Beyond Migration Management Policy: An Alternative Discourse

Introduction

This policy brief attempts to spark a discussion that goes beyond the current migration-management discourse. It advances an alternative research agenda that counter-balances the prevailing migration-management policy agenda currently pursued by most countries in Europe. The narrow preoccupations of migration-management policy largely exclude the key links between migration and development. This biased policy priority tends to skew discussions about migration, contributing to the politicisation of migration discourse in Western countries. In turn, migration-management policies result in the incubation of hostile perceptions towards migrants in host countries, largely overlooking the positive contributions that migrants make to both home and host countries. More specifically, migration-management policies are mostly motivated by the assumed havoc that undocumented and uncontrolled migrants can cause in the host countries they arrive in.\(^1\) Thus, in the context of migration-management discourse, migration is a problem and needs to be controlled.

The predominance of migration-management policy overshadows the aims to embrace migration and development as a fundamental aspect of development cooperation policies and leads to a focus on issues which are political in nature.\(^2\) Those issues might be important from the Western governments’ point of view, yet addressing them does not contribute directly to the development benefits that are hoped for, especially in Africa. Contrary to popular view, dealing with migration hand in hand with development in fact achieves more than just the management of migration flows. This approach therefore needs policy and research consideration that goes beyond current migration-management priorities.

Diaspora-driven development

The development cooperation sector of migration and development is distinctive and driven largely by the diaspora. It is different from the traditional development cooperation sector, which is the domain of donor Western governments. It is new and informal. It is a development sector which is still poorly understood and under-researched; therefore much of the considerable contributions made within the sector remain undocumented.

Diasporas are the key strategic agents that make the nexus between migration and development a reality. Without their strategic intervention, the crystallisation of a nexus between these two fields would not have been possible. However, not all members of the African diaspora are in a position to be the driving force in this particular approach to development. In practical terms, those who are in such a position have already lived 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 other groups of migrants (particularly newcomers) to transfer considerable resources of various kinds to the home countries, so as to positively influence the situation on the ground.

Categorisation of the many different types of diaspora is important. There are new and established diasporas, just as there are well-integrated and less well-integrated diasporas in the host societies of the new homelands. As has been observed, the better those migrants are integrated into their respective host countries, the better-positioned they will be to engage in development-promoting activities in their countries of origin. However, the mobilisation of the established and well-integrated category

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\(^1\) See Hein de Haas. ‘The myth of invasion: Irregular migration from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union’ (IMI research report, October 2007).

\(^2\) Unfortunately, it is a policy partially dictated by domestic political concerns of the host countries in the Western world. ‘Given that funding usually comes from the North, research agendas are often biased, focusing on issues such as how to control migration’ (Zoomers and Schapendonk, 2009).
of migrants has not yet received sufficient research and policy attention, despite the fact that these migrants have the potential to be key actors in the field of migration and development. Moreover, research and policy analysis should devote greater attention to this category of migrants if their full potential is to be harnessed for the development of their countries of origin. Ultimately, effective policy instruments in the field must ensure that the contribution of the diaspora to the development of their respective home countries is maximised, sustained and implemented in a large-scale manner.

Diaspora-oriented development policy

There is a need to develop new alternative knowledge beyond migration management. The generation of this new knowledge should take as a starting point the actual development efforts mediated by the diaspora who are the key agents for development in this particular sector. In this regard, the field of migration and development should address the potential of the diaspora to contribute to sustainable development through remittances, transfer of skills and knowledge, investment, brain circulation and building of valuable transnational networks. It should also recognise the crucial role that diasporas are currently playing in this sector.

Diasporas have already positioned themselves as critical development actors in development policy circles. This is because diasporas are becoming increasingly involved in the development of their respective homelands on a larger scale. Yet, both in terms of policy and practice, the initiatives of the diaspora are not structurally integrated into existing programmes and projects implemented by mainstream development circles in the home and the host countries.

The development-related initiatives mediated by African diaspora organisations contribute to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in their respective homelands in Africa. Yet, in policy proposals such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) of the home countries, there is no consideration of diasporas as potential partners for development in the homelands. The same applies to the policies developed to meet the MDGs.

