



# **MOBILISING AFRICAN DIASPORA FOR THE PROMOTION OF PEACE IN AFRICA**



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The African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is a platform of knowledge and expertise in the area of migration and development. The Centre serves to facilitate an effective policy dialogue through sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, expertise, new ideas, insights and different perspectives, practical experiences, past lessons and best practices among the migrant organizations, civil society associations, the mainstream development agencies, the government institutions and other stakeholders concerned with migration and development issues in the Netherlands. The Centre particularly contributes to better development in Africa by providing a platform that enables African diaspora in Europe to connect more closely with the continent as a collective force, pool their resources and proactively undertake initiatives for the promotion of peace, better governance and brain gain in Africa. The Centre is unique in acting as a valuable strategic link between African diaspora communities in Europe and Africa. In this regard, the Centre is filling an important strategic gap in the European countries and, the Netherlands in particular. The added value of the Centre is to assist the tangible contribution of the African diaspora to the efforts geared to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa in 2015 and beyond.

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## **Preface**

This study was commissioned to SAHAN Consultancy by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the views expressed are entirely those of SAHAN. The main purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the role that the African diaspora in the Netherlands play with regard to homeland conflicts. A related purpose was to assess ways in which the potential and peacemaking capacity of African diaspora in the Netherlands can be effectively harnessed in fostering the resolution and transformation of conflicts in their respective countries of origin. The focus of the study is specific. It is a case study of the conflict-generated diaspora from Africa in the Netherlands who come from the conflict-plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. This study is timely because it addresses the connections between the African diaspora's activities and the dynamics of conflict in their homelands, a dimension that has been largely overlooked in policy analysis despite its critical significance. In fact, the role of the African diaspora in conflict and peacebuilding is an aspect that has so far received scant attention within policy-making circles.

Yet, evidence suggests that homeland conflicts also directly affect the lives and well-being of the diaspora despite the fact that they are far away from the conflict zones. This realisation makes it imperative to mainstream strategically the long-distance diaspora's activities in the formulation of policy options and proposals designed to promote peace and security, political stability and good governance in their respective countries of origin in Africa. This is with the aim of making better use of the unique strategic position and the immense potential of the diaspora for conflict transformation and development activities in their countries of origin. Normally, in policy discussions on conflict in Africa, diasporas are mentioned only in passing remarks as negative agents in the process, without further substantiation. This study has revealed a different picture from that commonly assumed. The study discovered that the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora have both positive and negative impacts on the conflict dynamics in their homelands. The policy challenge is how to minimise the negative and maximise the positive activities of the diaspora in homeland development.

The information in the study was mainly collected through extensive literature review, in-depth interviews, and small group discussions with African diaspora organisations, institutions and scholars on the subject. This study has benefited considerably from the insights and experiences that the African diaspora individuals and organisations interviewed have willingly and openly shared with us. It was also enriched by the views, ideas and experience discussed in the conference on Migration and Development in Africa which was organised by Global Coalition for Africa Policy Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on January 26-27, 2005 in which I participated. One of the main aims of the conference was to consider issues concerning African diaspora and how their contribution to the development of the continent can be promoted and supported. I am particularly thankful to Sally Peberdy of the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) who shared with me some of her research experience on the subject particularly in Southern African countries. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Elias Haroon of the Team Addis Business, a diaspora returned from the Netherlands. Haroon enthusiastically explained to me the strategic networking role he is playing with the aim of advising and assisting in bridging the cultural barriers regarding business dealings between Ethiopian and Dutch entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the study benefited enormously from the research and practical insights and experiences gained from the discussions I had with Dr. Beacon Mbiba, a member of the Blair Commission for Africa, Dr. Claude Sumata of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and Chukwu- Emeka Chikezie and Onyekachi Wambu of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) in London.

I am grateful to Professor Gerd Junne from The Network University (TNU) for his constructive comments on the first draft of the study. I also thank Marte Hellema for her research assistance in such matters as collecting data and tracking down library sources which contributed much to the completion of this report.

Last but not the least, I want to extend my gratitude to the African diaspora individuals and organisations whose undercapitalised wealth of knowledge, views, insights and practical experiences have significantly enhanced the quality of the report.

