



## **Policy Seminar on Migration and Development: Diasporas and Policy Dialogue**

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**Organized by the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC)**

### **Background:**

Migration and development have become interlinked issues which would certainly play a crucial role in the development cooperation relations between the North and South in the coming decades. These phenomena are two of the most salient features of contemporary globalisation that are helping shape new patterns and trends of development cooperation relations whose dynamic impacts can no longer be overlooked. They therefore represent a major issue for development, meriting continued consultations and policy dialogue at different societal and policy levels. The nexus between diaspora and development has become a major issue of an emerging research, policy field and public debate in the last few years and will remain an important area in the 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 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 need to be maximally tapped for the overall development of their countries of origin. It is also partly the result of the high level policy attention that international organizations such as the UN have since recently accorded to the issue.

At the international level, 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 high-level meeting devoted to the topic for the first time in history was called for by the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan himself. He recognized the potential benefits that can be gained from the development activities mediated by the diasporas in their home countries of origin. In his opening speech, Annan stated clearly that if constructively and creatively harnessed, migrants can contribute to a better social, political and economic transformation both to their adopted and native countries. Furthermore, Annan urgently recommended that the dialogue and the discussion on the 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 of the globe.

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 on 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 gaining an input from such important stakeholders into the subsequent governmental discussions on the subject which took place on July 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. This 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 up with the continually unfolding patterns and processes in the migration and development field. The generation of a solid policy-relevant knowledge, information and insights on the subject remains a precondition for the formulation of appropriate policy proposals that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions. Due to this urgent policy need it was decided that the third international forum in the field to be organised in Manila in 2008, so as to keep the policy dialogue ongoing 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 level among a wide range of stakeholders. Eventually, the practical implementation of policy prescription 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 different countries both in the North and in the South, with different policy interests and levels of intensities. 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 as well as donor development agencies. These diverse political and social layers have been undertaking various research activities and convening meetings to gain more information, knowledge and new insights on the migration and development issues. Yet, one key strategic stakeholder and player in this field whose voices, views and perspectives have not yet sufficiently heard are the migrant constituency in the Netherlands. In other words, the intellectual contribution of the diasporas to the migration and development discourse, policy dialogue and the production of ideas, visions and strategies has not been clearly articulated nor sufficiently documented. As a result, very little is currently known. 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 in 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 process possible.

**Purpose:**

The overall purpose of this policy seminar is to facilitate an open policy dialogue among diverse stakeholders in the migration and development field such as diaspora, academic researchers, development practitioners, policy makers in the government institutions, civil society organisations and the private sector, etc. Furthermore the policy seminar aims to provide a platform in which information, knowledge, expertise, experiences, new ideas, insights and different perspectives are exchanged and shared by all these diverse stakeholders concerned with migration and development issues both in Netherlands, other European countries and beyond.

The added value of the policy seminar is to facilitate the inclusion of the diaspora voices and visions in policy deliberations at the local, national and international level. This is to

mainstream diaspora voices in the policy discussions in the field 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 an active role in the generation of ideas, information and more policy relevant knowledge in the field. In other words, there are intellectual diasporas who 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. This is the reason why we need to engage the diasporas 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 and policy options 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 community on how the policy development in the migration and development could be continuously improved.

Diasporas are the most important strategic stakeholders in the migration and development field which makes it essential to involve them in policy debates since the practical implementation of any policy proposal should largely require migrants to play a leading role in the process. Migrants are the chief agents practically making the link between migration and development possible and without their strategic interventions it is not likely to succeed and achieve the expected results. This reality makes it impossible to design appropriate policy instruments without tapping creatively 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, 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 specific purposes of the policy seminar are:

- To provide a platform in which migrant opinion leaders can dialogue, share and exchange information, new insights, experiences and best practices with other stakeholders on diverse issues in the migration and development field
- To stimulate the active participation of diasporas in the discussion and in the generation of ideas and policy insights so as to make count and increase their critical voices in the migration and development related matters
- To make known and visible the successes achieved from concrete development related activities initiated by migrant organisations and groups and the specific factors that contributed to positive outcomes
- To discuss ways in which knowledge and information can be produced specifically targeted at the policy makers in the countries of origin such as the new Ministers of Diaspora Affairs and other officials (so far the knowledge produced in the field is largely targeted at policy makers in the host countries) dealing with diaspora and development-related issues so as to help them formulate better informed policy positions and instruments.
- To deliberate policy options and practical modalities that the considerable potential (capital, knowledge and networks) of the already established and well integrated

diasporas in the host countries such as the Netherlands and elsewhere can be sufficiently harnessed and mobilised to contribute more to the migration and development efforts in their countries of origin.

The African Diaspora Policy Centre is currently drafting a policy report which will serve as a background document for the policy seminar. The report will be sent in due course.

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