Neither are the practical development initiatives undertaken by diaspora organisations, even if these are implemented in the home countries, integrated into initiatives undertaken by donor development agencies, government institutions, international and regional organisations and UN bodies active in the countries of origin.

There are, however, great advantages to using diaspora organisations as partners for the development of Africa. Diaspora initiatives can add value to the efforts undertaken by other stakeholders active in the field of development cooperation in their countries of origin. A more structured and formal incorporation of the diaspora into development circles, both in the home and the host countries, would greatly boost development efforts on the continent. It would also facilitate a broadening of the development constituency in African and host countries.

There is therefore an urgent need to explore feasible strategies and instruments through which the initiatives of the diaspora could be incorporated, both in policy and in practice, into the existing development activities implemented by the established development circles in the home and the host countries. This exploration should start by identifying broad entry-points and strategic actors around whom concrete activities and actions can be initiated. Options to be investigated include the initiation of pilot projects collectively implemented by the diaspora and other stakeholders in this field. A joint pilot project of this kind can, through practice, pave the way to viable working relationships between the diaspora and established development circles. At the moment, a new type of policy-oriented research is needed in order to provide better insights into how diaspora-driven development initiatives can be integrated into the policies, strategies and activities of established development circles at different levels.

Access to information among African policy-makers

Another challenge to be addressed by an alternative research agenda is the unequal access to up-to-date knowledge and information in the field of migration and development among policy-makers in Africa. The knowledge and information in this emerging research and policy field is primarily generated in the Western hemisphere, with very little being generated in Africa.
Furthermore, the knowledge and policy insights produced so far in the field of migration and development are not targeted at policy-makers in the homelands, even though this is urgently needed. Rather, they are primarily targeting policy-makers in the host countries. This has resulted in a situation whereby policy-makers in the West are over-informed from diverse sources while their counterparts in Africa are left in the dark. This could have negative consequences in the decision-making processes of the policy-makers in the homelands owing to the acute lack of evidence-based policy-supporting information that could help them to formulate better-informed policy positions and instruments.

The access to cutting-edge knowledge in the field has helped many governments of host countries in Europe strengthen their policy instruments in dealing with migration-related issues. For example, they have set up special departments in their ministries, trained competent personnel and have developed national strategies and instruments on migration matters. They have also set aside financial resources for research aimed at strengthening the knowledge-base necessary for the development of appropriate and sound policies geared towards migration and development. Furthermore, informal policy forums have been created in which policy-makers from various host countries in Europe regularly meet to exchange information, share experiences and become better equipped in their policy implementation in the field of migration and development.

While institutions in the host countries in Europe dealing with migration issues are sufficiently strengthened, those in the homelands still experience a dire capacity deficit. Obvious examples can be observed in many countries in Africa. Recently, many African countries have set up diaspora-related institutions and ministries in order to deal more professionally with diaspora-related issues. In addition, the African Union Commission has created the African Citizens Directorate (CIDO) to deal with overarching issues in the relationship between overseas diasporas and homeland governments. This step is indeed a precondition for engaging the diaspora in the overall development of their respective home countries. Yet, despite their well-intentioned gestures, most African governments have limited experience in dealing with diaspora-related issues at an institutional level. The reason for this is that, compared to their Asian and Latin American counterparts, most African countries responded belatedly in encouraging their diaspora to contribute to the development of their homelands.

Thus, the knowledge in the field of migration and development currently possessed by most African governments is insufficient for those governments to develop national strategies and policy instruments specifically intended to mobilise the diaspora in an effective and sustainable large-scale manner. The development of national policy strategies will help policy-makers in Africa who are dealing with diaspora and development-related issues to make more informed policy choices and appropriate decisions in their practical interventions.³ It will also help policy-makers to devise feasible strategies for effectively harnessing the considerable resources of migrants for the development of their respective home countries.

Migration and diaspora-related issues are matters of concern both to host and home countries. They are also issues that need to be addressed from both sides through effective and well-developed national political instruments. It is therefore urgent that governments invest in the capacity-building of the institutions in the homelands in Africa.

