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Migration and Development

The Contribution of African Diaspora to Policy Dialogue

By Dr. A. A. Mohamoud

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Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by support provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the views, interpretations, recommendations and conclusions expressed in the report are entirely those of the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC).

The author of the report would like to thank the African diaspora opinion leaders consulted and individuals interviewed whose undercapitalised wealth of knowledge, views, insights and practical experiences in the field of migration and development have significantly enhanced the quality of the report. Particular gratitude is owed to Owusu Sekyere, Toni Kofi, Wofa Yaw Ampomah-Nketiah, John Macnally-Boateng, Charles Vanderpuye, Mohamed Baswanye, Mulugeta Asmelash, Abdel Halag, George Duncan, Dr. Michael Oneka, Samuel Guane Ackah, Joseph Junior Seh, Mindanda Mohugu, Santo Deng, Véronique Walu, Khamis Mwinyimbugu, A. Guled and Amna Nagi. I am also grateful to Theo Wingaard for his assistance in an expert meeting attended by a number of key African diaspora figures representing diverse organisations. The author takes the responsibility for the views expressed in the report.
This report aims to contribute to the ongoing policy dialogue regarding migration and development from the perspective of the diaspora – a point of view which has not been sufficiently heard. The report attempts to bring out the voices, views, insights, perspectives, practical experiences, aspirations, interests, priorities, challenges and the specific needs of the African diasporas in the Netherlands. This is important, as without narrating the migrant’s part of the story satisfactorily, the knowledge that we now possess on the migration and development field will not be comprehensive enough or of sufficient quality to allow for sound policy formulations. The purpose of the report is to stimulate the active participation of the diasporas in the discussion and in the generation of ideas and policy insights so as to make their critical voices count in discussions related to migration and development matters. The added value of the report is to facilitate the inclusion of the diaspora voices and visions in policy deliberations taking place at the local, national and international level in a more structured and formalized manner.

Diasporas are not only implementers of projects but are also thinkers with visions and ideas who can play active roles in the generation of ideas, information and more policy-relevant knowledge in the field. In other words, there are intellectual diasporas that have the knowledge and the aptitude to translate practical experiences into perceptions, perspectives and models that then can be further translated into policy instruments, options and action plans. For this reason we need to engage the diasporas not only as development practitioners but also as carriers of knowledge whose ideas and views can add value to policy insights, enrich the discussion and influence the opinion and policy options of other stakeholders in the field. It is therefore absolutely imperative to hear and document the ideas, perspectives, actual experiences, specific practical realities and alternative suggestions of the diaspora community on how policy development in the migration and development arena could be continuously improved.

Diasporas are the most important strategic stakeholders in the field of migration and development. It is therefore essential that they be included in policy debates, since the practical implementation of any policy proposal requires migrants to play a leading role in the process. Migrants are the chief agents in the establishment of linkage between migration and development and without their strategic intervention it is unlikely that initiatives on development and migration can succeed or achieve the expected results. This reality makes it impossible to design appropriate policy instruments without creatively tapping into the input and intellectual resources of the diasporas, whose wealth of knowledge and practical experiences are largely undercapitalized. It is as simple as that: the best solutions are likely to be worked out when the primary stakeholders – in this case, the migrants and target groups – are involved from the outset.

The report addresses four policy areas that hold high priority in the perspective of the individual African diasporas interviewed and groups consulted. Diasporas are proposing that more attention be devoted at the policy level to addressing the issues presented below, in order to catalyse the positive impact of the development activities they mediate in their homelands.

The four policy areas where the report offers recommendations with respect to research, policy debates and practical interventions are as follows:

1. Continued consultations and policy dialogue.
   —Continuing consultations and policy dialogue between diasporas and other stakeholders in the field so as to generate information, knowledge
and policy insights on the subject from a different stakeholder perspective. Generating a solid knowledge base on the subject is a precondition for the formulation of appropriate policy proposals that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions.

—Creating or supporting an existing platform through which diasporas can participate in the generation of information, ideas and creative visions in the field in a more structured manner. The fact of the matter is that the intellectual contributions of diasporas into the discussion regarding migration and development issues have not been sufficiently tapped.

—Formalising the consultation and policy dialogue. This will give opinion leaders among the diasporas the opportunity to participate in policy discussions in a structured manner rather than in ad-hoc fashion as is now the case. Moreover, it will enable diaspora organisations and mainstream players in the field to engage on a continual basis, learning from each other and regularly exchanging information, ideas and best practices. Diasporas interviewed suggested a framework through which the policy dialogue can be officially formalised. They proposed the establishment of a migration and development policy dialogue platform or a task force modelled on the National Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee (LOM), which was set up by the Dutch government in 1997. This would be a body mandated to contribute to the policy dialogue in the migration and development field more systemically and on a continual basis, drawing on different stakeholder perspectives and thereby ensuring that effective policy is developed at different levels.

2. Development projects undertaken by migrant organisations

—Understanding that the development projects undertaken by the diaspora organisations are in essence complementing those implemented by the mainstream donor organisations in the homelands. They are responding to vital needs not covered by the programmes of the established development agencies since the needs of the poor and marginalised sections of society in the homelands are vast and extremely pressing.

—Acknowledging that the development projects implemented by the diaspora organisations in the home countries bring with them not only resources but also experiences, transnational contacts and networks, valuable information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, new technological skills, smart and innovative business and trade practices, to name a few.

—Realising that development projects of diaspora organisations target the weakest sections of society, paralleling the aspirations of the mainstream development agencies. There are, accordingly, advantages when both development sectors join forces on certain projects that are implemented on the ground in the homelands.

—Appreciating that the contemporary diaspora organisations are comparable with the development agencies in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time they were also new, weak and in their infancy, but were established to redress global inequality. It is therefore imperative not to underestimate the driving ambition and the development potential of the diaspora organisations, as some of them will undoubtedly develop into established diaspora development agencies in the foreseeable future.

3. Diaspora organisations and development agencies

—Understanding that unlike development agencies, diaspora organisations do not operate in a single national context and in this regard, are not tied to a specific country. Diasporas and their organisations operate in transnational settings. The process enables diaspora and their organisations to mobilise considerable resources, and build up valuable contacts, forge important partnerships, and build economic and political bridges with valuable benefits across countries and continents

—Promoting the dialogue process between diasporas and the development actors where this is currently not happening. Dialogue is the logical start to interaction and information exchanges. It makes it possible to establish contacts and networks and to learn from each other’s experiences, unique strengths and added values. Diasporas interviewed proposed the establishment of a permanent dialogue group that would include representation from diaspora organisations and mainstream development agencies.

—Encouraging diaspora organisations and development agencies to initiate joint pilot projects in both the host and home countries in order to build up a viable working relationship through practice. Initiating joint pilot projects can bring the two development sectors much closer together than is now the case.

4. Fostering institution building between diasporas and homeland governments

—Proposing that governments in Africa create an enabling environment on the ground, as this is a precondition for engaging the diaspora in the development of their respective home countries.

—Fostering formal and institutional cooperation between the diaspora institutions and the continental bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad). These formal partnerships will assist the continental bodies to benefit from the lobbying, campaigning and advocacy capacities of the diasporas residing in power centres where global decisions are made.

—Undertaking policy research to improve our understanding of how policy mechanisms and structures can be put in place that facilitate the building of solid institutional cooperation at the national level where the goal of this cooperation is to create better opportunities for diasporas to contribute to the overall development of their respective countries of origin.

—Building institutional cooperation at the sector level within a country, as the benefits gained from sector-based links between the diasporas and the homelands are considerable. The initiative not only facilitates a targeted integration of the skilled diasporas into homeland development efforts, but also boosts the efficiency and delivery services of the sectors they serve.
Introduction

Nowadays, migration and development are interlinked issues, and in the coming decades, this reality is certain to play a crucial role with respect to relations concerning development cooperation between the North and the South. These phenomena are two of the most salient features of contemporary globalisation that are helping shape new patterns and trends in development cooperation relations. Their dynamic impacts can no longer be overlooked. They represent major issues for development, meriting continued consultations and policy dialogue at different societal and policy levels. The nexus between diaspora and development has become a major focus of emerging research and policy discussions, and a topic of public debate in the last few years. It will remain an important area in international development cooperation policy in the foreseeable future. The topic has already gained a top priority on the national and international agenda and is reflected on and discussed at different levels for different policy purposes and interests. This is partly the result of the growing economic and human resources potential of the migrants that needs to be tapped for maximum benefit with respect to the overall development of their countries of origin. It is also partly the result of the high priority at the policy level that international organisations such as the UN have since recently accorded to the issue.

At the international level, a few developments are worth mentioning here. The first development of symbolic political significance was the High-Level UN Dialogue on Migration and Development which was held in New York on 14 and 15 September 2006. This first-ever high-level meeting devoted to the topic was called by the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan himself. He recognized the potential benefits which may be realised by the home countries of development activities mediated by the diasporas. In his opening speech, Annan stated clearly that if constructively and creatively harnessed, migrants can contribute to a better social, political and economic transformation in both their adopted and native countries. Furthermore, Annan urgently recommended that the dialogue and the discussion on migration and development-related issues should continue not only at the UN level but also more at the national level since there are also important issues for the national agenda in each country, whether it is located in the North or in the South.

The second development of importance was the international follow-up meeting to the High Level Dialogue organized by the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) held in Brussels from July 9-11, 2007. The significance of this event from the point of view of the migrants was that the first day of the forum was devoted to a meeting of civil society representatives (including diasporas) with the objective of opening the door to input from these important stakeholders at the subsequent governmental discussions on the subject which took place on July 10th and 11th. There was, in fact, an appreciation of the indispensable role that stakeholders in the civil society can and should play in contributing to the policy dialogue in the migration and development field. More importantly, the meeting clearly demonstrated the importance of an ongoing policy dialogue in order to keep apprised of the continually unfolding patterns and processes in the migration and development field. The generation of solid policy-relevant knowledge, information and insights on the subject remains a precondition for the formulation of appropriate policy proposals. These can then be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions. Due to this urgent policy need it

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1 In this report migrants and diasporas are interchangeably used since both terms exemplify more or less the same connotations.

was decided to organise a third international forum. This will take place in Manila in 2008, so as to continue the policy dialogue at the international level.

Sustaining the policy dialogue on the topic at the international level is indeed imperative but it is equally important to continue the discussion and policy dialogue at the national and local levels among a wide range of stakeholders. In the end, the practical implementation of policy prescriptions is largely undertaken at the local and national level. There are indeed ongoing policy dialogues in the field taking place at the national level in various countries, both in the North and in the South, with different policy interests and at different levels of intensity. However, taking the Netherlands as an example, the policy dialogue in the field is largely dominated by the mainstream institutions such as government departments, academic and research centres, and donor development agencies. At these various political and social levels, various research activities have been undertaken and meetings convened to gain more information and knowledge, and new insights into migration and development issues. Yet, not enough has been heard from one key strategic stakeholder and player in this field: the migrant constituency in the Netherlands. In other words, the views and perspectives of diasporas themselves have not been sufficiently heard, nor have their intellectual contributions to the migration and development discourse, policy dialogue and the production of ideas, visions and strategies been articulated or sufficiently documented. As a result, very little is currently known.

The evidence of this shortcoming is most glaring in the main policy reports so far produced on the subject in the Netherlands. For instance, none of these reports have attempted to explore sufficiently or adequately draw on the knowledge and experiences of migrant groups and organisations in the Netherlands – that is, from their expertise, activities, best practices, and lessons learned from the past experiences, positive exceptions, interests, priorities, challenges and specific needs. Furthermore, none of the information in the reports has been drawn from the research, project reports, analyses and strategic papers migrant organisations have produced. In short, the problem is as simple as that: without narrating the migrant’s part of the story satisfactorily, the knowledge that we now possess in the migration and development field will be neither complete nor adequate for sound policy formulations. There is therefore a need to stimulate the active participation of the diasporas in the generation of ideas and policy insights so as to ensure that their voices are better represented in policy deliberations on migration and development-related matters. This is for the simple fact that diasporas are the most important stakeholders and the chief actors making the nexus between migration and development possible.