May 17, 2005

Dr. A.A. Mohamoud

**SAHAN** Wetenschappelijk onderzoek & adviesbureau

## **Executive summary and recommendations**

This study was commissioned to SAHAN Consultancy by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the study is to provide background paper for an African diaspora conference that will be organised by the Sub-Sahara Department at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the second quarter of 2005. The study has four aims. The first aim is to conduct policy-relevant research about the long-distance activities (both positive and negative) undertaken by the African diaspora in the Netherlands and their impact on the conflict dynamics in their countries of origin. The study focuses on the African diaspora originating in the conflict plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. The second aim is to generate insights that enhance our understanding of the critical roles frequently played by diaspora in their homeland conflicts. Understanding how the activities of the diaspora can reinforce dynamics that make homeland conflicts more protracted is important for practitioners and policy-makers interested in promoting conflict resolution. The connections between the African diaspora and conflicts in their homelands have not yet been sufficiently analysed. This study undertakes to explore and examine the workings of these long-distance interactions. Herein lies the added value of the study. The third aim is to provide background information and analysis that will help the Dutch government formulate policy that will transform the negative and destructive activities of the African diaspora into positive and constructive gains for the homeland in Africa. The fourth aim is to identify entry points, strategic actors and practical steps where policy interventions might be initiated by the Dutch government that will facilitate a process enabling African diaspora groups from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions to become more of a force for constructive conflict transformation in their respective countries of origin.

The overall objective of the study is to provide an input into the regional policy proposals designed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote peace and security, political stability and good governance in the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. This is a policy-relevant study whose results should be of interest to EU diplomats, UN peace mediators and other international and regional organisations active on the ground in both regions as well as to the practitioners and policy makers in the Netherlands involved in the peace process from a distance. It is in this regard that the findings of this study have local, regional and continental significance in Africa in terms of peace, security and political stability.

This study has found that since the late 1980s, two major developments propelled by the impact of the current globalisation process have accelerated the dynamics of the transnational networks mediated by the diaspora. The first development is the revolution in transport technology, which has made long distance travel very cheap and quick. Cheaper transportation allows diaspora to make more frequent trips to their original homelands and enables friends and families to reciprocate these visits, thereby cementing the transnational ties. The second development is the rapid and massive leaps forward in communications technology such as the Internet and e-mail and inexpensive phone calls which enable widely dispersed diaspora to make contact cheaply and effectively for the first time in history. As a result of the expansion of inexpensive transportation and communications technology the diaspora are now able to exert far greater influence on their homelands than ever before.

The study also shows that the diaspora's long-distance involvement in the homeland dynamics is a double-edged affair. There is both a negative and a positive side of the diaspora's remote involvement in the homeland situations. The policy challenge is how to minimise the negative and maximise the positive activities of the diaspora in the homeland development. This challenge needs to be addressed by the African diaspora organisations, mainstream development agencies, policy-makers in the host countries such as the Netherlands as well as the source countries at different levels in the short, medium and long terms.

The study reveals that the long-distance involvement of the African diaspora in the homeland dynamics is multi-faceted. This required adopting of a broader scope. For instance, the study has identified four critical areas through which the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora make both positive and negative contributions to the conflict dynamics in the homelands. The four critical areas that are of research and policy interest are:

- Remittance and conflict in the homeland
- Diaspora political involvement in the homeland
- Diaspora civic-oriented involvement in the homeland
- Diaspora lobbying in the host country

Furthermore, the study shows that in all areas except financial remittances the knowledge base necessary for policy formulation is still very limited. As such, sound policy-making requires serious investment in building knowledge not only of financial remittances but also of social remittances, such as the social capital transferred by diaspora and the extent to which it influences developments in the homeland.

The target groups of this policy report are wide and include the African diaspora; policy-makers and practitioners -- both in the development agencies and in government institutions; along with peace activists and civil society organisations involved in the peace process, political stability and good governance in the countries of the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions.

The primary data in this study has been collected through in-depth interviews with 20 African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands. The organisations interviewed are involved in different long-distance activities ranging from basic welfare-oriented projects to political dealings, although most of their activities correspond with the domestic situation in the homeland. Another important criterion is that each of these organisations has a peace-making component in its programmes, which is the specific focus of this study. Information for the study was also gathered at a specially organised one-day workshop attended by a number of African diaspora organisations and experts. In that workshop we presented, in order to garner feedback, the preliminary results of a study of the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora in the Netherlands and their impact on perpetuating or resolving conflicts in their respective countries of origin. The primary data collected among the African diaspora in the Netherlands is further supplemented by additional interviews and small group discussions with African diaspora organisations, institutions and scholars on the subject in Britain. Furthermore, in this study we have systematically reviewed in detail the more important literature on the subject in order to take stock of what is known about the long-distance activities undertaken by the diaspora and their impact on the course of political events in their respective countries of origin. This is the reason that the report has become somewhat bulky. Nonetheless, this study can be seen as a *staging point* for a new research area that has thus far been overlooked despite its critical significance. This is the link between the African diaspora activities and the dynamics of conflict in the homeland. The study thus constitutes a “pioneering survey”.