**Strengthening the policy-making capacity of institutions in Africa**

In order to address the divide in knowledge of migration and development-related issues among policy-makers in Africa, the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) has initiated two research programmes⁴ that are aimed at generating policy insights to help African institutions benefit from the social and intellectual capital of the African diaspora.

In 2008, the ADPC initiated the research programme entitled ‘Building Institutional Cooperation between Diaspora and Homeland Governments in Africa’. This project aims to foster the development of networks, strategic alliances and sustained institutional cooperation between the diaspora and newly formed policy-makers, such as the Ministries of Diaspora Affairs and other officials dealing with diaspora

³ Today, there are a number of African Diaspora Ministers and a large number of both senior and junior officials dealing with diaspora-related issues in their respective countries.

⁴ More information about these two research programmes can be found via the following link: http://www.diaspora-centre.org/Better_Governance/Research.
and development-related issues, within the governments of their respective countries of origin.

This policy-relevant study will undertake extensive case studies in the homeland countries of Ghana and Nigeria and in the host countries of Germany, the UK and the US, where most of the diaspora from both countries reside. The aim is to obtain baseline data on the evolution, nature, patterns and trends of the existing institutional links between the governments in the two case-study countries and the host countries of their overseas diasporas. More broadly, the study attempts to identify patterns of best practices and assemble specific trajectories and entry points that can help foster better relationships and sustained institutional collaboration between the African diaspora and governmental policy-makers in their respective countries of origin.

The findings of the research will be presented in a conference that will take place in 2010 in Ghana. Policy-makers from several African countries and institutions will be brought together in order to benefit from the insights and proposed recommendations as a result of the research project. Furthermore, the findings will be documented in a book that will help African policy-makers to identify strategies and develop policies that can catalyse the structured engagement of the diaspora in issues related to migration and development.

A second research programme initiated by the ADPC in 2009 aims at specifically strengthening the policy-making capacity of the newly formed diaspora ministries and institutions in Africa. The two-year programme, entitled ‘Capacity-building for the newly formed Diaspora Ministries in Africa’ has been initiated by the ADPC in collaboration with the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) in Accra, Ghana. It aims to redress the African policy-makers’ lack of access to useful and up-to-date information in the field and strengthen the policy-making capacity of the newly formed Diaspora Ministries in Africa. Its objective is two-fold: to develop new knowledge in the field of migration and development tailored to the specific policy-making needs of the diaspora representatives; and to provide capacity-building training which will enable these newly appointed policy-makers to gain access to up-to-date information in the field. Acquiring this knowledge will enhance their policy-making capacity and also improve their capability to design effective policy instruments geared to connect more closely the collective force of the African diaspora population in Western Europe with the development of Africa in all of its facets. The programme is the first of its kind in its response to the capacity deficit which currently hinders emerging Diaspora Ministries in many African countries in the making of well-informed policy choices and appropriate decisions in the field of migration and development. This capacity deficit also prevents the Ministries from developing feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions that can help to maximise the contribution of the diaspora to the development of the continent.

Conclusion

The alternative research discourse outlined here will help to advance knowledge in the field of migration and development from a perspective which has been largely overlooked, despite its critical significance. Such an approach will focus on the concerns, challenges and priorities of the diaspora already located in the West, who are the key agents for development in this particular sector. As already noted in the introduction, the current research agenda in the field prioritises policy and research related to migration processes and migration management over a focus on the actual economic and development potential of migrants in Western countries for their home countries. However, although they have not been seen as such in the development cooperation sector, in practical terms migrants are the driving force and the chief potential contributors to this particular kind of development. Research into the potential contributions of the diaspora to development in the homelands is vital to fill a gap in the existing policy research in the field of migration and development.

About ADPC

The African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is an independent platform of knowledge and expertise in Europe in the area of migration and development. The Centre generates knowledge, information and policy insights on the subject from the diaspora perspective – a point of view which has been largely overlooked. For more information, please visit www.diaspora-centre.org.

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