In the past, migration and development have been a terrain in which diasporas groups and organisations have broadly operated in a quite informal and exclusive manner. It is also an area in which diasporas have already developed knowledge, expertise, and practical experience and where they have constructed pathways and transnational networks which give them a considerable advantage over traditional mainstream development organisations, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Furthermore, with their networks that criss-cross countries and continents, and the social, economic and political links they have established between their new places of residence and their original homelands, diasporas are the chief agents and driving force to enable cross-fertilization at the nexus of the migration and development communities. This is the reason that diasporas living in the Western world are currently considered as the “fourth development aid actors”, along with international organisations, governments and mainstream development agencies. In view of this positive development, diaspora organisations in the Netherlands should be viewed as valuable partners with whom collaboration at all levels can be explored.

This report is mainly intended to facilitate the inclusion of the diaspora voices in policy deliberations at the local, national and international levels. Furthermore, the report contributes to current and future policy dialogue from the perspectives and the mindsets of the diasporas. In this regard, the report provides policy-relevant analyses so as to improve the existing knowledge base regarding diaspora and development-related issues.

1.1. Aim and objectives of the report

The main aim of the report is to add value to the ongoing policy dialogue regarding migration and development from the point of view, not sufficiently heard, of the diaspora. The report therefore attempts to bring out the voices, views, insights, perspectives, practical experiences, aspirations, interests, priorities, challenges and the specific needs of the African diasporas in the Netherlands. The purpose is to stimulate the active participation of diasporas in the discussion and in the generation of ideas and policy insights.

Within this main aim, the report has the following four objectives:

1. To solicit views and suggestions of the African diaspora opinion leaders on the need for continued consultations and policy dialogue regarding migration and development-related issues and the appropriate ways to promote this dialogue

2. To narrate and make known the concrete development-related activities that the diasporas have initiated in their countries of origin as evidence-based cases for the making of evidence-based policy

3. To investigate strategies and practical steps through which diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies can increase their cooperation for development so as to reinforce one another’s efforts and work constructively towards a common objective

4. To explore possible strategies that could be adopted to build up institutional cooperation between Africa and the diaspora at different levels

1.2. Significance of the report

This report is particularly significant because of its timing. The report addresses an aspect of the migration and development arena which has not received sufficient attention in research and policy analysis despite its critical importance: the intellectual contributions of diasporas to the ongoing policy dialogue in terms of ideas, visions, perspectives and fresh insights. The report aims to narrate and document as far as possible the experience, expertise, accumulated knowledge and concerns of diaspora groups and organisations in the Netherlands. As mentioned above, this information is urgently needed at this time.
Furthermore, the report attempts to make known and visible the successes achieved with concrete development-related activities initiated by migrant organisations and groups and the specific factors that contributed to their positive outcomes. It taps ideas and views that should be given priority in policy interventions in the future. It presents knowledge and information targeted at the diasporas and policy makers in the homelands (so far, knowledge produced has targeted the policy makers in the host countries) as well as formulating the interaction between these two areas”. No. 43 (The Hague: June 2005).

1.3. Methodological approach

A combination of methods was used in gathering the empirical data for this report in order to achieve both depth and breadth. The information was collected through in-depth interviews with a number of African diaspora opinion leaders representing various organisations involved in development activities in their countries of origin. The in-depth interviews were further supplemented by an expert meeting among 15 key figures from the African diaspora representing organisations from Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. In addition to this, information was also gathered through observations and site visits to organisations run by members of the African diaspora in order to get a better picture of the environment in which they operate, and also by consulting news magazines, project proposals, strategy papers and reports that the organisations have produced. Finally, a follow-up correspondence by e-mail, mail and telephone was undertaken in cases that required additional clarification or that promised additional input and insights.

The report has been prepared to provide a background document for a policy seminar that will be held on October 24, 2007.

1.4. Structure of the report

The report is divided into six sections. The sections of the report are organized in a manner which ensures a logical sequence starting from the contribution of the diaspora in terms of ideas, views and perspectives with respect to the ongoing consultations and policy dialogue regarding migration and development-related issues in the Netherlands, and extending to the feasible strategies and targeted interventions that could be adopted to foster institutional cooperation between the African diasporas and the governments in their countries of origin on the continent.

Following the introduction, section 2 opens the discussion in the report by airing the voices, views, perspectives, aspirations, interests and priorities of African diaspora opinion leaders. The section also presents suggestions proposed by them regarding the need for continued consultations and policy dialogue on the subject, and assesses the critical role that diasporas can play as proactive interlocutors with other stakeholders and players in the field for a valuable and effective policy dialogue.

Section 3 presents and discusses five concrete initiatives that African diaspora organisations have been involved in contributing to development in their countries of origin. This section pays more attention in particular to successful achievements realised from the diaspora initiatives, positive exceptions and best practices that need to be built on in future interventions, and ongoing initiatives in the homelands that need to be sustained, supported and strengthened.

Section 4 investigates how diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies can join forces in partnership for African development – partnerships that make it possible for mainstream development agencies and diaspora organisations to complement each other’s activities and work constructively towards a common objective. Furthermore, the section considers the need to make greater efforts to stimulate the exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise among the diaspora organisations, civil society associations and the mainstream development agencies so as to gain better insights about their respective activities. This way of sharing knowledge and expertise is very important, as it can serve as a stimulus for the undertaking of joint development projects in Africa.

Section 5 explores possible strategies and targeted interventions that could be adopted to build up institutional cooperation between Africa and the diaspora at different levels. The section also examines the roles that diaspora organisations can play in fostering institutional cooperation with the institutions on the continent, be continental bodies such as the AU and Nepad, or those operating at country or sector levels.

Section 6 brings together the most important issues identified and examined in the sections of the report, draws a number of general conclusions and discusses options for policy recommendations. The section further underlines the urgent need to formally incorporate diasporas into the ongoing consultations and policy dialogue on migration and development issues at various levels. They are seen to be critical stakeholders and valuable partners to be engaged, and who can contribute in particular because their world views and perspectives are so clearly framed by socio-political realities across countries and continents. Diasporas occupy bridge-building positions which enable them to develop and entertain perspectives differing from prevailing views in the host countries such as the Netherlands. Those alternative perspectives add value to the policy dialogue.

2.1. Continuing the general consultations

The added value of continuing the general consultations with the diaspora opinion leaders and experts is considerable. When they are engaged, diasporas can identify and bring forward new issues of importance and thereby add breadth to the agenda. Diasporas are in fact in a position to contribute to the setting of the agenda relating to migration and development issues in a more pro-active manner.

Some of the diasporas interviewed expressed the view that diasporas are currently reacting to issues and agendas set by others who do not give the highest priority to diaspora concerns. They suggested that diasporas should be more proactive in placing issues on the agenda which reflect their concerns, aspirations, interests and priorities, rather than remaining only reactive stakeholders.

Likewise, if their inputs are sought, diasporas can enrich discussion on the crucial issues related to migration and development by presenting alternative views, perspectives and mindsets. After all, diasporas occupy a vital strategic position giving them a particular kind of a world view intimately framed by socio-political realities across countries and continents. Diasporas therefore view many of these issues from perspectives quite different from those advanced by the more traditional parties in host countries such as the Netherlands, and that their contributions thus add value in the process that leads to the generations of ideas, knowledge and information.

Furthermore, the issues that are currently discussed address dynamic processes in the field. Unfolding these dynamic processes demands thorough reflection, up-to-date analysis and continued consultation involving a range of perspectives. More importantly, the follow-up conference on Migration and Development that will be held in Manila in 2008 makes it important that general consultations on the subject be continued more intensively in the months leading up to that meeting. The consultations should take place not only between diasporas and other stakeholders in the field but also among diaspora organisations; such consultations are at this time inadequate. One of the diasporas interviewed put it very aptly by saying that, ‘we the diasporas actually are not in a dialogue. A dialogue … will enable us to learn from each other, exchange and share information, new ideas and practices, experiences, expertise, contacts and networks, and perhaps form alliances, collaborate and act jointly on development-related activities regarding homelands’.

On top of the points briefly outlined above, diasporas interviewed also mentioned other important issues which argue for continued consultations as a way to achieve a better understanding. One of these issues is the discussion that revolves around the connotation of migration and development where these concepts are interpreted in different ways for different policy and research purposes. This raises a concern among some of the diasporas interviewed who believe that the framework has often been used for other issues instead of to encourage contributions from migrants to development in their homelands. And these other issues, which largely dominate the dialogue on subjects such as migration processes in the South and migration management, are given higher policy priority rather than the actual economic and development potential of the migrants in western host countries – including the Netherlands. It is therefore suggested that this policy priority subordinates the objectives of development cooperation policy regarding migration and development to other issues which are also important but are not contributing directly to the development benefits that are key to the diaspora. The term migration and development focuses the discussion on the fact that migrants are the driving force and the chief potential contributors to this particular...
kind of development and yet, in the development cooperation sector, they have not been fully appreciated as valuable strategic partners. It is in this connection that some of the interviewees raised the point that, according to their point of view, the contribution of diasporas organisations and individuals to peace building, improving human rights conditions, advancing institutional knowledge, upgrading and strengthening governance institutions, deepening democratisation processes and facilitating knowledge transfer (brain gain) should all be considered to be forms of development and be widely discussed. This is because building stable social and political institutions in the home countries will eventually make growth and economic development possible. The implication is that sustainable development and economic growth is not likely to take place in the homelands unless social and political institutions and viable governance structures have been established.

Consideration of these issues leads to the conclusion that ongoing consultations with researchers, experts and opinion leaders among the diasporas are urgently needed in order to build a good knowledge base with respect to migration and development which is at this time lacking. Generating a solid knowledge base on the subject is a precondition for the formulation of appropriate policy proposals that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions.

2.2. Policy development

Diasporas can contribute both to general knowledge development in the field and to some specific aspects of policy development. Diasporas are most important as strategic stakeholders in the migration and development field and so it is only logical to involve them in the exchange of ideas and views, to invite their participation at expert meetings, and to involve them in the drafting of specific policy making proposals and options. This is important since the practical implementation of such policy proposals would largely require migrants to play a leading role in the process. In other words, migrants are the chief agents who make linkage between migration issues and development issues possible; without their strategic interventions it is not likely that any linkage can succeed or that the expected results will ensue. This reality therefore means it is impossible to design appropriate policy instruments without tapping the creative input and intellectual resources of the diasporas. As one diaspora expert in the field of development cooperation warned, “it should be noted that any migration and development projects that the diasporas as strategic partners and stakeholders do not participate from the outset in its conception, generation of ideas, policy development and formulation and also its practical implementation is unlikely to achieve the expected results, even if it is correctly designed. This, in hindsight, is what past experience of development cooperation projects in other areas has taught us’. Similarly, another diaspora expert observes, “Best solutions can be worked out when the primary stakeholders, in this case, the migrants and target groups, are involved from the outset”. There is no gainsaying that diasporas can contribute considerably intellectually to the development of migration and development policies in way that will increase their successes on the ground.

Ultimately, then, the targeted beneficiaries gain tangible and sustainable benefits. Diasporas can contribute both to general knowledge development in the field and to some specific aspects of policy development. Diasporas are most important as strategic stakeholders in the migration and development field and so it is only logical to involve them in the exchange of ideas and views, to invite their participation at expert meetings, and to involve them in the drafting of specific policy making proposals and options. This is important since the practical implementation of such policy proposals would largely require migrants to play a leading role in the process. In other words, migrants are the chief agents who make linkage between migration issues and development issues possible; without their strategic interventions it is not likely that any linkage can succeed or that the expected results will ensue. This reality therefore means it is impossible to design appropriate policy instruments without tapping the creative input and intellectual resources of the diasporas. As one diaspora expert in the field of development cooperation warned, “it should be noted that any migration and development projects that the diasporas as strategic partners and stakeholders do not participate from the outset in its conception, generation of ideas, policy development and formulation and also its practical implementation is unlikely to achieve the expected results, even if it is correctly designed. This, in hindsight, is what past experience of development cooperation projects in other areas has taught us’. Similarly, another diaspora expert observes, “Best solutions can be worked out when the primary stakeholders, in this case, the migrants and target groups, are involved from the outset”. There is no gainsaying that diasporas can contribute considerably intellectually to the development of migration and development policies in way that will increase their successes on the ground.

