel and the Indian High Commissioner Mr. V. Mahalingam were most instructive.

According to a 2016 study, India’s diaspora grew by over 60 percent in the last decade. It is estimated that over 32 million Indians live abroad. This is followed by Mexico where the figure is around 30 million persons. The other countries that make up the top ten include Russia, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ukraine, the Philippines, Syria and the United Kingdom.

The release of the 2016 figures prompted the United Nations to remark that ‘well-managed migration brings important benefits to countries of origin and destination, as well as to migrants and their families.’ Mr. Medel said that there are millions of persons of Mexican origin living in the United States. People have been granted amnesty to millions of Mexicans. Mr. Medel pointed out that after 9/11 there was a shift in US immigration policies as, ‘Mexicans found it difficult to cross the border due to a step up in security. In 2017, we have 12 million Mexicans living in the US and around 7 million have proper documents. We have to provide consular protection for them.’

Mexico is also a transit point as many persons from Latin America use it for immigration to the US. Diaspora engagement for Mexico then is very important. A serious engagement took place in 1990 when the President of Mexico put in place a program for Mexicans living abroad. In 2003, President Vincente Fox decided to establish a permanent agency to look after Mexicans abroad. President Donald Trump has promised to build a wall to keep away Mexicans from entering the US but this is opposed by Mexico.

There are 61 Consulates in the US; one of their tasks is to encourage persons to learn English so they can get their GED in the US. Health is another area that needs to be addressed and the accessing of community clinics is important. The Ambassador said the Mexican diaspora has information on more than 100 different kinds of services that are available.

One of the raised in the diaspora. In 2016, more than 600 hometown associations participated in the program. It built confidence among the Mexicans abroad.

The Indian High Commissioner Mr. Mahalingam is a seasoned diplomat with experience in several countries. He has been in Guyana for the last three years as High Commissioner. He said that engaging the diaspora is an art and that India understands it. The first wave of mass migration from India took place 150 years ago, and later after independence, indians defined who is an NRI. He said that NRI’s move out of the country for work or to do business and still continue to hold Indian passports. The PIO, on the other hand, are those Indians that have obtained citizenship of another country. India does not permit dual citizenship but, unlike other countries, understands the geographic distribution of its diaspora.

There are millions of Indians in West Africa, North America, Europe and in Western Asia. Myanmar and Malaysia have 5 million Indians have given rise to Home-town Associations. Some of the projects included the paving of streets and other amenities.

What is good about the program is that the Federal government is matching the dollars to the Gulf countries. India has defined its expatriate population in two categories. They are non-resident Indians (NRI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO). In commenting on Guyana Mr. Mahalingam said, ‘I would like to refer to Dr. Dhanpaul Narine from the NYC Department of Education who spoke at the inaugural session of the Diaspora Conference. Dr. Narine said that Guyana should call its diaspora PGO’s or Persons of Guinean Origin. I think that’s a very good idea.’

His Excellency H. Mahalingam
India’s High Commissioner to Guyana.

Indian High Commissioner to Guyana Mr. Mahalingam and Mexican Ambassador Mr. Medel at the Diaspora Conference sponsored by the University of Guyana.

Dr. Dhanpaul Narine is an independent columnist. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of The West Indian.