

# ADPC *Factsheet*

## Tapping the diaspora perspective in policy dialogue



June 2008

### Diaspora contribution to policy dialogue

There have been two major recent events that have called great attention to intensifying the inclusion of the African diaspora in policy dialogue. The first was the High-Level UN Dialogue on Migration and Development held in New York in September 2006. This meeting highlighted the extensive potential of the African diaspora to constructively contribute to the social, economic and political development of Africa. As a follow up to this meeting, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) took place in Brussels in July 2007. The importance of an ongoing policy dialogue was a central theme of the meeting. Although a constructive framework for the inclusion of the diaspora in policy dialogue does not yet exist, important steps are being made towards formalizing this process. Moreover, the topic is beginning to gain a top priority on the national and international agenda, though the views and perspectives of the diaspora themselves have not been sufficiently heard. This factsheet looks at the debate surrounding the inclusion of the diaspora in policy making.

### Beyond remittances

The human, intellectual and social capital (for example policy and managerial expertise) possessed by the diaspora is the most valuable offshore asset of Africa. Yet, most of the literature on the potential of the diaspora in the realm of international development focuses on the influence of remittances or the financial value of the diaspora to their home countries. Nonetheless, it is increasingly becoming recognized that the diaspora also remit socially and intellectually to their countries of origin, which is just as valuable as sending money home. A key area where the diaspora are becoming recognized as chief

actors is in influencing policies with regards to migration and development. The focus here is on the value of the African diaspora in contributing to constructive policy dialogue that will benefit the homelands. This makes them one of the most valuable stakeholders in the field of migration and development. Not only are the diaspora implementers of projects, but they are also equipped with knowledge and practical insight as a result of their active participation in international development. For instance, migrants are crucial in the establishment of links between the homelands and the host country, making their strategic intervention a necessity. Naturally, it is unlikely that initiatives on development and migration can succeed or achieve the expected results without the incorporation of the diaspora's views and perspectives. In order to move beyond the value of their financial contribution, it is imperative to design appropriate policy instruments by creatively tapping into the input and intellectual resources of the diaspora, whose wealth of knowledge and practical experiences are largely underutilized.

### Value in policy development

The value of the African diaspora in policy dialogue is not that they are the panacea for the development of Africa, but rather that they hold strong ties with their homeland. The diaspora (be they individuals or organizations) are highly active in the ways through which they contribute to the development of their homelands. On the other hand, there are no structural policies present that will catalyze and utilize this potential. Three key levels of policy formulation where the diaspora can be influential in migration and development are the national, regional and international levels. For example, at the national (homeland) level, the diaspora can be instrumental in assisting to formulate tailored poverty reduction policies, or help to build the ministerial capacity of African

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the non-financial contribution of the diaspora, please refer to *The Contribution of African Diaspora to Policy Dialogue (2007)* by Dr. A. A. Mohamoud: [http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/Migration\\_Developm.pdf](http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/Migration_Developm.pdf)

governments. At the regional (North-South) level, the diaspora would be an added value in enhancing the transfer of knowledge as a collective force from Europe to Africa. The diaspora can also be influential at the international level by, for instance, contributing to the achievement of the millennium development goals (an area where diaspora organizations are most active), or through the creation of policies that will ensure the rights of migrants in Europe. In other words, there are different levels in which the diaspora can add value to current policies, and where they possess the potential play a key role.

## Structured dialogue

An insight into the value and potential of the diaspora in the field of migration and development remains limited, even though they are already highly active in the field of development cooperation, and specifically as bridge-builders and facilitators. Despite actual evidence, the diaspora and their organizations are perceived to be implementers of small and short term projects with little prospect. An important step towards building a deeper understanding of their potential is through formalizing dialogue with the diaspora. Currently, there is no structural system through which migrant and mainstream organizations engage in dialogue. The formalization of dialogue with the diaspora is of great importance: first, a space of analyzing and understanding the insights of the diaspora opinion leaders will be forged. Secondly, the diaspora will gain an official and active voice in the creation of migration and development policy, a privilege that is awarded other sectors of civil society. Third, the inclusion of the expertise of the diaspora can only add efficiency to existing policies. Finally, mainstream organizations will greatly benefit from structured and continuous exchange of information with the diaspora, which will undoubtedly build on the potential for sustainable and enduring development in Africa.