Ultimately, then, the targeted beneficiaries gain tangible and sustainable benefits. However, we need to disaggregate the diasporas as some them are development practitioners while others are researchers, experts and carriers of knowledge who can use their own experiences to begin a process that ultimately leads to policy instruments, options and action plans. The opinion leaders and experts from the diaspora community who were interviewed and consulted in the writing of this
report serve to dispel the prevailing image of diasporas as implementers of small scale projects. Some diasporas do indeed implement projects in the homelands but that is only a portion of the full story. For instance, one leader and cadre of diaspora organisations whose input we sought for this report are not only implementers of projects but are also thinkers with visions and ideas. They articulate pronounced ideas and views that can add value to the generation of policy insights and also enrich the discussion and influence the opinion and policy options of the other stakeholders in the field. Some of them even suggested that they should contribute more intellectually to the migration and development discourse by initiating discussion forums, there would be a higher level contributing to the policymaking process in the migration and development field. This suggestion was made in response to the question posed to opinion leaders among the diasporas as to whether they are in fact contributing intellectually to the development of ideas, visions and strategies in the migration and development field. In other words, it is often stated that they are not contributing ideas and perspectives to the discussion. Some of the interviewees however argued that they lack a knowledge platform which would allow them to generate information, ideas and creative visions in a more structured manner. At any rate, the wealth of knowledge and experience of diasporas has not been not sufficiently tapped, and it is therefore absolutely imperative that the ideas, perspectives, actual experiences, specific practical realities and alternative suggestions from the diasporas on how migration and development policies might be continuously improved should be not only heard but also documented. Regarding policy development, certain stakeholders in the field such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs do invite key diaspora figures to discussions on some of the migration and development issues from time to time. This is viewed positively by the diaspora intellectuals, and they hope the practice continues on regular basis. They also see it as an appreciation of the valuable contribution they can make to such policy dialogues in the field, in view of the unique position that they occupy. According to them, it is no longer possible to discuss migration and development-related issues – and thereby develop policy options and proposals – without directly engaging and conducting a dialogue with migrants (to whom those issues are of vital importance). Diasporas interviewed are convinced that they can be valuable strategic partners in the development efforts in this field because they are uniquely positioned to act as bridge-builders between the host and the home countries. However, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not the only player in the field. The stakeholders in the field are wide and diverse and include government institutions, mainstream development agencies, universities, policy research centres, the private sector and civil society organisations, etc. But few of them are engaging the diasporas in a policy dialogue. For example, among mainstream development agencies, the players in the field who infrequently consult the diasporas at policy level include OxfamNovib, IICO and to lesser extent Cordaid. Unfortunately, as some interviewees stated, when it comes to the level of ideas and intellectual insights, most of the mainstream stakeholders in the field do not value the contributions of the diasporas or their expertise, and don’t take their view into consideration as they develop their respective policy positions and strategies. In this regard, they deprive themselves of experience, expertise and the intellectual resources of the diasporas.

There are different ways that the mainstream stakeholders can benefit from the experiences and expertise of the diasporas. For instance, they can employ diaspora professionals in migration and development programmes they set up or are planning to set up in their respective sectors, institutions and organisations. A good example is PSO where Joseph Junior Seh coordinates a migration and development project and the other example is OxfamNovib where Leila Rispens-Noel also coordinates a big migration and development programme. Both diaspora professionals play very important strategic roles facilitating contacts and dialogues between migrant organisations and development agencies. However, despite the crucial roles they are playing in building valuable bridges, they still remain, in the larger picture, woefully insignificant, as the diaspora professionals are hardly represented at all in activities undertaken by the mainstream stakeholders in the migration and development field. Other ways that that the mainstream stakeholders could organise such fora, thereby capitalising on the know-how of the diasporas, would be to hire them as consultants, freelance researchers, capacity building trainers, policy advisors and resource persons in workshops, conferences and expert meetings, etc. In short, diaspora professional and experts can contribute not only to policy development among the mainstream stakeholders but they can also help them to professionalise their programmes and practical activities in the migration and development field.

2.3. Formalised policy dialogue

Diasporas interviewed have proposed to continue consultations and policy dialogue in a more formalised manner. According to them, a policy dialogue conducted on a regular basis will give opinion leaders among the diasporas the opportunity to participate in policy discussions in a structured manner rather than in ad-hoc fashion as is now the case. Furthermore, formally institutionalising such dialogue would give diasporas a more active voice in the migration and development field. More importantly, a structured arrangement would enable the diasporas to systematically contribute to a genuine and effective policy dialogue. On top of all, formalised policy dialogue on a continuing basis will enable diaspora organisations and the mainstream to learn from each other and to exchange information, best ideas and practices regularly. Another advantage with such regular contacts is the likelihood that diasporas and the mainstream stakeholders will form networks and alliances that could facilitate collaboration and joint activities.

Some of the diasporas interviewed suggested a framework through which the policy dialogue can be officially formalised. They proposed the establishment of a migration and development policy dialogue platform modelled on the National Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee (LOM), which was set up by the government in 1997. There is therefore no need to re-invent the wheel as there is already an instructive example of a minority organ that can be emulated. However, the LOM was primarily set up to act as a reliable channel to allow minority groups to express views and opinions to government on specific issues related in particular to integration policy that concern them directly. It was also mandated to promote the discussion of and contribute to the integration of ethnic minorities in the wider Dutch society – to address a domestic issue, that is. In this regard, LOM does not have the mandate to be involved in a policy dialogue relating to migration and development issues which are, for the most part, unrelated to Dutch internal affairs. For this reason, migrant interviewees have proposed the establishment of a new body which is authorised to deliberate and contribute to policy proposals relating to the migration and development activities in which the Dutch-based migrants are involved in their home countries.

While some other interviewees suggested that this new body could take the form of a task force in which all the stakeholders in the field are represented. This task
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Contribution of African Diaspora to Policy Dialogue

"We must redouble our efforts to involve the Diaspora and the migrants in the development process in order to widen our constituency, gain more support and increase our knowledge about development". Agnes van Ardenne, former Minister for Development Cooperation, the Netherlands, speaking in January 2003 to the NCDO

"The challenge for development actors is not to make diaspora organisations more like them, but to build on their unique strengths" Hein de Haas 2006a.

3.1. Challenges in the local context

This section discusses in brief five projects initiated by African diaspora organisations and individuals based in the Netherlands, and examines their contributions to development in their countries of origin. The projects presented here were initiated and implemented by the African Humanitarian Foundation, Sankofa Foundation, Dir Foundation, Nedsom and MD Fedis AgriMix PLC. The countries in which the projects were implemented are Ethiopia, Ghana, Somalia and Uganda. The projects range from small family poultry farm to a large commercial farm. The projects were initiated as a response to a challenge in the domestic context in each country. The challenges have both local and external roots and are largely the results of global economic inequalities. The projects, which are mostly community development projects, were initiated to improve the livelihood of destitute or marginalized members of society who are mostly living in rural areas, to create employment or income generating activities, provide education and skills training, capacity building, etc.

Diasporas interviewed stated that their comparative advantage is that they understand the specific challenges as well as the dynamics of the local context much better than any other outsider. This is because diasporas occupy a very strategic position, living in two cultures, or between two cultures, and thus they have the advantage of intimate knowledge of local conditions, social situations and networks and cultural subtleties in the home countries to a far greater degree than expatriates. And as one of interviewees further emphasized, ‘culture is an added value in the context of development [where] … the diasporas mediate, as development aid in general is [a] culturally constructed phenomenon.’

Moreover, diasporas are in a position to identify certain specific challenges in the homelands much better, since, thanks to the contemporary revolution in transport and communications technology, they are able to keep a foothold in each culture. According to Richard Joseph, “a globalising world makes it possible for more citizens to think, live, and act as transnationals for whom home and abroad are no longer fixed and immutable locations”. Furthermore, diasporas have the advantage of knowing better than others how the global dynamics impact on the local challenges they are tackling in

the home countries. This is because diasporas, though acting locally, operate in a transnational global context, and do so by adopting ingenious strategies to maximise the advantages which the contemporary globalisation process has presented to them. For example, diasporas forge innovative patterns of ‘globalisation from below’ in which individual and group players rather than mega-corporations, benefit and make use of the opportunities offered by globalisation.6

Diasporas interviewed explained that understanding the local context better has enabled them to work with reliable, trustworthy and capable local partners. These are the local partners who understand the needs and priorities of the local community and also represent the beneficiaries of the project. Furthermore, the projects that the African diaspora organisations implement in the homelands are demand driven and carefully identified by the community. More importantly, diasporas interviewed stated that as they nowadays travel to the home countries more frequently, they come to understand local circumstances and the urgent problems that the marginalized elements of society are grappling with. With the lower costs for transportation, diasporas are able to make more frequent trips to their original homelands and can thereby firmly cement transnational ties which they then translate into concrete commitments, actions and activities.

Also, the rapid and massive advances in communications technology such as the Internet and e-mail, and inexpensive phone calls enable widely dispersed diaspora to make contact cheaply and effectively for the first time in history. As a result of the expansion of inexpensive transportation and communications technology, diasporas are now able to exert far greater impact on the development in their homelands than ever before.

Diasporas interviewed argued that with the projects they implement in their home countries they bring with them new technological skills, new values, norms and work ethics, and smart and innovative economic development and practices which have helped to modernise the traditional practices. A good example is the Sankofa Family Poultry Project in Ghana which is modernising the traditional way of poultry keeping that is associated with many problems such as rampant outbreaks of diseases and pests, exposure to predators and weather, etc. And as one of the interviewees put it, ‘we bring home more than development projects which cannot be easily quantified in concrete development terms’. Diasporas also bring home a culture geared to delivery in an efficient manner. In short, diaspora organisations are addressing the challenges of the domestic context in their respective homelands taking advantage of the strategic positions they occupy between home and host countries.

3.2. Examples of concrete cases

The five selected development projects that the diaspora organisations mentioned above have initiated will be briefly highlighted here. This is to give exposure to the concrete development-related activities that the diaspora organisations initiate in their countries of origin. Another purpose is to present them as evidence-based cases for the making of evidence-based policy. The projects that are featured are: Buna Bet Ethiopian Coffee; Sankofa Family Poultry; Diaspora Partnership Programme; Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Street and Orphaned Children and Child Soldiers; and Commercial Farm.


Buna Bet Ethiopian Coffee

Dir Foundation, set up by the Ethiopian Diaspora in the Netherlands, has initiated the Buna Bet Ethiopian Coffee Project. Dir was founded in 2000, and aims to contribute to the development of Ethiopia, stimulating the integration of Ethiopians in the Netherlands, and reinforcing contacts and co-operation between the two countries.

Dir has set up the coffee processing project, which is one of several projects that the foundation is implementing in Ethiopia. The projects target poor and marginalized elements of society in the home country. The project was developed to improve the living conditions of former prostitutes by creating a means of living for them. For instance, the coffee is bought directly from the farmers and then washed, dried, ground, roasted, and packed by the women. Afterwards, the coffee is shipped to the Netherlands and subsequently sold in Dir’s coffee corner in Amsterdam. The coffee-processing project has now resulted in the establishment of a company, and not only provides an income for the former prostitutes and their families, but also contributes to fair trade, since the farmers receive a better price for the coffee.7

Sankofa Family Poultry Project

Sankofa Foundation initiated the Sankofa Family Poultry Project in 2003. Sankofa is a foundation that was set up by Ghanaian diasporas in the Netherlands in 2001 with the aim of contributing to development in Ghana.