The study summarises here the four critical policy areas through which the African diaspora mainly interact with the homeland dynamics and also outlines some options for policy considerations

## **Remittances and conflict in the homeland**

The study discovered that African diaspora in the Netherlands are involved in two forms of remittance to their homelands. These are *individual and collective remittances*. Individual remittances are mainly sent to families and relatives to meet subsistence needs, health care, housing, and paying school fees, etc. A number of interviewees explained that it is impossible for individual remittances to be used to finance conflict efforts. This is particularly true in

countries in conflict or which have just emerged from conflict where civil wars have destroyed the economic livelihood, the basic public services have broken down and the majority of the people are unemployed. It is, rather, collective remittances with which we should be concerned, they say. Collective remittances (money collected from the diaspora for a particular purpose) sent by the African diaspora groups to finance both community welfare activities and conflict efforts. What is not yet clear is what proportion of those collective remittances is used to finance conflict in the homelands. The answer to this question is difficult to determine as the diaspora interviewed in this study could not provide satisfactory responses. Consequently, this question will require further investigation in the homeland through extensive interviews with diverse political groups, actors, civil society organisations, human rights groups, journalists, peace activists and locally operating international NGOs and agencies. It also requires the active involvement of and monitoring by the Netherlands and the other EU embassies based in the capitals of the target countries so as to ascertain the volume of the diaspora remittances that are allocated to the continuation of conflict in the homelands. For example, it is noted in the main body of the report that a survey undertaken by the Somali Online Voting Booth showed that only 6 percent of the respondents admitted that they remit money occasionally to fund political activities in the homeland. The rest of the respondents stated that they send most of their remittances to their families and relatives for their own upkeep and only a small fraction of it to community-oriented projects. This opinion poll, although it gives an indication of the remittance behaviour of some individual diaspora, is not representative and thus cannot provide a reliable conclusion. More comparative surveys are required to draw clear conclusions.

**The study recommends action in the following areas:**

- Gaining more detailed insights into how much of the collective remittances sent by the African diaspora in the Netherlands, finance conflicts in the homelands. Obtaining this information is essential as it will enable the policy makers concerned to formulate targeted policy interventions against the diaspora groupings in the Netherlands that finance the activities of violent and destructive lawless rebels and militias which perpetuate conflicts in the homeland. The ultimate objective is to design policy instruments that should maximise the benefits of the diaspora remittances for the promotion of peace and poverty reduction among the poor and vulnerable populations in the homelands, while minimising their negative effects.
- Appreciating that the conflict-generated African diaspora in the Netherlands are – as newcomers -- smaller in numbers, not actively organised and not yet well-established compared with other diaspora already settled in France, Germany and Belgium and the UK. Examples are the large numbers of the well-established and active Congolese in France and Belgium, Eritreans and Ethiopians in Germany and Somalis in the UK, etc. The tentative conclusion drawn from this study is that the African diaspora in other EU countries such as France, Belgium, Germany and the UK do more to finance insurgency movements back home than the diaspora in the Netherlands. This finding thus creates a policy challenge beyond the Netherlands which can better be addressed at the EU level. Responding to this formidable and complex policy challenge will require a two-pronged strategy. Firstly it is necessary to undertake a wider empirical study of remittance behaviour and the general activities of the African diaspora in various EU countries, notably France, Germany and the UK where they largely reside. This EU-wide empirical study is crucial in order to build up a strong knowledge base on the subject for sound policy-making. The second strategy is the need to develop an EU-wide policy instrument that addresses the long-distance involvement of the African diaspora and the impact this could have on the domestic peace process in the homeland.
- Developing policy instruments at the embassy level in the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions that are geared to ensure that our peace efforts on the ground are not undermined by negative activities of the diaspora. It will be a serious contradiction if the peace efforts undertaken by the Dutch government and civil society organisations and institutions in the Netherlands on the ground in these countries are destabilised by subversive activities

sponsored by some destructive African diaspora residing in our country. It is also important to know if certain activities undertaken by the diaspora are promoting peace initiatives on the ground so as to develop policy strategies at the embassy level geared to support and strengthen the process.