## Key recommendations

- Continuing consultations and policy dialogue between diaspora and other stakeholders in the field of migration and development.
- Understanding that the development projects undertaken by the diaspora organisations are, in essence, complementing those implemented by the mainstream donor organisations in the homelands.

- Promoting dialogue between diaspora and the development actors where this currently does not exist.
- Creating a space for the diaspora to contribute to policy dialogue at the national, regional and international levels.

## Positive and inspiring examples

Diaspora organizations are responsible for the implementation of key projects and initiatives in the homeland, making them key players in the field of migration and development. Unique lessons can be drawn from these projects, and can be an inspirational source to others. Three examples of inspiring stories are briefly noted here that are making a difference on the ground.

### *Three examples of inspiring stories*

#### **Buna Bet Ethiopian Coffee**

DIR Foundation (founded in 2000) is highly active in the Netherlands and Ethiopia in stimulating the contribution of the Ethiopian diaspora community to development in Ethiopia. This also includes bringing Ethiopia closer to the Netherlands, with the potential of mutual benefit and exchange. One of the projects implemented is a coffee corner in Amsterdam. The project was developed to improve the living conditions of former prostitutes by creating a means of living for them. The coffee that is sold in the Netherlands is bought directly from the farmers and is refined by members of the community. The uniqueness of the project is that it targets a broad group of the poor and marginalized in the community.

<sup>2</sup> See Mohamoud, A.A. (2005). *Reversing the brain drain in Africa: Harnessing the intellectual capital of the diaspora for knowledge development in Africa*. Sahan Wetenschappelijk Adviesbureau.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see the PSO Cross Over Program, that aims build capacities and fight poverty in developing countries through the diaspora: <http://www.psocrossover.nl>

**2 Sankofa Family Poultry Project** ‘Ghanaian government policies do not take into consideration how small farmers in the rural areas are surviving’ reports George Duncan, chairman of Sankofa Foundation (founded in 2001). Another hindrance for farmers in rural areas is the dumping of agricultural goods by European markets in Ghana. The Sankofa Family Poultry Project builds the capacity of poultry farmers in rural Ghana, and assists them in producing poultry that can compete with European chickens in the Ghanaian market, and thereby creating a sustainable business for the farmers.

**3 Fedis AgriMix (FAMIX)** Brothers Elias and Redwan Haroon, originally from Ethiopia, wanted to stimulate job creation in their home countries. In 2004, they set up the company Fedis AgriMix, which aims at producing fruits and vegetables from the Great Rift Valley. One project implemented by AgriMix was established with the aim of poverty reduction by keeping the company commercially healthy and creating job opportunities. Its mission was to generate quality farm results and growth in income, as well as transferring skills and knowledge. Today, the company employs more than 50 personnel, both in the Netherlands and Ethiopia.

## Further Information

### Selected African diaspora organizations active in the field of migration and development

AFFORD  
[www.afford-uk.org](http://www.afford-uk.org)  
 DIR Foundation  
[www.dirnet.nl](http://www.dirnet.nl)  
 Fedis AgriMix  
<http://www.famix.eu>  
 Nedsom  
<http://www.nedsom.org>  
 Sankofa Foundation  
<http://www.sankofa.nl>

### Key websites of selected institutions in the field

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)  
[www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)  
 Migration Policy Institute  
[www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)  
 Global Forum on Migration & Development  
[www.gfmd-fmmd.org](http://www.gfmd-fmmd.org)  
 UN Migration & Development  
[www.un.org/esa/population/migration/index.html](http://www.un.org/esa/population/migration/index.html)

### Key reports and literature related to the subject

Brown, M. (2000). *Using the intellectual diaspora to reverse the brain drain: Some useful examples*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Fukuda-Parr, S., Lopes, S. C. & Malik K. (2002). *Capacity for Development: New Solutions to Old Problems*. New York, UNDP & London Earthscan.

De Haas, H. (2006). *Engaging Diasporas: How governments and development agencies can support diaspora involvement in the development of origin countries*. A study for Oxfam Novib. International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.

Mohan, G. & Zack-Williams, A. B. (2002). *Globalisation From Below: Conceptualising the Role of the African Diaspora in Africa's Development*. *Review of African Political Economy* (92), 211-236.

Newland, K. & Patrick, E. (2004). *Beyond Remittances: The Role of Diaspora in*

*Poverty Reduction in their Countries of Origin*. Migration Policy Institute, Washington, D.C.

## About ADPC

The African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is an independent platform of knowledge and expertise 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.

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