Sankofa supports and collaborates with local NGO’s working in the field of agriculture, education, gender advocacy and income generation projects in rural areas. The target groups of the foundation in Ghana are chiefly the destitute and marginalized sections in society such as women, children and unemployed youth who mostly live in rural areas. These groups are badly neglected by the government institutions of Ghana because they do not live in urban areas. As George Duncan, the chairman of the Sankofa Foundation stated, ‘Ghanaian government policies do not take into consideration of how small farmer in the rural areas are surviving’. Sankofa implements different projects in Ghana. One of these projects is the Sankofa Family Poultry Project. Sankofa started this community development project in Ghana in partnership with the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen (GNAFF), GAPNET and the Asutuare Women’s Desk in the Asutuare area in Greater Accra in 2005. The project is a response to the damaging impact that Dutch poultry cultivation has had on the Ghanaian poultry industry. Thanks to the EU subsidies, Dutch poultry farmers overproduce chickens and dump them in markets in Ghana and other countries in Africa. This dumping practice has completely destroyed Ghanaian poultry farms and with that, the subsistence livelihood of the Ghanaian farmers in the rural areas. The economic tragedy of the Ghanaian poultry farmers inflicted by the dumping of the Dutch chickens in Ghana was shown live on the Dutch TV (Netwerk) on Wednesday evening 11 July 2007. This economic tragedy for Ghanaian poultry farmers is one of many

7 For more information regarding the Buna Bet Ethiopian Coffee Project, see http://www.dirnet.nl
examples which invite questioning of the morality of EU subsidies which encourage European farmers to overproduce in order to continue receiving their subsidies and then to dump the surplus on Africa at very low prices with such destructive consequences for Africa’s agrarian economy. The Sankofa Family Poultry Project is attempting to offset some of the economic hardships in the rural areas of Ghana and is indeed making a difference on the ground. 8

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Street and Orphaned Children and Child Soldiers Project

This project was initiated and implemented on the ground by the African Humanitarian Foundation (Humanitaire Hulp aan Afrika). The Foundation was set up by an African diaspora group in 2004 to provide assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, orphans, migrants, victims of human rights abuse and human trafficking, ex-child soldiers, ex-prostitutes, and people affected by natural disasters, conflicts and poverty. The vision of the Foundation is to see that victims of natural disasters, conflicts, human rights abuse, human trafficking and poverty, as well as migrants, can re-build their lives, find ways to earn their livelihood, integrate into society and the economy, and live in peace and dignity. The Foundation implements projects in several countries located in East and Central Africa. The projects range from the rehabilitation of the youth abducted by the LRA rebels in the Northern Uganda to capacity building for the leaders of the local organisations such as SOPROP in Goma in the Eastern DRC.

The Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Street and Orphaned Children and Child Soldiers Project is implemented in Northern Uganda in a region where the social fabric of the inhabitants was devastated by a 20-year war between the government and the LRA rebels. The focus of the project is to rehabilitate ex-child soldiers and youth abducted by the rebels in the Northern Uganda. The project provides education with a particular emphasis on skills training such as carpentry and computer literacy, etc. The goal of the project is to ensure that the youth affected by the war learn skills that will enable them to gain employment and thereby earn a decent living for themselves and their families. 9

Diaspora Partnership Programme

The Diaspora Partnership Programme was initiated and implemented in Somalia by Nedsom in collaboration with CARE Netherlands. Nedsom was set up by Somali diasporas in the Netherlands with the objective of contributing to the economic development, capacity building and social and political reconstruction in Somalia. The Diaspora Partnership Programme started as a pilot project in 2006 and ends in 2008. The programme was initiated to contribute to the capacity building (brain gain) of the local personnel working in local organisations, civil society and government institutions in the homeland so as to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their service delivery to the people. The programme is a unique experiment as it attempts to mobilise and make available the expertise and critical skills acquired by the Netherlands-resident Somalis to the institutions in the homeland which are in dire need of certain professional capacities not available in the country. For instance, Nedsom sends skilled Somali diasporas to Somalia on temporary basis to promote knowledge sharing and exchange. The skilled Somali diasporas are therefore expected to transfer and share their knowledge, expertise and experience with the local personnel in a manner that ensures that the beneficiaries can easily appropriate, adopt, internalize and retain it. This is with the conviction that the Somali diaspora professionals, because of their strong cultural ties and affinity to the target population, sensitivity to the domestic environment and commitment to the cause, are in a better position to transfer appropriate knowledge that is well-suited to the needs of the local target groups and also can be effectively retained. This is in contrast to the approach of most of their native Western counterparts, largely expressed by the attitude that ‘we know what is good for you’. This approach has been criticised for inhibiting local development, creating and perpetuating a dependency mentality, and undermining self-confidence and capacity enhancement on the side of the recipients. 10

FAMIX Farm Project

The FAMIX Farm Project has been initiated and implemented by MD Fedis AgriMix PLC, a company set up by highly skilled Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands. FAMIX Farm was set up to modernise Ethiopian agricultural practices. This is a country which has a population of 80 million, of which 90% of the population are dependent on agriculture. Yet, agricultural practices still remain backward, which is one of the reasons why Ethiopia has suffered recurring food shortages and tragic famines on a massive scale since 1980 (and prior to 1980). For instance, the farmers still use cows, donkeys and manpower to till small plots for subsistence. FAMIX attempts to modernise the agricultural production methods in the country by introducing advanced technologies such as irrigation systems, tractors and lorry transport, etc. The FAMIX project has already invested in laying roads, repairing old bridges and also created employment for the poor living in the area where the farm is located. However, although FAMIX is a commercial farm it is committed to social responsibility. The stated goal of the company is to provide valuable information and raise the awareness of local farmers so as to develop an attitude which enables them to improve their harvest, water sanitations, better manage irrigation systems, and also assist in the marketing of the food products. This will be done by sharing the entrepreneurial experience, expertise and creative business practices that the diaspora owners of the company have brought with them from abroad with the local farmers through training, workshops, etc. In short, FAMIX strives to contribute to the production of a sufficient and sustainable food supply in Ethiopia and thereby directly contribute to the reduction of poverty in the homeland. 11

For more information, see http://www.sankofa.nl

For more information, see http://www.famix.eu

For more information, see http://www.africanhumanitarian.org


For more information, see http://www.famix.eu
3.3. Lessons learned from diaspora initiatives

There are important lessons that can be learned from the development projects initiated and implemented by the diaspora organisations in their countries of origin. The first lesson is that the development projects undertaken by the diaspora organisations are in essence complementary to those implemented by the mainstream donor organisations in the homelands. They are responding to vital needs not covered by the programmes of the established development agencies since the needs of the poor and marginalised sectors of society in the homelands are vast and extremely pressing. In this regard, the development projects initiated by the diaspora organisations are not only complementary to the programmes implemented by the donor agencies but are also effectively contributing to the reduction of poverty, which is the overall goal of development cooperation between the North and the South. This is the reason that the development projects initiated by the diasporas need to be supported and strengthened, in order to deliver more added value to development efforts in the homelands.

The second lesson is that the development projects initiated by the diaspora organisations have a high probability of sustaining themselves once they are set up in the homelands. According to one of the interviewees, ‘once we set up a project on the ground we will help ensure its sustainability. This is for the simple reason that we own the project and that ownership forces us to continue investing in it. In addition to this, the social and cultural affinities we share with beneficiaries on the location compel us to remain involved in the project for a long period of time. This is in contrast to the projects set up by the donor development agencies which can be easily abandoned once their development policy priorities change’. The interviewee added however that, ‘if the diaspora organisations and mainstream development agencies join forces and partner projects in the homelands, our commitments will continue even after the financial support from the donor agencies dries up’.

The third lesson is that the development projects implemented by the diaspora organisations in the home countries bring with them not only resources but also experiences, transnational contacts and networks, valuable information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, new technological skills, smart and innovative business and trade practices, etc. In this regard, they bring with them more than resources. In fact, the projects open the eyes of the beneficiaries and raise the awareness of their collective potential in many different ways. Furthermore, the projects widen the worldview of the target groups as they facilitate the transactions of the local and global realities and processes from both directions.

The fourth lesson is that the development projects of the diaspora organisations, like those of the mainstream development agencies, target the weakest elements of society. This reality therefore supports the arguments that there are important advantages to be gained if both development sectors join forces in certain projects that are implemented on the ground in the homelands. The advantage of joining forces is that each development sector brings its unique strengths and added value into the projects, leading to increased reach, capacity, efficiency and impact of the projects on development in the local communities. This is perhaps an idea worth exploring.

The fifth lesson is that the contemporary diaspora organisations are comparable with the development agencies in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time they were also new, weak and in their infancy, but were established to redress global inequality. This was a noble mission although at the time the entrenched interests in the sector were apprehensive, as they felt challenged by these new agencies, a situation similar to that diaspora organisations now face. It is therefore imperative not to underestimate the driving ambition and the development potential of the diaspora organisations, as some of them will in all likelihood develop into established diaspora development agencies in the foreseeable future.
The central question raised in this section is how diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies can join forces to work in partnership for development in Africa. This is a partnership that makes it possible for mainstream development agencies and diaspora organisations to complement each other and work constructively towards a common objective. It is now becoming more evident that diasporas living in the Western world are emerging as the “fourth development aid actors” after international organisations, governments and mainstream development agencies. This is a reality which can no longer be overlooked. It is also an opportunity which should be seized and exploited to the maximum.

The involvement of the diaspora organisations in development projects in their respective home countries has been growing since 1996. This is due to the increasing number of the diaspora groups that have originated from one village, or town or who are linked through religious associations, clan ties and other associations or networks. This increase is making diaspora groups conscious of their potential to contribute to positive efforts both in the host and home countries. Another reason is that diaspora organisations have gradually developed a more externally oriented attitude. Whereas before, the primary concern of the diaspora organisations was to facilitate the integration socially and economically of the members of their particular communities into the new host country, many of them are now developing outward-looking concerns with respect to development in their homelands in Africa.

This is the reason that a growing number of diaspora groups have created organisations which are established specifically to contribute to poverty reduction and development in the home countries. A third reason is that diaspora individuals and their organisations feel that they are in a unique position to undertake development activities in their respective countries of origin. Some diasporas have now been settled in the Netherlands for long enough to feel that they are in a financial, social and intellectual position to help the people in the homelands cope with poverty. And they do this by adopting the culture of voluntarism and the voluntary associational life from the host societies in the Netherlands or elsewhere which they are now exporting to their homelands. Voluntarism fits well with the unpaid work that the cadres of the diaspora organisations perform. Finally, diaspora organisations are responding to the emerging needs resulting from the collapse of the national social services in many of their homelands. Consequently, many ordinary people both in urban and rural areas have been left without any social provision. The diaspora organisations therefore cater to the needs and act as a safety net to the poor and marginalized groups in their home countries, where governments lack the means to make such provisions.

In this respect, the efforts of the diaspora organisations contribute tangibly to the reduction of poverty and to development in their countries of origin. Yet, in the current development debates on Africa in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, the invaluable contribution of the diaspora organisations is completely ignored in development statistics and hence does not receive sufficient attention from practitioners in mainstream development agencies and policy-makers in government institutions. Even in discussions about the millennium development goals to halve the number of poor people in the world by 2015, the contribution of the diasporas to the reduction of poverty in their home countries has yet to be recognized officially.

The brief remarks above make it abundantly clear that diasporas and their organisations are mobilized to contribute proactively to development in their homelands. The problem is that, as Hein de Haas aptly explained, ‘rather than
“mobilising diasporas”, development actors themselves should be “mobilised” to engage with and to learn from diasporas in development cooperation so as to establish a genuine two-way working relationship. There are great advantages to be realised if diaspora organisations and development agencies join forces. The advantages are among, other things, the merging of the unique strengths of both development institutions. As Kathleen Newland points out “the benefits and unique strengths of both diaspora groupings (keen cultural awareness of communities of origin, better awareness of specific needs and/or potential pitfalls, long term personal commitment to projects and communities) and international development agencies (larger funding capacity, professional/technical expertise and experience, efficiency through economies of scale, credibility) can all be magnified through effective collaboration”. 13

But this is not happening yet and it is not clear how such partnership can be given a concrete shape. As the diaspora interviewees stated, the mainstream NGOs and development agencies are still ‘lukewarm’ about recognising diaspora organisations as agents for development and potential partners in development. Perhaps, the problem lies in the fact that development agencies still do not know how they can integrate development activities undertaken by the diaspora organisations within their overall poverty alleviation strategies.