- Undertaking campaigns targeted at the African diaspora organisations and groups which are geared to raise their consciousness and help them become aware of the destructive impact of the collective remittances if these are negatively used to fuel and perpetuate the conflicts in the homelands. This can be facilitated through the dissemination of written materials, such as this policy report, and also by organising public meetings and workshops aimed at helping African diaspora groups in the Netherlands to relate to the conflict back home in new and different ways which are more constructive. The chief purpose for this initiative is to mobilise the African diaspora in the Netherlands coming from the conflict plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions to play a proactive role in the promotion of peace and political stability in their respective countries of origin. This is with the objective of joining forces for peace and also widening the civil society peace constituency in the Netherlands with respect to Africa.
- Advising the African diaspora organisations to undertake their own respective campaigns and encourage their members to increase collective remittances for development purposes so as to contribute to the recovery of the collapsed domestic economy. They can also encourage their members to stop collective remittances for financing conflicts in the homelands or invest the resources in peace-making enterprises and thereby turning the destructive activity of the diaspora into a constructive one.

## **Diaspora political involvement in the homeland**

The second policy area covers the political involvement of the diaspora in homeland politics. It is an area that has not yet been sufficiently studied. It is also an area like the financial remittances in which the African diaspora are actively involved with both positive and negative effect in the homeland. The study showed that the African diaspora in the Netherlands largely relate to the development in the homeland through political channels instead of civil society or other non-political channels. The reason given is that most of the conflict-generated African diaspora were forced to leave home as a result of the political problems which resulted in violent conflicts and civil wars. However relating to the homeland along political lines makes the diaspora part of the divisive politics waged by the rival militias and groupings in the homeland and that compromises their neutrality even if some of them are neutral. The diaspora can be more effective in promoting peace in the homeland if they stop relating to homeland development through political activities. Peace can also be promoted through development and through the networks of domestic peace activists, civic institutions and actors. And this is what some diaspora organisations interviewed are currently doing as is related in the main body of the report.

The study shows that the long-distance political involvement of the diaspora in homeland politics is double-edged, having both positive and negative sides. Positively speaking the diaspora interviewed explained that the 'meddling' of the diaspora in the politics of their home countries is not always negative. The simple fact, according to a number of interviewees, is that the diaspora are not a monolithic entity. Diaspora entertain diverse political views and bring different strategies of engagement to the politics of their homelands. For example, diaspora proactively support positive political forces in the homeland by transmitting valuable new political ideas and practices that help the promotion of democratic political life in the homeland. Diaspora contribute positively to the peace dialogue by making their expertise available to the conflicting parties in the homeland in order to help them settle their differences through negotiation. An example cited is the prominent role played by the Somali diaspora in the Nairobi peace negotiation between the political factions in 2003/2004. Somali diaspora made

their expertise available to help enhance the articulation and negotiating capacities of the local protagonists. For instance, Somali diaspora undertook to draft strategic documents which served as the basis for dialogue between the conflicting factions in the homeland. Furthermore, during the post-conflict reconstruction period, the diaspora, due to their generally advanced educational levels, can assist the new governments in drafting treaties, agreements and constitutions, identifying policy priorities for social, economic and political reconstruction, and formulating strategies for implementation. They also provide advice to the governments in the homeland on diverse policy issues ranging from rebuilding justice systems to disarming the armed militias. It is in this way that the diaspora contributes to the rehabilitation of political institutions and civil administrations badly weakened or devastated by conflict. An example cited is that of the Eritrean diaspora which helped to draft the first constitution of the country after its separation from Ethiopia in 1993. In turn, the new government rewarded the Eritrean diaspora by giving them voting rights in future elections of the country. The main purpose of the African diaspora involvement in the politics in the homeland is to nurture and inculcate democratic political habits in the minds of the political society that gradually neutralise the prevailing authoritarian tendency in the power politics on the continent.

By contrast, some diaspora attempt to seek a solution of political problems in the homeland by supporting rival political groups locked in deadly power struggles and do not want to encourage reconciliation for the common good. In so doing the diaspora have no qualms about providing financial resources, networks and war materials to political groupings that use violence as a means to their political ends. However, the rival domestic political groupings that diaspora sponsor pursue factional agendas that are detrimental to the collective nation-wide political interests in the homeland. For example, most of the rival domestic groupings tend to pursue narrow political interests that do not transcend ethnic, religious and regional issues. This prevailing tendency therefore encourages diaspora groups to become affiliated to different and rival political constituencies back home that are immersed in a fragmented politics. In this respect, some diaspora support the fragmentation of politics which is having a destructive impact on the situation in the homeland. More damaging, the support of diaspora to violent rebel groups helps to boost the profile and financial powers of the self-styled war lords and faction leaders and this will ensure the perpetuation of the violent and destructive politics they pursue. It also ensures their domination in the domestic political theatre and prevents the emergence of an alternative non-violent political leadership in the homeland. A fitting example is that related by Mohamed Guled of the Somalische Vereniging Amsterdam en omgeving (SOMVAO) in the main body of the report. Guled tells how individuals among the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands travel regularly to Somalia and Kenya carrying sometimes more than 10,000 Euros in cash which they give to the militia and faction leaders to buy favour. They do this in the hope that they will be able to acquire positions in the emerging Somali government when their chosen faction leader becomes president or prime minister or a minister.

