

Today, roughly 1.3 billion people on the earth, out of the total of 7 billion, live on the daily budget of below one dollar a day (that is, nearly one out of five live below the poverty line). As the 2015 deadline set for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches, the scorecard on the MDG achievements is quite mixed among target categories and among geographical locations within the developing world. It is a duty for those of us who are fortunate enough to have access to education and other means to contribute to the collective effort to build a better world for all, either at the local, national or global level.

IDYF is still in its 6th year since it was established, but human network among its participants and alumni has been accumulating rapidly. Every year, IDYF sets a common theme for discussion, and a group of youth coming from all over the world debate relevant issues from all angles. For those participants from outside Japan, in particular, what they see, discuss and learn through their interactions with Japanese participants and the Japanese society is likely to leave a profound impact for the rest of their lives, no matter what kind of career paths they happen to choose in the future.

Among others, a career in international development is an exciting and rewarding one. As you become a professional in the area of international development, you naturally interact with people with many different backgrounds, such as policy makers of all levels (local, national and international), academics, farmers, workers and laborers, and children. As exciting as those interactions are, they tend to be somewhat constrained by social contexts and social positions where we and they are in. As an academic specializing in development economics, for example, I interact with them as a policy advisor, an academic colleague, an interviewer during field research in an attempt to collect data to be analyzed and to be published in policy reports or academic journals, etc. In fact, it is not easy to interact with all those people free of such social contexts and truly on an equal footing.

Those friends who you initially met as a child or as a college classmate, prior to becoming a professional, are an exception, however. With those friends, you can interact as if you were still college classmates, largely free of social and professional contexts.

Academic knowledge, in any discipline, expands at an enormous speed. In the field of development economics, for example, there have been remarkable advances in theories and empirical evidence accumulated in the past decade. This means that the cutting-edge academic knowledge you learn at college may well become obsolete just 10 years after you graduate. On the other hand, the value of your personal networks and friends that you make at college will never depreciate for many years to come.

After some 30 years spent in the international development field since graduating from a university, I cannot overemphasize how important such friends are. As students, we used to debate about social problems and about how to tackle such challenges, often in idealistic (and, one might say, rather immature) terms. Those young days shared with my friends, however, installed in me an attitude towards life of not giving up the ideals and dreams in the face of harsh realities. To the extent that I have been able to persevere in my professional life, I owe it to those my friends at youth. Today, those friends are journalists, public servants, private businessmen, politicians, academics, housewives, and many more. When we meet, however, we still interact, debate and kid each other as if we were school classmates. Such interactions give not only fun time to refresh myself but also some new and fresh viewpoints and a moment to reconsider some of the views taken for granted within the narrow circle of professionals, enriching my professional life.

How exciting it would be to have such friends scattered all over the world for the rest of your life! Had IDYF existed 30 years ago when I was a college student, I

would no doubt have joined the forum without hesitation.

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