The diaspora interviewed suggested three ways to address this dilemma. The first is to make more visible the development projects and activities in which the diaspora organisations are involved in their countries origin and the differences they are making with respect to the situation on the ground. This will require undertaking targeted research that brings out the added value of the activities of the diaspora organisations to the efforts geared to overall development in the homelands. The second is to examine possible options for integrating the rather informal development projects undertaken and sponsored by diaspora organisations with the formal development programmes promoted by the donor development agencies. The third is to identify specific projects and entry points at which contacts and cooperation between the diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies can be facilitated and promoted.

4.1 Diaspora and transnational networks

In this section the logical starting point is to state that unlike development agencies, diaspora organisations do not operate in a single national context and in this regard, are not tied to a specific country. Diasporas and their organisations operate in transnational settings taking advantage of the opportunities that are available to them as a result of globalisation. The process enables diasporas and their organisations to operate as transnational networks criss-crossing countries and continents. And the benefits are indeed considerable.

For instance, transnational networks enable diaspora organisations to mobilise considerable resources, valuable contacts, and important partners and institutions across countries. They are able to build social, economic and political bridges with valuable benefits across borders. One diaspora interviewee remarked that, “we are simply in an age of networks where the forging of innovative transnational connections are extremely important since they facilitate access to considerable benefit”, as Jean-Marie Guéhenno predicted in his book published in 1993. 14 More importantly, diasporas and their organisations are in fact one of the main global forces giving shape to the development process in the 21st century. 15

The long-distance development activities undertaken by the diaspora organisations are giving rise to new forms of development cooperation and new types of partnerships. They are therefore challenging the logic of the old framework of development as they are opening new avenues for development which are indeed distinctive in their practical manifestations. This is a development approach which is both grassroots driven and transnational in nature.

This is how one of the interviewees fittingly described the situation: “we in the diaspora are quick to respond to the opportunities offered by this globalising world as we are not yet established like the development industry and also strategically placed between developed and developing countries’. He then added that, ‘as the development cooperation relations has been democratized by the entrance of the development industry into the established fold in 1950, so we are now entering into the current established fold by further democratising the development cooperation relations, and making it both diaspora grassroots driven and transnational at the same time’. This reality therefore makes it imperative to have a better understanding of the context of the contemporary global process which facilitates the patterns of this phenomenon.

It is now becoming gradually apparent that development cooperation relations are no longer an effort undertaken from one developed country to one underdeveloped country as has been the case in the past. This linear process of development is now being challenged thanks to the entry of diaspora organisations into the development field. The entrance of diaspora organisations into the field has indeed created a multiplicity of development interventions initiated simultaneously from several localities and countries in the developed world that are geared to a specific country in the developing world. Perhaps, the transnational networked development interventions facilitated by diaspora organisations are pioneering the kind of development that will probably be a silent player in future development cooperation relations between developed and developing countries.

Diaspora organisations are tackling the development problems in their home countries by linking the process of globalisation to the local conditions on the ground in a very effective way. They are doing this in response to the failure of past development interventions in their respective homelands. In this way, what the diaspora organisations are doing is complementary to the development efforts undertaken by mainstream development agencies.

Diasporas are addressing development challenges from a transnational networked level (driven by grassroots diaspora organisations) while development agencies largely address development from a national level. This makes it important to integrate the two parallel processes of development so as to benefit from both approaches. It is also important that mainstream development actors understand that diaspora organisations are playing a decisive role in furthering the Acknowledgments

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democratization of development cooperation relations from below. Unfortunately, as a diaspora interviewee lamented, ‘a great number of the mainstream development actors disallow the developmental interventions undertaken by the diaspora organisations as being fragmented and amateurish. But this is how the contemporary professionalized development organisations were created fifty years ago’. In short, the transnational networks that the diasporas have ingeniously construct and mediate can, in fact, add value to the development efforts undertaken by the established development agencies, if only they are creatively and constructively tapped for the common objective they both vigorously struggle to achieve.

4.2 Facilitating constructive dialogue

Diasporas and development actors are not currently engaging in any dialogue at all. And even if they are in contact, which is seldom, there is not a level playing field, as it is an interaction based on a giver and ‘beggar’ relationship. Yet, dialogue is the logical starting point to begin to interact, exchange and share information, establish contacts and networks and learn from each other’s experiences, unique strengths and added values. Dialogue is also important in building confidence and mutual trust, understanding each other’s views and positions better and clearing up misconceptions which are perpetuated when the cultures are alien to each other. More specifically, the initiation of constructive dialogue is urgently needed in order to create a level playing field between the two development actors upon which collaboration can be initiated. It is with continued dialogue that a process could be created which enables both parties to build up genuine and effective partnerships. Such partnerships will no longer be asymmetrical, as it is now the case.

It is therefore imperative to initiate the facilitation of constructive dialogue between diasporas and the development industry. This is a dialogue which can be gradually developed into structured consultations among the stakeholders of both sectors. So far there is no platform or institution which has taken the initiative to facilitate such a dialogue. As a result, the two sides are locked into widely divergent worlds even though the goals they aspire to are the same: improving the well-being of the poor in developing countries. Yet, it is now more important than before to initiate a dialogue and structured consultations between both development sectors. This is for the simple fact that the mainstream traditional development agencies in the Netherlands and abroad have, in the recent past, developed migration and development projects targeted at diasporas. The Dutch agencies include CARE, Novib Oxfam and PSO (Capacity Building in Developing Countries) among others. However, most of the mainstream donor agencies lack knowledge, expertise and experience in the area of migration and development because, as previously noted, migration and development has been a field that migrant groups and organisations have dealt with quite informally and in an inclusive manner. These groups, then, have developed greater knowledge, expertise, and practical experiences in the field.

This new development therefore makes it essential to undertake on a continuing basis greater efforts to stimulate the exchange of knowledge, practical experience, best practices and successful achievements between the diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies in this area. Such exchanges of knowledge and expertise are very important, as they can increase the operational capacity and impact of the activities undertaken by both development sectors in the field. It can also be a stimulus for the creation of valuable alliances and joint development projects or other related activities such as lobbying, campaigning, advocacy, etc.

As those diasporas interviewed suggested, there are several ways to initiate a process of constructive dialogue between diaspora organisations and development agencies. One way is to organise regular consultations and expert meetings in which the professionals of both development sectors can come together, interact, exchange contacts and establish networks, and share information on new developments in the field. Another way is to set up a learning platform in which the development actors in both sectors are come together once a year for participatory learning activities. This action learning can be conducted in the form of the Context Master Class Lectures organised by Context for the staff members of the mainstream development organisation on a regular basis. For instance, the Context determines the form of participatory learning in order to stimulate the mainstream development actors to update their knowledge in the field, by having exposure to the knowledge, expertise and experiences of others who are also active in the sector. 14 A third way is to set up a permanent dialogue group with representation from both sectors with a mandate to facilitate a constructive and ongoing dialogue between diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies. The dialogue group can come together on a monthly basis so as to discuss strategies for improving the dialogue, contacts and appropriate ways of encouraging the flow of information between the two development sectors. The dialogue group can also devise communication channels through which the development actors in both sectors will become aware of each other’s thematic focus, policy priorities and practical activities on a regular basis. This means developing a two-way approach by which each sector will have access to the information produced by the other one regarding strategic plans, reports, position papers, other documentation, etc.

Furthermore, the dialogue group can organise a workshop once or twice a year in which the development actors in both sectors can exchange information about useful lessons, best practices and successful achievements regarding projects implemented by each sector in the field of migration and development. Facilitating a process of constructive dialogue between the diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies is a pre-condition for sustainable collaboration between the two sectors and this should be the first step in this direction. Furthermore, the combination of the three approaches noted above – approaches suggested by the diasporas interviewed – can contribute considerably to the efforts intended to facilitate constructive dialogue between the two sectors. This will then be a genuine dialogue, and should eventually lead to a productive collaboration between the sectors on development efforts in the homelands in the South.

4.3 Initiating joint pilot projects

Diaspora organisations and development agencies can initiate joint pilot projects in both the host and home countries. This is a way to develop a viable working relationship through practice. And while it may be true that practice makes perfect, to date such experiments have not been tried often enough. For example, initiating joint pilot projects can bring the two development sectors much closer than is now the case. Furthermore, diaspora organisations are evolving from informal to formal entities. Some of them have now developed into a full-fledged professional NGO’s such as Seva Network Foundation, Dir Foundation, and the African Humanitarian

14 For more information about the Context programme, see www.developmenttraining.org
Foundation. In this case, diaspora organisations are learning the tricks of the trade through trial and error, as was the case fifty years ago with the now well-established organisations. The diaspora organisations are fast learners in terms of networking with approaches to the right people. They are adept at mobilising resources for their projects by ingeniously using networking talents and the well-developed informal social capacities and skills they brought with them from their native countries. More specifically, diasporas and organisational networks are in fact mastering the rules of the game played in the Netherlands and elsewhere as they have become part and parcel of the host societies. Unfortunately, most of the policy research funded by the Netherlands government and others in the EU is not geared to studying and developing better insights concerning the development potential of the diasporas who are already settled in those countries, well-integrated into host societies in different ways and at different levels, and who can make a difference in the situations in their respective homelands. The current focus of most such research is the study of the processes and movements of migrants who are not yet in the Western countries and assessments of the best ways they can be managed and controlled from behind Fortress Europe.

The initiation of joint pilot projects can play a role in changing the status quo of the existing unequal economic power relations between diaspora organisations and the donor development agencies. Currently, diaspora organisations develop project proposals and seek funding from the donor development agencies, a dependence which is most often frustrating. For this reason, the joint pilot projects should be designed differently. They should be developed as projects where the resources, expertise, experiences, knowledge and network are brought together by the two parties from the development sectors. A good example of a joint pilot project is that of the ‘Diaspora Partnership Programme’ which CARE and Nedsom have developed together and currently cooperate on. The project is a capacity building (brain gain) programme and is implemented in the homeland. It is a unique project in which the Somali diaspora members of Nedsom have primarily initiated the idea of mobilising the expertise and critical skills acquired by the Dutch resident Somali and making them available to institutions in the homeland which are in a dire need of certain professional capacities not available in the country. The main objective is to send skilled Somali diaspora to Somalia on temporary basis for knowledge exchange purposes. The skilled Somali diasporas are expected to transfer and share their expertise with the local personnel so as to increase the capacity, efficiency and effectiveness of the local organisations and civil society and government institutions in the homeland. According to Guled A. Yusuf, the director of Nedsom, “this is a perfect joint venture based on equal footing. Nedsom brings contacts both from Somalia and from the diaspora, builds cultural bridges between the host and the home country, other networks, knowledge of local conditions and even resources; while CARE brings project management expertise, international contacts and networks, professional experience, administrative and financial skills among others”.

In short, the joint project between Nedsom and CARE is an experiment worth emulating by others, although it is still fairly new, as it was launched in 2006. It will also be important to evaluate the impact of the project on the target groups when the first phase ends in 2008. This is important so as to learn lessons from the experience of a joint project implemented by a diaspora organisation and a mainstream development agency and to gauge the added value gained from such collaboration.

Another area in which the diaspora organisations and the established development agencies can initiate joint projects in the host country in particular is that of lobbying. The lobbying, campaigning and advocacy potential of the diaspora organisations has not yet been sufficiently and purposefully tapped. However, lobbying is an important tool that diaspora organisations use to pressure and influence policy options and strategies of policy-makers both in the home and the host countries. And as Shain fittingly argued, “Diaspora may influence the foreign policies of their host countries. This is especially true of diaspora integrated into democratic societies, where they often organise as interest groups that influence the foreign policy of their host government. Equally, diaspora in far-off lands may actively influence the foreign policies of their homelands. When they achieve transnational economic or political clout (or both), diaspora can, and do, directly affect identities and homeland policies”. For instance, there are initiatives which would require the building up of a wide and effectively lobbying constituency in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe so as to influence the Dutch government, EU and international efforts and to positively impact such governmental entities on Africa in terms of policies, development programmes, debt cancellation, trade concessions, democratic governance and human rights issues, etc. Thus, the lobbying potential of the diaspora organisations is an area where the major mainstream development agencies in the Netherlands such as Hivos, Cordaid, ICCO and Novib, among others, can considerably benefit if they link up with diaspora groups in their campaigning and advocacy activities.