In a nutshell, the policy challenge is to discover how to maximise the contribution of the African diaspora to building political stability and sound governance while minimising the negative effects of their involvement in homeland politics.

**The study recommends action in the following areas:**

- Considering the critical role of the African diaspora's involvement in the homeland politics, it is imperative to invest heavily in a stronger knowledge base for policy-making purposes. Most of the current policy proposals focus primarily on the financial remittances that the diaspora transfer to their respective home countries. However, financial remittances are not the only means through which diaspora influence developments in the homeland. The African diaspora also interact with the homeland through their social remittances which are as important as the financial remittances although very little data is available. These *social remittances* include social capital, innovative ideas, technology transfers, knowledge, political contributions, democratic habits and attitudes, social values and cultural influence are just as significant as the

financial remittances. And although they cannot be easily quantified, these non-financial flows may even have a more profound affect on the attitudes of society towards the perception of freedom and tolerance of difference, human rights issues, governance and political practices in the homeland.

- Understanding that some African diaspora groupings reproduce and sometimes multiply the social and political fragmentation and other particularised cleavages existing in the homeland. African diaspora form interest groups based on religious, ethnic, regional, political and many other particularised networks in the host countries like the Netherlands. The multiplication of interests along dozens of competing lines does not promote the cohesion of a community either in the homeland or in the diaspora. Diaspora are free to organise themselves along all sorts of interest lines but it is the depth of the fragmentation that is detrimental. Widening further the divisions already existing makes the rebuilding of harmonious internal relations among the diaspora groupings much more difficult. For example, the Rwandese diaspora in the Netherlands number a little bit over 1300, and yet they have 13 organisations representing diverse interest groupings. This extreme fragmentation reinforces not only the strained divisions of the Rwandan community both in the diaspora and in the homeland, but also undermines their collective strength. This factional tendency among the African diaspora in the Netherlands therefore negatively retards the process of transforming the society in the homeland into a cohesive community which is the foremost precondition of building stable nation states on the continent. *It is also through this particularising tendency that African diaspora influence the foreign policy of their host governments like the Netherlands in ways which are often not constructive to the political dynamics in the homeland.* This is a dilemma which requires a change of attitude as well as of the perception of the diaspora groups. This problem can be resolved as the social harmony of the diverse groupings improves. However, this will require a process of sustained dialogue among diaspora groupings aimed at trust-building and fostering harmonious relations. It is only when the diaspora groups from a given country are united that it will become possible to pool their resources and capacities for a common goal.

- Recognising that a serious contradiction exists between attitudes and actions of some of the African diaspora groupings and organisations regarding homelands and their social position in the Netherlands. Most of the diaspora interviewed came to the Netherlands seeking refuge from the political conflicts in the homeland and they were granted to stay in the country on humanitarian grounds. This dramatically changed the social position they had while there were at home. In the Netherlands, they are expected to see themselves as members of civil society rather than political society. Yet, being oblivious to the social position and identity changes they went through (such as obtaining a new nationality) some of them still act as if they are political agents abroad for political parties in the homeland. In other words, despite being in exile some African diaspora groupings are still negatively involved in the political conflicts in the homeland, which forced them to leave home in the first place. This is a contradiction that individuals and groups in the diaspora have to address, as they cannot at the same time be members of the civil society in the host country and the political society in the homeland. The issue also raises the question of loyalty and the choices that the diaspora have to make between the host country and the homeland. One Rwandan interviewed stated that the government of Rwanda has refused to enter a dialogue with us. This statement raises questions, notably: who are you and where is your social base since you are in the diaspora and not in the homeland? Do you belong to political society or civil society? Furthermore, some diaspora, for different reasons, take hard-line positions with respect to the conflict in the homeland. However, one important reason identified is that the diaspora are outside the political process in the homeland, which is dynamic and changing, a fact to which some of them seem oblivious as they still entertain the old realities that no longer hold on the ground.

