



**Africaday 2011, The Hague, 29 October 2011**

### **ADPC Workshop: African Diaspora Change Makers**

On 29 October 2011, the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC), in cooperation with Cordaid and the Dutch Consortium of Migrant Organizations (DCMO), organized a workshop on: 'African Diaspora Change Makers' during the Africaday 2011 in The Hague. The main purpose of the workshop was to explore and discuss the role of the African diaspora in the field of development and to examine how far the diaspora differs from other development actors. In short, how does the African diaspora make the change?

The discussion was led by Ms. Amma Baddoo-Asante and the panel members were Howard Regusters, producer of the film 'Obama in Ghana', from the USA, and Gibril Faal from the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) in the UK. The workshop was well attended by a broad audience consisting of, among others, individuals from the African diaspora, representatives from diaspora organizations and the NGO sector, and academia. The diversity of the audience proved to be excellent for the discussion and both diaspora and non-diaspora participants showed a great interest in the topic.

The discussion focused on three consecutive questions: (1) How does the African diaspora contribute to the development of Africa? (2) What impact does the African diaspora and its initiatives have in Africa? and (3) Why has the diaspora not been acknowledged yet as a development actor in Africa? Participants in the workshop actively exchanged diverse experiences and opinions and several best practices of African diaspora initiatives were presented. A member of the audience asked what exactly the difference is between diaspora initiatives and conventional development initiatives. The positive response came promptly from within the audience itself: The diaspora brings knowledge to the field that other actors do not have. Moreover, the diaspora perspective differs from that of other development actors. The diaspora recognizes and understands the strengths and needs of its home

countries better. Diaspora members have another perception of Africa; they see the continent not in terms of poverty and problems, but rather as a source of power and wealth. Tony Regusters described the diaspora as a new entity; as a social, economic and cultural force that teaches its children how to improve the living circumstances in the countries of origin. The point was made that, in the West, matters are measured from a Western perspective; the African diaspora does not base its acts on Western perceptions. In fact, it was argued that Africans should not even try to fit in with these Western perceptions.

Accordingly, it was agreed that the African diaspora has an important and strong impact on Africa's development. Its added value is the knowledge and the unique perspective it has regarding the continent of origin. In other words, 'Diaspora = we are the difference!'

Regarding the third question, key challenges and existing constraints were identified. Unity was considered by all those in attendance to be of great importance. Currently, the African diaspora network is fragmented. African diaspora groups work independently and are not connected well enough with each other and with their countries of origin. In addition, the point was raised that not enough is done in terms of publicizing diaspora activities. Furthermore, the African diaspora does not make use of the media for its own purposes. The media is well-placed to spread the news about diaspora initiatives widely.

To conclude the workshop, the panel was asked to provide some recommendations. Tony Regusters, as an expert on news and media, stated that the African diaspora needs to take control of its image and its message. Public Relations (PR) is essential and the media needs to be used in order to get the message across. The diaspora needs to build its media presence and make use of new and constantly developing innovations in technology. In short, the media is the key. Gibril Faal pointed out that equal value has to be given to alternative activities. Existing methodologies and approaches should be used, for example, to evaluate the flow of remittances. How we value development organizations such as Oxfam should not change, but diaspora initiatives need to be valued equally. He recommended that the diaspora must be more present in the host countries as a decision maker, i.e. in parliament.

To sum up, an interesting debate about the role of the diaspora in development was started in the workshop. The African diaspora accounts for a significant contribution to development. The question still remains, however, of how to enhance its influence and make it visible. The points emerging from the workshop have great potential for further fruitful discussions. The contributions of the panel and, in particular the enthusiastic audience, illustrate that the debate should not stop here. It offered an insight into the dynamics of African Diaspora Change Makers who must continue their work and use their knowledge and perceptions about Africa to achieve their goals and inspire us all.

For more information on the Africaday, please visit the following websites: [www.afrikadag.nl](http://www.afrikadag.nl) and [www.evertvermeer.nl](http://www.evertvermeer.nl).