17 For Seva, see http://www.sevanetwork.net; for the African Humanitarian Foundation, see http://www.africanhumanitarian.org; and for the Dir Foundation, see http://www.dirnet.nl

Fostering institutional building between diaspora and homeland governments

Fostering formal and sustainable institutional cooperation between the diasporas and African governments at different levels is indeed imperative. The building of this form of relationship can considerably increase the contribution of the African diasporas to the overall development of their countries of origin. The fostering of institutional links can be facilitated by ensuring that an enabling environment is created on the ground in the home countries on the continent. Similarly, the creation of such an enabling environment in the home countries can be further bolstered by coupling it to the objective of fostering intense institutional cooperation between the African diasporas and the governments in Africa. Such institutional cooperation can take shape at different levels. For instance, it can be built up at the continental level through institutions such as the African Union (AU) or the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad), as well as at the country level and at sector level within a country. The contacts and relationships currently existing are mainly based on individual and group interactions. They are therefore informal and have not yet become formally institutionalised, which is limiting any intensive and sustained cooperation between the African diasporas and African governments. There is, consequently, an urgent need to upgrade the current informal relationships so that they can be developed into relationships based on organised and institutional cooperation between Africa and the diaspora.

Fostering institutional cooperation is in fact a precondition for large-scale involvement of the diasporas in the development of their respective home countries. The benefits gained from such institutional cooperation are considerable. It can facilitate the establishment of links that join Africa and the diaspora in undertaking a collective strategy for development, political stability and progressive social change on the continent. Therefore, it is now time to invest in developing formal institutions that would enable both the governments in Africa and the African diasporas overseas to pool their immense resources in working for development in Africa.

The absence of institutional cooperation between Africa and its diaspora reveals another problem that needs to be urgently addressed. The problem is that, in general, most African countries, compared with their Asian and Latin American counterparts, have not yet taken full advantage of the vast untapped potential of its overseas diaspora, nor have African diaspora organisations and their members been as actively involved in the development of their respective home countries as diasporas from countries in both Asia and Latin America. 19

The movement of Africans to the Western Hemisphere, whether forced or voluntary, went through several phases. The first phase was one of survival and freedom. The second phase was one of individual advancement. The third phase, which we are now ushering in must be one that heralds a joint venture between Africa and the diaspora for economic and political progress through institutional cooperation. However, as has been already suggested elsewhere, ‘Africa must develop a collective strategy for engaging the diaspora. There is a wealth of financial, technical and intellectual expertise in the diaspora. Africa needs to exploit these human and material resources to help tackle the multiple challenges

of development, environmental degradation, food security, energy supply and equitable economic growth."

5.1 Creating an enabling environment

The creation of an enabling environment in the home countries is, in effect, a precondition for sustainable development in Africa. It is also a precondition for engaging the diaspora in the development of their respective home countries. However, the home countries lack an environment conducive to promoting the diaspora’s contributions to development across various facets. The challenges in the home countries that are gravely hampering the diasporas’ efforts to contribute to development in Africa are indeed complex and variable. A few examples will be cited here. For instance, the most critical challenges are the lack of an enabling environment—such conditions as bad governance and political instability, poor economic conditions, and the absence of personal freedom, basic civic rights, democracy and the rule of law. The prevalence of such complex challenges, which are often referred to as ‘push factors’, manifest themselves in widespread social upheaval, the disruption of economic production, poor growth, high levels of unemployment, depressing working conditions, poor physical infrastructure, the lack of adequate social services, human rights abuses and the absence of democracy. Unfortunately, the persistence of some or all of these challenges in certain homelands gravely hinders diaspora development efforts in Africa; indeed, much research suggests the importance of strong institutions and good policies as an inducement for diaspora engagement for homeland development.20

More importantly, the development impact of diaspora is not equal across countries and is strongly affected by how the institutional environment in place on the ground shapes incentives. African diaspora institutions and organisations in the host countries in the West can play a role in this endeavour by increasing their investment in programmes promoting good governance and democratisation processes in the homelands, so as to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment on the ground. As one of the interviewees put it, ‘African diaspora should not only lament the lack of enabling environment in their home countries but they should contribute proactively to the creation of enabling environment by constructively engaging with the government and the civil society in the homelands. After all even autocratic regions in the homelands need the remittances sent by the diaspora. In this regard, African diaspora can use remittances as a weapon for a positive change in the home countries’.

Above all, a challenge of another kind which is limiting the contributions of the diaspora to development and the creation of enabling environment back home is the unwillingness of the governing elites in some of the home countries to reach out and seek the assistance of the diaspora for the development in their home countries. This obstinacy has already aggravated conditions on the continent as it has kept away the considerable benefits that could have been gained from the still untapped financial and human resources of Africans overseas. This is one of the obstacles, as noted earlier, that compared with their Asian counterparts, many African governments have not yet fully addressed. The success of the African

countries, particularly China and India, to attract their diasporas can be attributed to the enabling domestic environment: stable governance, policy openness, economic reform, basic infrastructure, and specific incentives. African migrants queried on this issue have stressed the need for more research on this aspect. Particularly, they pointed out the importance of learning from the experiences and examples of best practices in countries in other regions such as Latin America and Asia. Examples to be examined would include certain Asian countries such as India, China, Korea and Taiwan that have adopted policies to engage proactively with their respective overseas diasporas and to build up formal and sustainable partnerships with them for homeland development. More concretely, they suggested it is important to learn more from the strategies and policy mechanisms those countries have put in place in order to reach out to the diaspora and make it easy for them to return, set up businesses, transfer badly needed knowledge, expertise and resources and thereby remain deeply engaged with development in their countries of origin.

The interviewees also said it was critically important for African diaspora to learn more about how Asian diasporas have set up networks in the host countries, mobilise themselves, pool their considerable resources and effectively line up with their respective home countries. This is an importance remark since the African diaspora in the West trail their Asian counterparts in undertaking such endeavours. Asian diaspora have already set up numerous networks (acting as valuable strategic links) aimed at connecting more closely the diaspora population in the host countries with the homelands for different purposes ranging from business investment to the transfer of high-tech skills.21 For example, there are now at least 41 networks founded by the diaspora in the last ten years tied to 30 different countries of which disappointedly few of them have been set up by African diasporas.22

Diasporas in the host countries normally set up networks with the objective of linking up with the homelands for various reasons. In fact, networks are vital in facilitating important tasks which must be undertaken on the side of the host countries. Among others, networks are needed to inform the diaspora about the policy changes, specific challenges, needs and opportunities in the home countries, as well as to facilitate the long-distance transnational links between the host countries and the homelands. As the diasporas interviewed suggested, research on how African diaspora can learn from the experience of the Asian diaspora should be a priority in the near future, since there is no need to re-invent the wheel.

Another aspect which the interviewees brought to the attention is the role that embassies can play in mobilising and connecting the diasporas in the homelands. Embassies are strategically positioned to improve and normalise the relations between the diaspora and the governments back home. They can also provide accurate information to the diaspora about the political situation in the home country. Furthermore, embassies can provide information about policy changes in

20 See the speech by Howard F. Jeter, the former American Ambassador in Nigeria, ‘Reaching out to the African Diaspora: The Need for a Vision’, delivered at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (Lagos, November 26, 2002).


22 Indicorps is a good example of the networks that Asians in the diasporas have founded. Indian-Americans in the US have set up Indicorps as a network organisation with the aim to facilitate the return of professional Indian-Americans with specialised knowledge to India on a time-limited basis with the aim to upgrade and boost the competency and the capacity of local institutions.

23 See further Mercy Brown, “Using the intellectual diaspora to reverse the brain drain: Some useful examples.” (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2000).
the home countries that are favourable to the needs and interests of the diaspora, and provide information about business and investment opportunities to the diaspora. Similarly, embassies can collect information and compile a database of critical skills (not available at home) that the diaspora have acquired and make available to both the private and public sectors and institutions in the home countries. However, in order to seize the opportunities presented by the growing link between the transnational diaspora, globalisation and development, embassies have to adapt to the changing times. The Ghanaian embassy in the Netherlands was mentioned by the Ghanaian diaspora to be a good example as the embassy keeps the Ghanaian diaspora in touch with each other by hosting occasional ‘get-togethers’. The embassy also connects Ghanaian diaspora organisations with government delegations when they visit the Netherlands. Finally, some of the interviewees suggested that embassies should have diaspora attaches tasked to facilitate actions undertaken by the host countries to connect the diaspora with the homeland more profitably.

Another challenge worth noting here that is also hindering the ability of the diaspora to contribute to the creation of enabling environment on the ground, and which needs to be urgently addressed, is that many African governments have not yet developed national strategies and policy instruments specifically intended to involve the diaspora in the development efforts of their respective countries. However, developing policies and practical measures at the national level is a primary priority for engaging with the diaspora. African governments in order to benefit from the development potential of the diasporas, would need to put in place policy mechanisms that facilitate the building of effective links with them. They will also need to identify realistic and feasible mechanisms that could be adopted in sustainable collaborations. More importantly, African governments should define feasible programmes that persuade and encourage the effective involvement of the diaspora in the development efforts of the homelands. This, however, requires undertaking serious research on projects developed elsewhere, particularly in Asia that have encouraged the greater involvement of diasporas in the development of their countries of origin. Such research would result in a better understanding of what initiatives have worked and what conditions and factors contributed to their success in particular.

The diasporas interviewed have recommended that each home country develop a country policy strategy paper which they call a Migration and Development Strategic Paper (MDSP). The development of the MDSP will help organisations aware of the continental bodies, particularly in Africa, that have encouraged the greater involvement of diasporas in the development of their countries of origin. Such research would result in a better understanding of what initiatives have worked and what conditions and factors contributed to their success in particular.

5.2 Institutional cooperation at the continental level

Since 2003, there have been ad-hoc contacts between the diaspora and the continental bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad). The contact started when the AU officially recognized Africans in the diaspora as representing a ‘sixth region’ of the African Union in addition to the five regions on the continent. In doing so, the AU recognised the diaspora to be a force of a considerable potential with which a partnership should be forged for the benefit of the continent. For instance, one of the policy goals of the AU is to involve the diaspora more actively in its endeavours to promote democracy and development in Africa. But since then, the African Union had only hosted infrequent meetings with the diaspora. It was however Nepad which, as a focal point for African diaspora groups, decided to boldly take initiative to reach out to the diaspora. For instance, Nepad initiated several spectacular summits with the diaspora in several African capitals, and in particular, in South Africa. In fact, it is South Africa, where the secretariat of Nepad is located, which has taken the lead in this endeavours. The embassy in South Africa to host a summit on the African Diaspora. This is scheduled to take place in the first quarter of 2008. Consequently, the South African government has instructed its embassies in Europe and elsewhere to organise consultations with the diaspora so as to prepare them for the forthcoming summit between the Diaspora and the African Union.

All these activities are an indication that at the continental level, the AU and Nepad have a clear policy to court the diaspora so as to build up a partnership with them. This is also a demonstration that the continent as a whole is adapting to changing times and wants to reap the benefit of the resources available within its huge diaspora population. More importantly, both the AU and Nepad have taken the initiative to reach out to the diaspora and this has already laid the groundwork for a gradual increase in solid institutional cooperation. But this is just the beginning since the policy commitment of these continental institutions has not yet been translated into concrete plan of actions, realistic programmes and formal cooperation.