- Keeping in mind that the behaviour of the diaspora is very much influenced by the domestic situation in the homeland. If the domestic situation in the homeland is stable, diaspora tend to invest in activities that ameliorate poverty and contribute to developments such as community

welfare projects and business investment as well as civic-related initiatives. However, if the situation in the homeland is not stable, diaspora tend to invest in partisan and politically related activities that are destructive as some of the examples cited in the body of this study demonstrate. Thus, there is a direct correlation between the domestic situation in the homeland and the long-distance behaviour of the diaspora. An example that can be noted is the different situation between Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Ethiopia, as the study discovered, the members of the diaspora that returned from the Netherlands and other EU countries can now invest in the country because of the enabling political environment while in DRC it is not possible because the risk is too high.

- Purposefully stimulating the African diaspora organisations to initiate concrete conflict transformation focused projects as one of their foremost activities so as to contribute directly to the peace process in the homeland. Conflict is the main cause for most African diaspora being in the Netherlands. Yet, the focus of the African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands rarely addresses the conflict back home. Even when they do address it (mostly indirectly), the promotion of peace in the homeland is not on the top of their priority lists. For instance, African diaspora initiate all types of community-oriented projects in the homelands and yet a conflict prevention project is not one of their foremost concerns. When asked why this is so, diaspora frequently reply ‘that we are contributing to the transformation of the conflicts on the ground through the reconstruction of collapsed social services such as rehabilitating health centres and facilities, building schools, supporting rural farmers and helping create income-generating activities for the destitute and marginalised groups in society’. However, if the conflict on the ground is not addressed head on, these community-oriented services supported by the diaspora can be easily destroyed if conflict flares up again.

### **Diaspora civic-oriented involvement in the homeland**

This is the third policy area and the one which has received the least policy attention. It is also the least studied in comparison to other policy areas. Yet, this area - as the diaspora interviewed noted - is where the activities of the diaspora are largely concentrated. It is also an area where the activities undertaken by diaspora directly contribute to peace-making efforts in the homeland. In this study, the rubric ‘civic-oriented’ includes activities such as community-oriented development and business investment as these are central to the non-political involvement of the diaspora in the homeland domestic situations.

Diaspora interviewed related that they contribute to peace and political stability in the homeland, for the most part, indirectly through *civil society*, *development* and *business* engagement. A simple answer that the diaspora interviewed provided is that they see themselves as natural allies of the civil society rather than the political society in the homeland. It is thus normal that they focus on civic-oriented activities and thereby help nurture and widen the civil society peace constituency in the homeland. The impact of this civic-oriented diaspora involvement in domestic development in the homeland can be better observed at sub-national, local and village rather than national levels. The diaspora interviewed hold the view that viable peace in the homeland needs to be initiated not only from the top-down, but also from the bottom up, in a spirit of diligence and complementarity. They therefore argue that peace building can only be effectively promoted if national, sub-national and local activities are simultaneously undertaken at different levels and are consciously linked between different strategic sites and actors. It is from this optic that African diaspora contribute to peace and conflict transformation efforts at sub-national and local levels through civil society construction, livelihood development and business investment in the homeland.

The involvement of the diaspora in the homeland through civic and development-oriented activities is an aspect whose importance regarding the transformation of homeland conflict is not yet recognised. This is because policy makers normally view and address conflict as something which is caused largely by political differences and rivalries. That is true but conflict is also caused by poverty and the competition for scarce resources at the grassroots levels. This

study therefore seeks to fill in this knowledge gap in addressing conflict although it provides just a preliminary survey. The study thus sets a *staging point* for further research in this area in order to gain more information and better insights on the activities of the diaspora in their homeland situations.

