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Conference Yields Increased Financial Options for Dominicans

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Two nonprofit financial institutions—one based in Manhattan and the other in the Dominican Republic—have joined forces to better serve their customers, thanks, in part, to their participation at a Fordham conference.

The organizations, Banco de Ahorro y Credito Adopem and Credit Where Credit is Due (CWCID), provide financial education and counseling to low-income communities and play a large role in assisting immigrants who remit money to their home countries.

The transnational collaboration between Adopem, an organization that supplies women in the Dominican Republic with microfinancing loans and other products, and CWCID, a Manhattan-based credit union and financial literacy organization, was forged in March.

The venture will provide the groups with a larger financial platform to jointly offer transnational savings, credit and loans to the Dominican community here and in the homeland, mainly through the use of remittance and saving incentives.

Fordham faculty members Norma Fuentes-Mayorga, Ph.D., assistant professor of sociology; Erick Rengifo, Ph.D., assistant professor of economics; and Darryl McLeod, Ph.D., assistant professor of economics, have been working with the institutions since they organized "Migration, Remittances and Financial Inclusion," a conference hosted in November by Fordham's Center for International Policy Studies (CIPS).

"This is a historical and unique development," Fuentes-Mayorga said. "This event brought together many community organizations to advocate for research support as well as collaboration between transnational microfinanciers."

To foster financial investments in New York and the Dominican Republic, both associations will provide financial education about savings, credits and loans targeting immigrant communities, she said.

McLeod said the collaboration comes at an important time. "The current economic crisis is affecting local businesses and especially access to credit, so certainly this will help," he said. "Just recently I heard a story on National Public Radio describing how pawn shops are not making new loans because they cannot sell the merchandise they have already taken in as collateral."

Darryl McLeod, Ph.D., and Norma Fuentes-Mayorga, Ph.D., at the November conference that inspired dialogue leading to the collaboration. Photos by Bruce Gilbert



Upper Manhattan's Washington Heights and Inwood neighborhoods comprise the largest concentration of Dominicans outside the Dominican Republic, according to information provided by CWCID. Dominicans represent 71 percent of the population living in the area, which is overwhelmingly low-income.

Many CWCID customers have financial obligations and priorities in the Dominican Republic. Their budgets often include support of family in their home country through remittances, as well as a longer-term commitment to investment opportunities in the Dominican Republic. It is estimated that Dominicans send money to their home country seven times a year, on average, though less than 5 percent of recipients deposit the funds into a Dominican bank account.

"We're cross marketing our services to our audiences in New York and in the Dominican Republic," said Ryan Newton, director of business development for Credit Where Credit is Due. "The bottom line is: we're working together to help families here and there become 'banked,' which is lacking."

Fuentes-Mayorga said CIPS is planning to host a seminar later this month that will bring together a number community microfinanciers and other cash-based business from Manhattan and the Bronx, such as the NYC association of Dominican Bodegueros and Taxi and Limousine Services.

Ryan Newton, director of business development at the Manhattan-based Credit Where Credit is Due.



"The main objective of the seminar will be to convene the expertise and insights of these service providers in trying to develop a financial service model that can both benefit the service provider but also help reduce the cost that poor families are forced to pay for financial services," she said. "We also want to brainstorm new ways of linking some of these microfinanciers in New York and the Bronx with similar institutions in the Dominican Republic and Mexico in order to help promote the development of a financial transnational model that will help protect and invest the remittance of immigrants in the New York area."

Founded in 1841, Fordham is the Jesuit University of New York, offering exceptional education distinguished by the Jesuit tradition to approximately 14,700 students in its four undergraduate colleges and its six graduate and professional schools. It has residential campuses in the Bronx and Manhattan, a campus in Westchester, and the Louis Calder Center Biological Field Station in Armonk, N.Y. 05/09

Ryan Newton, director of business development at the Manhattan-based Credit Where Credit is Due. Source:

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