The building of institutional cooperation between the bodies at the continental level and the diaspora cannot be realised overnight. This can be realised by putting a process in motion which promotes regular contacts and practical cooperation in certain policy areas between the continental institutions and the diaspora. For example, the AU has commissions that are tasked to different policy areas such as health, education, good governance, peace building, etc. with which the diaspora groups and institutions can be involved. And this way contribute to the improvement of the sector. Moreover, the initiatives that the diaspora groups, organisations and institutions have initiated abroad can be strategically integrated into the ongoing work of a strategy. This will help programmes already implemented by the commissions of the AU and Nepad on the ground in Africa. Also, the diasporas represent an opportunity as they are Africa’s greatest offshore asset, and the potential of their immense human and financial capital is waiting to be exploited for the benefit of the continent. For instance, diaspora occupations a vital strategic position between the North and Africa. African diasporas are now in a unique strategic position in this ever-globalising world, scattered as they are across different economic and power centres around the globe. The huge presence of African diaspora in such powerful political centres as London, Paris, New York and Washington has an especially important strategic significance. In this regard, the AU and Nepad can greatly benefit if they devise strategies to tap into the lobbying, campaigning and advocacy capacities of the diaspora residing in these power centres where global decisions are made. The focus of such strategies would be to influence
policy makers in the power centres, promoting policies that impact positively on the continent in terms of favourable policy changes, trade concessions, debt cancellation, appropriate development programmes, etc. Additionally, diasporas could be engaged to express their views and bring more informed political voices to the policymaking debate in Europe and North America. Eventually, this long-distance practical cooperation will be needed in order to develop tangible institutional links. The practical cooperation need not be a grand plan of action. It can start small and expand gradually thereafter. Furthermore, another practical type of cooperation which contributes to the development of structural institutional links between the diaspora and Africa is the harnessing of critical skills, expertise and professional experiences of the diaspora – not on the continent – for capacity building purposes and for negotiations with multilateral institutions. As those diasporas interviewed noted, compared to Asia and Latin America, continental bodies in Africa including both the AU and Nepad hardly enlist diaspora experts as resources in their bargaining efforts with European Union institutions, their negotiations with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and similar activities. As a consequence, delegates from Africa often fail to support their positions with accurate figures during bargaining because of a lack of cutting edge knowledge of the issues at hand. An example cited is the negotiations of the World Trade Organisation in Cancun in 2003 where the negotiators from Africa were outclassed by their European, North American and even Asian counterparts because they all had access to up-to-date information on the issues under discussion. The urgent need to rectify this situation compels both the AU and Nepad, in their dealings with the multilateral institutions, to more often tap the knowledge of the diaspora on such and other related economic matters. At the same time, this will contribute to the process of connecting the diaspora with the continent. Finally, to ensure that the interests of the diaspora are represented in the continental bodies at both the AU and Nepad, diaspora commissioners should be appointed. The commissioners should not only safeguard the interests of the diaspora abroad but also play a liaison role in the process of connecting the diaspora with the continent in a more structural manner.

In short, it is through the habit of practice – as opposed to rhetorical slogans – that institutional cooperation between the diaspora and Africa can be eventually realised. The positive thing is that there is now a willingness both from the diaspora and continental bodies in Africa to join forces collectively for the development of the continent. For example, some of the interviewees recounted that there is now a growing realisation among African communities that they have a responsibility to do something for the continent that they have left physically but not emotionally. The painful truth that ‘while Africa regresses the rest of the world progresses’ is a matter of deep concern. African diasporas feel that they now can facilitate the process of undertaking transnational activities and establishing networks and can act as development bridge-builders between the West and Africa. The strategic position they occupy enables them to channel information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, new technological skills, smart and innovative business and trade practices, peace-making tools and techniques and democratic political habits and practices from the West to Africa. This is an opportunity which both the diaspora and the continental bodies such as the AU and Nepad have to seize by translating their public proclamations into tangible deeds, practical plans and concrete actions.

5.3 Institutional cooperation at the national level

The establishment of institutional cooperation at the national level will greatly facilitate contributions by the diaspora to the overall development of their respective countries of origin. The existing contacts between the diaspora and homelands are largely informal, ad-hoc and directed specifically at family, village, community and local level. The reason is that the access of the diaspora at other societal and national levels is extremely limited. Such access depends largely on the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland and on the policies of the government towards the diaspora abroad. For instance, in some countries, the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland has been hostile, while with others the relationship can be characterised as indifferent, and with still others, cordial. Ethiopia and Ghana represent the opposite ends of the spectrum of the examples cited by the interviewees. However, some of the interviewees have expressed the opinion that the ongoing policy changes in many countries in Africa towards the diaspora since 2000 represent a positive break with the past. According to them, many countries in Africa are addressing vexing policy issues that have previously frustrated the diaspora and made it impossible for them to contribute to development on the continent. Consequently, the change in policy is creating a badly needed enabling environment in many Africa countries. Yet, more needs to be done in terms of putting in place policies that facilitate the diaspora to establish contacts and networks with the institutions at the national levels. The existing contacts need to be expanded from the family and local level to higher levels so as to facilitate the process of institutional cooperation at the national level. This is already happening in some countries while in others it has not yet occurred. Examples that the interviewees cited are Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda, among others. In all of these countries, diaspora issues are more or less institutionalised. Ghana, Mali and Senegal have already established Ministries of Diaspora Affairs while in others, officials have been appointed to deal with diaspora-related issues. Ghana particularly has made policy concessions by granting diaspora dual nationality and voting rights in the country. More importantly, Ghana has even elected diaspora candidates as that they have a responsibility to do something for the continent that they have left physically but not emotionally. The painful truth that ‘while Africa regresses the rest of the world progresses’ is a matter of deep concern. African diasporas feel that they now can facilitate the process of undertaking transnational activities and establishing networks and can act as development bridge-builders between the West and Africa. The strategic position they occupy enables them to channel information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, new technological skills, smart and innovative business and trade practices, peace-making tools and techniques and democratic political habits and practices from the West to Africa. This is an opportunity which both the diaspora and the continental bodies such as the AU and Nepad have to seize by translating their public proclamations into tangible deeds, practical plans and concrete actions.

Another policy option worth considering that can promote the integration of the diaspora into the government systems in the homelands has been suggested by the diaspora interviewees. This is to ensure that homeland governments draw on diaspora skills and expertise much more than is now the case, as a way to compensate for the dramatic scarcity of skilled personnel which many countries on the continent are facing today because of the devastating effects of the brain drain. For example, governments can place skilled diasporas in critical institutions, both public and private, so as to help improve and deliver adequate services. This kind of practical collaboration can easily facilitate the growth of solid institutional cooperation between the diaspora and the homeland government in the long run. The benefit from this policy strategy is that homeland governments can directly

profit from the critical skills, extensive transnational networks, powerful international forces, and political connections that the diaspora can mobilise – linkages that span the globe and through which they can positively influence the situation in the homelands. So far, countries such as Kenya and Nigeria have made few attempts to draw on the cutting edge skills of nationals abroad who have excelled internationally in their fields of expertise. For instance, a study by the International Organisation for Migration reported that 30% of the highly skilled manpower stock from Africa is already abroad, a powerful illustration of the grave human resources deficit with which the continent is grappling today. 39 And as the ‘Our Common Interest’ report published by the Commission for Africa specifically pointed out, ‘Skilled professionals are key to building improvements in the administration and technical ability which Africa so gravely lacks’. 31

Other countries need to emulate the tangible progress in the field that the few leading countries noted above have already made if they want to benefit from the considerable potential of the diaspora abroad. Furthermore, the countries that have already achieved tangible results in this area need to build on the progress they have made. They also need to consolidate concrete policy practices already undertaken and adopt targeted policy interventions to further advance the efforts in the field. There is still a long way to go in order to realise sustainable institutional cooperation between the diaspas and Africa. Achieving this objective will require greater effort at various policy levels. More importantly, this is a new field, about which very little in currently known despite its critical importance.

For this reason, interviewees suggested that there is a need to carry out policy research to enhance our understanding of how sustainable institutional cooperation between diaspora and homeland governments in Africa can be fostered and better realised. This research would aim to produce evidence-based knowledge and information that would showcase examples and catalysts of institutional cooperation already existing between African diaspora and African governments on the continent. Lessons could be learned for policy making purposes by the new African Diaspora Ministers and other officials dealing with the diaspora issues in their respective home countries.

5.4 Institutional cooperation at sector level

On top of the institutional cooperation at the continental and national levels, collaboration at the sector level is also important. Initiating constructive links and meaningful relationships and actions at all the three levels can significantly increase the chances of constructing sustainable institutional cooperation between diaspora and their respective homeland governments. It can also put in motion a multi-faceted dynamic process which can speed up the realisation of this objective within a foreseeable period of time. The benefits gained from sector-based links between the diasporas and the homelands are considerable. The initiative will not only facilitate a targeted integration of the diaspas into homeland development efforts but also boost the efficiency and delivery of services in the sectors they serve.

Diaspora professionals abroad often organise themselves along sector lines. For instance, they set up associations of professionals in the host countries such as medical doctors, engineers, academic scholars, etc. They set up such associations primarily for social purposes, the maintenance of contacts, networking, and to address loneliness and isolation that individual diaspas may face in a host country. But over the years, many of these associations have evolved into well-established professional associations and have extended their vision in the direction of the homelands. In this regard, these established professional associations are ripe for mobilisation. The skills, experiences and networks they have accumulated in the host countries over the years can then be utilised for the benefit of homeland development. Some of them have indeed mobilised themselves voluntarily and are proactively contributing to development in the home countries. They serve as lessons learned; examples of active diaspora professional associations in their respective homelands include, among others, the Ethiopian medical associations in Canada and the United States and the Ghanaian medical doctors in the UK and the United States. Both associations are very much involved in improving the health systems in their home countries.

Today, in many host countries in the West, numerous African sector-based professional associations exist which can be tapped into to meet specific needs of the sectors in the home countries. Identifying, registering and collating the existing professional associations along country lines should be the first practical step in this effort. The embassies and consulates in the host countries should take the lead and play a proactive role in the preparation of a professional association database of the diaspas. Also, the embassies and consulates can play a role in making the compiled database available to the sectors in the homelands, where there is a need for the professional skills the diaspas possess.

Moreover, the governments in the homelands should develop policies at the sector level that identify the critical skills needed, how they can be replenished, the internal procedures followed and the strategies that any given sector can adopt in order to gain access to the skills of the diaspas. Furthermore, sectors should pinpoint priority areas, forms of engagement, and the skills needed before the appropriate diaspora professionals and experts are recruited. The whole effort should be a demand-driven exercise and be approached in a manner in which the skills of the diaspas add value but do not replace capacities already existing in the sectors.

Involving homeland sectors (be they public, private or non-profit) directly in the process of linking actively with the associations of the diaspora professionals abroad can effectively transform policy intentions and pledges of governments into concrete operations and practical actions. It can also make possible the promotion of sustainable links between the sectors in the homelands and the sectors in the host countries where the diaspas are working, to the benefit of the homeland sectors.

Linking homeland and host country sectors can create a mechanism by which diaspora professionals transfer their skills in a more structured and sustained
manner. The suggestion advanced by the diaspora interviewees to pursue such linkages is worthy of consideration by governments both in the home and host countries at the policy level in their bilateral dealings. Some interviewees even made practical suggestions about how such linkages can be concretely initiated. For instance, a diaspora medical doctor in a hospital could go and work in a hospital in his country of origin for 3 months per year while earning his salary from the hospital to which he is attached in the host country, be it the Netherlands or elsewhere. This is perhaps the most appropriate way, as numerous and diverse institutions and sectors in the host countries in the West where the diasporas are employed, both public and private, can be mobilised on a greater scale to contribute to development in the home countries in Africa. The skills development and the capacity building needs of public and private institutions and sectors in the homelands in Africa are tremendous and can only be addressed through sustained and massive engagement of diaspora professionals over a long period of time. This considerable task will therefore require the mobilisation not only of the associations of diaspora professionals but also reaching out to those sectors in the host countries with which they are associated. The involvement of the sectors in the host countries in the process is of paramount importance, as they are endowed with rich resources, abundant human capital, equipment, and materials which can be tapped for the development of Africa. Thus, a targeted engagement and active collaboration of the institutions with which the diasporas are employed in the host country, to arrange temporary placement in a particular sector in the home countries, will substantially contribute to home country development and capacity to deliver services efficiently.