**The study recommends action in the following areas:**

- Recognising that some diaspora organisations contribute to the peace and political stability in the homeland through developing livelihoods at the local level. In many instances domestic conflicts in the homeland are caused not only by power struggles at the national level but are also triggered by unequal distribution of the national resources, extreme social and economic imbalances, marginalisation and grinding poverty at different societal levels. Diaspora interviewed stated that they address some of the economic causes of the conflicts and thereby make a positive contribution to the reduction and stabilisation of the social tensions of the economically marginalised groups at the bottom of society. A good example is the Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA) set up by the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. HIRDA is by far the most successful self-help organisation of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. One of the current projects that HIRDA sponsor is education and in particular vocational training. HIRDA set up vocational training courses to provide skills to child soldiers and the many unemployed youths roaming around in the towns. HIRDA targets the youth to prevent them from joining the numerous armed militia groupings that perpetuate the wars and civil conflict in the area. HIRDA also targets the militia leaders since some of them have already gained some skills through formal education but cannot use them because of the lack of meaningful employment. HIRDA employ some of the militia leaders to become teachers at schools, nurses in the town clinics and security guards etc, so as to give them a means of living outside the militia life. In this context, African diaspora are directly and efficiently contributing to the reduction of poverty which is one of the chief sources of conflict. This is an aspect to which the mainstream development organisations and policy circles in the Netherlands have not yet paid sufficient attention.
- Purposefully stimulating African organisations to undertake more activities geared to enhancing the capacities and organisational structures of the civil society networks in the homeland so as to instil the local community with a collective and civic-minded mentality. This civic-minded awareness-raising can help nurture the development of the social capital of the local community in the long term. In this civil society formation process at the local level, diaspora can play an indispensable role because of the limited resources and capacities of the local forces when it comes to formal structures and organisations.
- Giving greater support to the African diaspora organisations that are channelling more social remittance resources such as social capital and skills into activities geared to enhancing and upgrading the administrative and governance capacity in the homeland such as providing training in order to raise qualified local administrators and also sponsoring the organisation of seminars, workshops and public discussions, etc, where information, skills, experience and new ideas are exchanged and shared. Also, those that are channelling more funding and expertise to democratisation projects in the homelands that are geared to promote social emancipation, empowerment, political participation and good governance. The reasoning of the African diaspora interviewed was that empowered and emancipated people are best positioned to use their maximum potential for self-development and to make a break with the past and take their destiny into their own hands. They identified these socially-oriented projects as priorities in building peace constituencies and good governance culture in their countries of origin. They are also urging the mainstream donor development organisations in the Netherlands to orient more of their development assistance in the homelands towards these efforts.

## **Diaspora lobbying in the host country**

Lobbying in the host country is the fourth significant dimension of diaspora interaction with the homeland dynamics. The diaspora have a long tradition of lobbying. Diaspora lobbies both for particularised and for collective ends. Furthermore, diaspora engage in both politically and non-politically oriented lobbying activities in the host country. The African diaspora in the Netherlands are involved in three kinds of lobbying activities. Firstly, they lobby against the governance practices of an incumbent government in the homeland of which they disapprove. Secondly, they lobby for factional interests or policies favourable to particular groups in the homeland. Thirdly, they lobby for collective ends on a continent-wide level such as pressing for debt cancellation, trade concessions, the opening of markets for products from Africa and enhanced aid budgets in the social services and the informal economy that cater for the poor.

The study showed that lobbying is an important tool used by the diaspora to influence the policy options and strategies of policy makers in the host countries. They also use lobbying to pressure homeland governments to adopt different domestic as well as foreign policies that suit their political preferences. The study also showed that most of the conflict-generated diaspora from Africa in the Netherlands coming from the conflict plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions use lobbying for factional interests which are for the most part not constructive. In other words, diaspora groupings acting as political wings abroad use lobbying as an important pressure tool to campaign for policies favourable to the political parties, rebel groups and armed militias to which they are linked with. Most of them are immersed in violent power struggles in the homeland. The reason as to why the conflict-generated African diaspora in the Netherlands employ lobbying for factional interests is the collapse of central governments in their countries of origin because of civil wars. Thus, since there are no incumbent governments which they can lobby against they have to lobby for the cause of their warring comrades in the homeland - which only serves to perpetuate the political fragmentation in the homeland.

### **The study recommends action in the following areas:**

- Seeking alliances with the African diaspora organisations so as to tap their lobbying potential for the campaigning and advocacy activities geared to influencing the Dutch government, EU and international efforts to impact positively on Africa in terms of policy changes, development programmes, debt cancellation, trade concessions, democratic governance and human rights issues. This is an area where the mainstream development agencies such as Hivos, Cordaid, ICCO and Novib among others can benefit considerably if they link up with the African diaspora organisations in their campaigning and advocacy activities. It is also imperative to build the positive lobbying potentials of the African diaspora into the promotion of peace in the homeland.
- Recognising that significant diaspora groupings and organisations in the Netherlands lobby for sectarian interests which are destructive and only serve to strain the already hardened communal and ethnic relations and lead to the continuation of conflict in the homeland. This sectarian tendency still pursued by significant African diaspora groups often reproduces and sometimes multiplies the social and political fragmentation and other sectarian cleavages already existing in the homeland. The policy challenge therefore is to learn how to maximise and benefit the positive aspects of the diaspora's lobbying activities and minimize their negative effects with regard to homeland conflict.

