DIASPEACE is a three-year research project funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme, within which the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is a consortium member. The research project seeks to generate policy-relevant, evidence-based knowledge on the role exiled populations from conflict regions play in the dynamics of conflict and peace in their countries of origin. New research findings show that diaspora groups are an increasingly prominent actor in peace and reconciliation processes. In DIASPEACE, the focus is on these positive initiatives, while also keeping in mind the unintended impacts.

On 3 July 2009, the ADPC hosted a workshop in Amsterdam aimed at facilitating access among diaspora organisations active in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in their countries of origin to the preliminary findings of the DIASPEACE research project. The programme included the presentation of emerging issues from case studies in Italy and Germany, and diaspora participants living in the Netherlands shared their own experiences.

The workshop served a number of purposes. First, it brought the researchers from the three European countries together in order to link and synergise their research findings. Second, it offered diaspora participants information on the ways in which diaspora groups in those countries are making contributions geared towards peacebuilding within the countries of origin. Third, it offered researchers the opportunity to validate some of the findings of the study so far, and allowed diaspora participants to contribute to some of the conclusions and analyses made with regards to diaspora contributions to peacebuilding in their country of origin.
Diaspora perceptions on peace and development

According to Clara Fischer, researcher at the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC), diasporas active within Ethiopian organisations in Germany perceived their role within peacebuilding in the country of origin mainly in the fields of awareness raising, reconciliation efforts and development projects. The role of the diaspora was mainly seen as mediating or facilitating constructive dialogue processes. Ethiopian diaspora organisations perceive peace and stability as an end that can best be realised on the civil society or grass roots level. Hence, the majority of these groups are committed to supporting community-based initiatives.

In Italy, Petra Mezzetti of the Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI) showed that the activities of the Somali diasporas were highly dependent on current events and trends in Somalia. A common hindrance for Somali diaspora organisations in Italy is that the political climate is not conducive to migrants and their activities. This leads to a large variability in the degree of engagement among Somalis towards the home country, but it also makes them far more resourceful in comparison to diaspora organisations in other European countries. For instance, the Somali diaspora in Italy are more engaged at the municipal level and therefore find support for their activities there, as opposed to seeking support at the ministerial level. Due to their engagement in Italian politics at the municipal level, they also create avenues for fundraising opportunities which directly influence the number of activities they engage in. Moreover, it also impacts the nature of projects that diaspora organisations set up in Somalia: activities tend to centre on mechanisms that will build capacity among civil society groups and that will catalyse the development of local institutions.

Are diasporas good actors in promoting peace?

The DIASPEACE project identified diaspora organisations operating as civil society activists to promote peace in the country of origin, but others have been found to sympathise and support homeland governments. The diaspora participants in the workshop showed that this apparent support to homeland governments should not be taken at face-value. Geresu Tufa of a Netherlands-based Oromo organisation pointed out that diasporas often have no option but to show outward support towards homeland governments, given their long-term stake in their country of origin. For instance, diasporas may own property or businesses in the home country that serve as investments or retirement plans, which they will not jeopardise by opposing homeland governments.
According to Tufa, these underlying rationalisations must be taken into consideration before conclusions are drawn on the apparent negative engagements of diasporas in their homeland. Tufa also added that diaspora perceptions towards their home country differ based on their ethnicity. Conflicts within diaspora groups, which sometimes counter efforts towards peacebuilding in the homeland, arise because not all diasporas will accept being represented by overarching diaspora organisations. Because of this, Tufa suggested that in order to gain better understanding of the role that diasporas can play in building peace in the country of origin, all stakeholders must be involved. This includes home and host country governments, since diasporas act inter-dependently of these stakeholders.

In Mezzetti’s perspective, the diaspora’s strength in peacebuilding lies in what they are able to communicate to the outside world with regards to peace in their country of origin. It is important, going forward, to convey messages about peacebuilding and conflict resolution through the activities in which the diaspora choose to engage. In this sense, even diaspora organisations that are perceived to be countering the process of peacebuilding due to their support of homeland governments, have a role to play in completing the picture.

**Insights for diaspora organisations active in peacebuilding**

The preliminary findings of the DIASPEACE project offered some insights that can assist diaspora organisations in contributing more viably to peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin. Some of these insights are noted below.

- Research is providing a response to the complexity of the role that the diaspora play in peacebuilding. However, research findings lack the ability to mediate the activities of diaspora organisations. Therefore, diaspora organisations are advised to utilise the knowledge that exists in order to develop their action plans with regards to peacebuilding in their countries of origin.

- Mainstreaming of the activities of the diaspora with regards to peacebuilding is feasible. It is clear from the research findings that there is no competition between international development organisations and diaspora organisations, since they operate at different levels.
- Diaspora organisations should be supported by large institutions because their role is complementary to that of international development organisations.

- In order to support long-term sustainability, diaspora organisations need to re-orient themselves to create and use opportunities that are available within host countries.

- The inclusion of diaspora organisations within Dutch policies towards migration and development showcases and reinforces their legitimacy within the international development community.

- Diaspora organisations are most successful when they implement projects on the ground. Therefore, transnational links between Europe-based diaspora organisations and activities that take place directly in countries of origin must be scaled up.

To learn more about DIASPEACE, visit http://www.diaspeace.org. The next workshop will be hosted by CeSPI in Italy.