In short, institutional cooperation at sector level between diasporas and the homeland governments is the most appropriate entry point at which practical steps can be initiated. They can then be gradually scaled up to national and continental levels. Although collaboration activities may be initiated at the sector, national or continental levels, they can stimulate multi-layer engagement. When this occurs, it can facilitate the establishment of sustained institutional cooperation between African governments and African diasporas. Such cooperation, in turn, facilitates the articulation of collective strategies for economic progress, viable political institutions and progressive social change on the continent.

Conclusions

This final section brings together the most important issues identified and examined in the sections of the report, draws a number of general conclusions and presents options for policy section further states, once again the urgent need to formally incorporate diasporas into the ongoing consultations and policy dialogue on migration and development issues at different levels, since they are critical stakeholders and valuable partners to be engaged. They possess unique world views and perspectives, framed by socio-political realities across countries and continents. Diasporas occupy bridge-building positions which enable them to develop and entertain perspectives different from those that prevail in host countries such as the Netherlands. Inclusion of such perspectives adds value to the policy dialogue on migration and development issues.

This study takes as its starting point the position that migrants who are making the link between migration and development possible are those who have already been in the West for decades, and have accumulated wealth, knowledge, specific expertise, influential contacts and valuable networks in the host countries. This category of migrants is in a better position than the rest (particularly the newcomers) to transfer considerable resources of all kinds to the home countries, so as to positively influence the situation on the ground. However, the mobilization of this category of migrants has not yet received sufficient policy attention despite the fact that these migrants are the key actors for development in the field of migration and development. Nevertheless, this is the category of the migrants to which research and policy analysis should devote greater attention if the objective of the development cooperation policy regarding migration and development is geared to harnessing the full potential of the migrants for the development of their countries of origin. Ultimately, effective policy instruments in the field must ensure the contribution of the diasporas to the development in their respective home countries is maximised, is sustainable, and implemented in a large-scale manner. Unfortunately, most of the policy research funded by the Netherlands government and others in the EU countries is not geared to studying and developing better insights regarding the development potential of the diasporas who are already settled in those countries, well-integrated with the host societies at various levels, and in the position to make a difference in the situation in their respective homelands. The current focus of most such research undertakings is the study of processes and movements of the migrants who are not yet in the Western countries and investigating the best ways they can be managed and controlled from within ‘Fortress Europe’.

This study, which is the first of its kind, attempts to fill in this knowledge gap although it provides just a preliminary survey. The study thus sets the stage for further research on the development potential of the migrants already settled in the Western countries, as this is a dimension which is largely overlooked in the discussion regarding migration and development. Gaining more understanding and better insights on how to mobilize the considerable potential of these migrants to facilitate their ability to contribute more to the poverty reduction and development in their countries of origin is of critical importance.

The study is conducted to stimulate a wider public discussion on the policy options and practical modalities regarding the considerable potential (capital, knowledge and networks) of the established migrants residing in the Netherlands and in other countries in Europe. It looks at how the potential can be sufficiently harnessed and mobilised to contribute more to the migration and development efforts in their countries of origin. More importantly, the study is carried out to narrate and bring to the forefront the voices, views, insights, perspectives, practical experiences,
aspirations, interests, priorities, challenges and the specific needs of the African diasporas in the Netherlands. The purpose is to stimulate the active participation of diasporas in the discussion and in the generation of ideas and policy insights so as to make certain their views are heard and taken into consideration on migration and development related matters. The diasporas interviewed often lamented the fact that they have creative ideas and views but they not trained as writers, and no one is interested in listening and documenting their intellectual contributions to discussion in the field. This study thus attempts to document and compile some of the ideas that the diasporas interviewed have recounted verbally.

The study addresses four policy areas that both the individual African diasporas interviewed and as well as groups consulted have identified to be a primary priorities. They are issues that concern them the most among all other aspects discussed with respect to migration and development-related matters. Diasporas are therefore proposing that more attention should be given in addressing those issues in the future as they could impact positively on the long-distance development activities they mediate with respect to their homelands. The four policy areas, which entail research, policy and practical interventions in the field of migration and development, concern:

- Continued consultations and policy dialogue
- Development projects undertaken by migrant organisations
- Diaspora organisations and development agencies
- Fostering institutional building between diasporas and homeland governments

A fifth policy area that the interviewees have identified as priority from their perspective is the importance of capacity building of the diaspora organisations involved in development in their respective countries of origin. Unfortunately due to the lack of time and space, the study has not addressed this critical policy area; a separate study might well address this point.

The information of the study was collected through in-depth interviews with a number of African diaspora opinion leaders representing diverse organisations involved in development activities in their home countries of origin. The in-depth interviews were further supplemented by an expert meeting of 15 key figures from the African diaspora representing organisations from Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. In addition to this, information was also gathered through observations and site visits to organisations run by members of the African diaspora, in order get a better picture of the environment in which they operate, and also by consulting news magazines, project proposals, strategic papers and reports that the organisations have produced. Finally, a follow-up correspondence by e-mail, mail and telephone was undertaken in cases that required additional clarification or that promised additional input and insights.

The report has been prepared to provide a background document for a policy seminar that will be held on October 24, 2007.

6.1 Recommendations: Specific policy considerations

The study summarises here the four policy areas that the African diasporas individuals interviewed and groups consulted have identified as priorities with respect to development in the homelands, and also briefly outlines some specific options for policy considerations.

Continued consultations and policy dialogue

The added value of continuing general consultations with the diaspora opinion leaders and experts is that if they are consulted, diasporas can identify and bring forward new issues of importance and thereby broaden the scope of issues on the agenda. Diasporas are in fact in a position to contribute to the setting of the agenda regarding migration and development-related issues. Likewise, diasporas can enrich the discussions on the issues identified to be priority issues by offering alternative views, perspectives and mindsets. Diasporas occupy a vital strategic position which enables them to develop a particular kind of a world view intimately informed by socio-political realities across countries and continents. As noted above then, diasporas therefore entertain perspectives different from the prevailing views in the host countries such as the Netherlands.

Specific policy considerations:

- Continuing consultations and policy dialogue between diasporas and other stakeholders in the field so as to generate information, knowledge and policy insights on the subject from a different stakeholder perspective. Generating a solid knowledge base on the subject is a precondition for the formulation of appropriate policy proposals that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions.

- Creating or supporting an existing platform through which diasporas can participate in the generation of information, ideas and creative visions in the field in a more structured manner. The fact of the matter is that the intellectual contributions of diasporas into the discussion regarding migration and development issues have not been sufficiently tapped.

- Officially formalising the consultation and policy dialogue. This will give opinion leaders among the diasporas the opportunity to participate in policy discussions in a structured manner rather than in ad-hoc fashion as is now the case. It also enables diaspora organisations and mainstream sectors in the field to engage on a continuing basis, to learn from each other, and to regularly exchange information, best ideas and practices. Diasporas interviewed suggested a framework through which the policy dialogue can be officially formulated. They proposed the setting up of a migration and development policy dialogue platform or a task force modelled on the National Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee (LOM), which was established by the government in 1997. This would be a body mandated to contribute to the policy dialogue in the migration and development field more systematically and on a continuing basis from different stakeholder perspectives so as to ensure that effective policy is developed at different levels.

Development projects undertaken by migrant organisations

This section briefly discusses five projects initiated by African diaspora organisations and individuals based in the Netherlands and describes their contributions to development in their countries of origin. The projects range from a small family poultry farm to a large commercial farm. The projects were initiated as a response to a challenge in the domestic context in each country. The challenges have both local and external roots and are largely the consequences of global economic inequalities. The projects, which are mostly community development projects, were initiated to enhance the lives and provide a livelihood of destitute or marginalized elements of society who are mostly living in the rural areas, to help
create employment or income generating activities, and to provide education, skills training, capacity building, etc.

**Specific policy considerations:**

- Understanding that the development projects undertaken by the diaspora organisations are in essence complementing those implemented by mainstream donor organisations in the homelands. They are responding to vital needs not covered by the programmes of the established development agencies, since the needs of the poor and marginalised elements in society in the homelands are vast and extremely pressing.

- Acknowledging that the development projects implemented by the diaspora organisations in the home countries bring with them not only resources but also experiences, transnational contacts and networks, valuable information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities, new technological skills, smart and innovative business and trade practices, etc.

- Realising that the development projects of the diaspora organisations target the weakest members of society who are also targeted by mainstream development agencies. This reality therefore justifies collaboration between the two development sectors on certain projects that are implemented on the ground in the homelands.

- Appreciating that the contemporary diaspora organisations are comparable with the development agencies in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time they were also new, weak and in their infancy, but were established to redress global inequality. It is therefore imperative not to underestimate the driving ambition and the development potential of the diaspora organisations, as some of them will undoubtedly develop into established diaspora development agencies in the foreseeable future.

Diaspora organisations and development agencies

The central question raised in this section is on how diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies can join forces in partnership for development in Africa. Such partnerships make it possible for mainstream development agencies and diaspora organisations to complement each other’s activities and to work constructively towards a common objective. It is now becoming more evident that diasporas living in the Western world are emerging as the “fourth development aid actors”, after international organisations, governments and mainstream development agencies. This is a reality which can no longer be overlooked. It is also an opportunity which should be seized for maximum benefit.

**Specific policy considerations:**

- Understanding that, unlike development agencies, diaspora organisations do not operate in a single national context and in this regard are not tied to a specific country. Diasporas and their organisations operate in transnational settings. As a result, they and their organisations are able to mobilise considerable resources, develop valuable contacts, establish vital partnerships, and build economic and political bridges across countries and continents, with many advantages accruing from these global connections.

- Stimulating dialogue between diasporas and the development actors, as they are not currently engaged in any dialogue at all. Yet, dialoguing is the logical start point for interaction, exchange and information sharing, and the establishment of contacts and networks, and makes it possible to learn from each other’s experiences, unique strengths and added values. Diasporas interviewed proposed the establishment of a permanent dialogue group from with representation from both development sectors, with a mandate to facilitate a constructive and ongoing dialogue between diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies.

- Encouraging diaspora organisations and development agencies to initiate on an experimental basis joint pilot projects in the host and home countries. This is to try to build up a viable working relationship through practice. Initiating joint pilot projects can bring the two development sectors much closer than is now the case.

Fostering institutional building between diasporas and homeland governments

Fostering formal and sustainable institutional cooperation between the diasporas and Africa at different levels is indeed imperative. The building of this form of relationship can considerably increase the contributions of the African diasporas to the overall development of their countries of origin. Such institutional cooperation can be built up at the continental level through institutions such as the African Union (AU) or the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad), as well as at the country level and at sector levels within a country.

**Specific policy considerations:**

- Proposing that governments in Africa create an enabling environment on the ground, as this is a precondition for engaging the diaspora in the development of their respective home countries.

- Fostering formal and institutional cooperation between the diaspora institutions and continental bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad). This formal partnership will help the continental bodies to benefit from the lobbying, campaigning and advocacy capacities of the diasporas residing in the power centres where the global decisions are made.

- Undertaking policy research that improves our understanding of how to put in place policy mechanisms and structures that facilitate the building of solid institutional cooperation at the national level, in order to greatly enhance the contributions of the diasporas to the overall development of their respective countries of origin.

- Building institutional cooperation at sector levels within a country, as the benefits gained from sector-based links between the diasporas and the homelands are considerable. The initiative not only facilitates a targeted integration of the skilled diasporas into homeland development efforts, but also enhances efficiency and service delivery in the sectors they serve.
Annex

Organisations visited
persons interviewed and
participants at the expert meeting

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The African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is founded with the mission to contribute to better development in Africa by facilitating African diaspora in Europe to pool their resources for the benefit of Africa. Focus: peace building, better governance and brain gain. The ADPC implements projects which creatively and purposefully harness the considerable social capital of the huge population of the African diaspora in Europe. The ADPC has links with diverse institutions both in The Netherlands and abroad. October 2007. Contact us for more information.