Report on the 2008 Global Forum on Migration and Development Civil Society Days

“Protecting and empowering migrants for development”

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Introduction

Diasporas and migrants play a crucial role in the development of their countries of origin, a fact that has gained much attention over the past years. They make significant financial, social and intellectual contributions that help to construct peace, create jobs through the transfer of skills, ideas and new perspectives. Although most of the literature on the potential of the diaspora in the realm of migration and development focuses on the influence of remittances or the financial significance of the activities of diasporas and migrants, scientific evidence is continuously mounting and consistently showcasing the insurmountable social and intellectual contributions of diasporas and migrants to the development of their homelands as well as their host countries. The link between migration and development first gained international recognition in 2006 when a UN High Level dialogue was held in New York to systematically address global migration. One of the findings of this conference was that there is an important and insufficiently articulated link between migration and development, which has mutual benefits for the host country and country of origin. It was then decided that a more effective way to move discussions forward was to have governments take turns hosting a Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) that would encourage more informal and productive discussions on the extremely complex issues surrounding the movement of people around the world. The overall objectives of the GFMD are threefold:

- To address, in a transparent manner, the multidimensional aspects, opportunities and challenges related to international migration and its inter-linkages with development;
- To bring together government expertise from all regions to enhance dialogue, cooperation and partnership in the areas of migration and development and;
- To foster practical and action-oriented outcomes at the national, regional and global levels;

Two GFMDs have taken place, making this an appropriate moment for evaluation and reflection to inform more constructive future global forums. This report is based on the experiences of the representative of the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) who attended the 2008 GFMD in Manila, the Philippines. This report reflects on the degree to which the set objectives of the 2008 GFMD were addressed, and draws up a list of recommendations that can inform a more successful 2009 GFMD.

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1 For example, the George Washington Diaspora Research Program focuses solely on the diaspora’s contribution to war torn societies and their role in international development. The ADPC also has several publications that point to evidence on how African diasporas based in Europe are transforming their homelands. Refer to http://www.diaspora-centre.org/PUBLICATIONS for a list of publications.

From Brussels to Manila

Belgium was the first country to host the GFMD in 2007, which primarily focused on human capital and labour mobility, remittances and diaspora, as well as institutional and policy coherence. This first meeting aimed at encouraging civil society actors to inform governments on what actions they should take with regards to migration policies. Recommendations focused on the ratification of conventions set up by the UN and the ILO, laws to protect migrants and their families, linking migration policies (especially towards skilled workers) with development policies, and improving policies towards remittances.

Recognising the link between migration and development (and vice versa) at the 2007 GFMD was an important milestone for migrant organisations. It legitimized their contribution to development cooperation, confirmed their salient status as development actors and showcased their mutual benefit for the home and host country, and their key role as bridge builders. The 2007 GFMD ended with some important conclusions on what should be done next with this link. First, it pointed out that in order to benefit from the positive effects of migration, the development concept must be placed at its centre. Legal migration was hailed as an opportunity of mutual benefit for origin and destination countries. Furthermore, it was shown that sharing responsibilities between developed and developing countries can make migration work better for development and vice versa, and that development can lead to migration by choice and not by necessity. It offered a platform for discussing experiences, innovative and good practices, and for identifying concrete ways of assuring the positive contribution of legal migration to development. Through country focal points, a vehicle for greater coherence and a more comprehensive approach towards migration, development and other policies at national level was created.

The second GFMD meeting was hosted by the government of the Philippines in 2008 in Manila. The theme of the 2008 GFMD was “Protecting and empowering migrants for development”. The conference featured 7 parallel workshop sessions revolving around three themes: 1) Migration, Development, and Human Rights; 2) Secure, regular migration can achieve stronger development impacts and 3) Policy and Institutional Coherence and Partnerships. There were also three additional workshops this year entitled “Voices from the Regions” covering Asia/Middle East, Africa/Europe as well as the Americas and the Caribbean, aimed at giving delegates the opportunity to voice their key concerns from the regions they reside in.

The specific objectives of the 2008 GFMD were to address challenges and answer complex questions on migration and development, to identify best practices and exchange experiences and to share knowledge and expertise from different sectors. The following sections will reflect on the degree to which these three objectives were met.

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4 Refer to www.gfmd2008.org for more details. Also refer to this website for the Civil Society Days Chair’s (Sharan Burrow) report to governments.
Migration and development challenges

It is clear from the conclusions of the 2007 GFMD and the themes of the 2008 GFMD that discussions have been repeated, and in some way, may have taken a step backwards. For instance, addressing the issue of migration and development as a joint issue with human rights at the 2008 GFMD has weakened the attention to the contribution of diasporas and migrants to development. Although the link between migration and human rights is a salient one, it is distinctly separate from that of migration and development, as was already agreed during the 2006 UN High Level dialogue. Aside from the fact that these two issues address very different concerns, they also need to be addressed at very different levels. While the issue of migrant rights still faces challenges in terms of the ratification of conventions set by international institutions, the recognition of migrants as agents of development requires that they are closely included in informing policies. At the 2008 GFMD, little attention was paid to the enhancement of the contributions that migrants make to their countries of origin and their host countries. Migration and development are two intersecting policy terrains around which diasporas have successfully developed knowledge, skills, expertise, and practical experience. They have constructed pathways and established transnational networks which have given them, to a great degree, a comparative advantage over traditional mainstream development agencies. In fact, migrants have come to be regarded as the “fourth development aid actors”. For instance, there have been very positive developments in terms of policy dialogue between migrants in the Netherlands and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Development Cooperation: the 2008 Dutch policy memorandum on migration and development cites its support for the formation of a platform of diaspora organisations to increase their effectiveness and active participation in the migration and development debate. A constructive space needs to be formed within the GFMD to allow for discussions on maintaining and up-scaling similar initiatives in order to enhance formal policy dialogues between the diaspora and policy makers in development cooperation. Although session 3.2 focused on addressing policy challenges, the recommendations brought forth in the Chair’s report to governments still remained in the realm of increasing policy coherence between ministries, and mainly addressed the reformation of policies within governments and the institutions such as the EU with regards to the protection of the rights of migrants and overseas workers. However, if coherence and policy reform are to take place, migrants must be closely and formally involved in dialogue processes.

Exchanging best practices and experiences

One of the specific objectives of the 2008 GFMD was to identify best practices and exchange experiences that are constructively contributing to the migration and development debate.

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from different sectors of civil society. It is evident from experience that the activities of diasporas and migrants within the field of development cooperation are ill-understood and not widely known. The main reason for this is that they currently have no real voice or avenues through which to share their experiences, even within forums that are meant to address just this, such as the GFMD. As it is currently organized, the GFMD is taken as opportunity by many civil society groups to voice their dissatisfaction with national and international policies, and as an opportunity for oratio pro domo. However, what is really needed is for the GFMD to provide a platform in which information, knowledge, expertise, experiences, new ideas, insights and different perspectives are exchanged and shared by all the diverse stakeholders concerned with migration and development issues. The idea of encouraging the exchange of experiences and best practices is imperative for civil society networks to learn from one another and to emulate activities that are making a real contribution and difference. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the GFMD organisers create a platform within the GFMD that allows for theme-based exchange of best practices and experiences, with equal representation of diaspora/migrant lead initiatives.

Cooperation between CS representatives: Sharing knowledge and expertise

Another important objective of the GFMD is to foster closer cooperation between the different civil society (CS) networks in order to be in a stronger position to influence and advise national and international policies. This entails bridging knowledge generation (from researchers and academics) with practice (activities and observations from practitioners). Background literature was prepared for each of the parallel session, and resource persons from academic and research institutions were assigned to summarize findings and trends that would provide an informed background and open the floor for the delegates for follow up and discussion. To a great degree, this important objective was unsuccessful, and resulted in redundant, mismatched and uninformed debates. An immediate recommendation for future GFMDs is to harness an effective mechanism that would bridge research and practice. A second challenge within this perspective for future GFMD organizers is the inclusion of the perspectives and ideas of migrants and diasporas into the framework of the exchange of knowledge and information sharing. Diasporas are not only implementers of projects but are also thinkers with visions who can play an active role in the generation of relevant ideas and information in the field that would enrich our understanding of the complexities of migration and development. In other words, there are intellectual diasporas that have the knowledge and the aptitude to translate practical experiences into perceptions, perspectives and models that can be further translated into policy instruments, options and action plans. Therefore, migrants and diasporas should have a more concrete role in the GFMD not only as development practitioners but also as carriers of knowledge and whose ideas and views can add value to policy insights, enrich the

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6 A model that future GFMD organizers can capture ideas from are the conferences that the ADPC has organized in October 2007 (the Hague) and June 2008 (Brussels). Refer to the following link for details: [http://www.diaspora-centre.org/Migration__Development/Expert_Meetings](http://www.diaspora-centre.org/Migration__Development/Expert_Meetings)
discussion and influence the opinion of the 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 and migrant communities on how knowledge in the migration and development field could continue to be improved.

**Summary of recommendations for future GFMDs**

- Create a constructive space within the GFMD to allow for discussions on maintaining and up-scaling the inclusion of migrants and diasporas in policy dialogue in order to enhance formal policy dialogues between migrants and policy makers on migration and development;
- Create a platform within the GFMD that allows for theme-based exchange of best practices and experiences, with equal representation of diaspora/migrant lead initiatives;
- Harness an effective mechanism that would bridge research and practice, and that would allow CS groups to learn from researcher’s findings, and whereby researchers and academics can tap into issues that need further exploration in a more constructive manner;
- Provide migrants and diasporas with a more concrete role in the GFMD and not only as development practitioners but also as carriers of knowledge and whose ideas and views can add value to policy insights, enrich the discussion and influence the opinion of other stakeholders in the field.