## 1. Introduction

A diaspora is a community of people living outside their country of origin. Since the 1980s, the dynamics of rapid globalisation and the patterns of the labour migration process have considerably increased the diaspora population and the transnational communities around the world. This wave of labour migration was largely a voluntary initiative and people moved abroad in pursuit of economic advantage and a better life. This immigration tendency is fittingly described by the economist J.K. Galbraith as “the oldest action against poverty”.<sup>1</sup> However, since the 1990s a different wave of migration has been in motion. In this wave, people have been forced to flee their home countries by protracted wars and violent conflict. This is a forced migration and not a voluntary movement of people, as the conditions at home make it impossible for them to remain there. The people in this pattern of migration are generally referred to as “conflict-generated diaspora”.<sup>2</sup> In this context, migration is the exception rather than the rule. It is estimated that world-wide 175 million people currently live outside their country of birth.<sup>3</sup> In this total number, the share of the African diaspora who live mainly in Europe and North America is estimated to be around 3.8 million people.<sup>4</sup> Amounting to 2.9 % of the world population, contemporary diaspora particularly those who are in the rich Western countries such as the Netherlands have the capacity to mobilise substantial financial resources, extensive transnational networks, powerful international forces, and political connections that span the globe.<sup>5</sup> It is this enormous potential in global scale that enables diaspora to make a difference to the situation in the homeland for better or for worse in different respects.

The long distance involvement by the diaspora in the course of events in their respective countries of origin has been facilitated by the current globalisation process. Thanks to inexpensive transportation and rapid communication diaspora are exerting an ever greater influence on the politics of their homelands. This advantage enables diaspora communities to build up vast transnational networks (criss-crossing countries and continents) linking the process of globalisation to the local conditions of their respective countries of origin. Likewise it enables the individuals and groups in the diaspora communities to build up intersecting social, economic and political bridges that link their new places of residence with their original homelands. In this regard, contemporary diaspora are becoming one of the main global forces shaping the directions and trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Galbraith, J.K. 1979. *The Nature of Mass Poverty* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press).

<sup>2</sup> For more analysis on this subject, see Lyons, Terrence. 2004. 'Engaging Diasporas to Promote Conflict Resolution: Transforming Hawks into Doves' (Fairfax; Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University. April)

<sup>3</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM). 2003. "Facts and Figures on International Migration", Migration Policy Issues, No. 2, March, p.1.

For instance, between 1960 and 2000, the number of people living in a country other than their original home has dismally increased from 75 to 175 millions, which is 3% of the global population.

<sup>4</sup> From a development perspective, Titi Banjoko asserts that this diaspora is one of the Africa's greatest offshore assets because of the potential of their considerable human and financial capital. Banjoko, Titi. 'Harnessing the Power of the African Diaspora' a PowerPoint presentation placed on the internet. Online at <http://www.odi.org.uk/speeches/africa2004/index.html> [accessed 30 November 2004].

<sup>5</sup> Van Hear, Nicholas. 2003. 'Refugee Diasporas, remittances, development, and Conflict'. Feature Story in *Migration Information Source* (Washington; Migration Policy Institute. June) Online at: <http://www.migrationinformation.org> [accessed 12 Augusts 2004].

<sup>6</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). 2004. *World Economic and Social Survey 2004, international Migration* (New York; United Nations)

## **1.1. Timely response**

This action-oriented study is a response to the new Africa policy memorandum ‘Sterke mensen, zwakke staten: het Nederlandse Afrikabeleid in een Meerjarig Perspectief’ that the current cabinet published in 2003.<sup>7</sup> The premise of this new policy is that sustainable development is not possible without peace and stability. In the memorandum, the government has developed for the first time a regional policy approach to Africa that sees countries as parts of a region. It is in line with this regional policy approach that the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions have been chosen as a priority regarding conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The policy justification is that the countries in these two regions are those most affected by the enduring cross-border conflicts on the continent. This new policy approach is very sensible since some of the intractable conflicts in Africa have now developed into networked wars linking diverse groups who are active in different countries. It therefore makes it imperative to deal with these intersecting wars not only at a country, but also at a regional level. However, the new regional policy approach has shortcomings. For instance, the domestic conflicts in most of the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions have not only been regionalised but they are also largely internationalised among other factors through the activities of diaspora groupings. This reality therefore makes it necessary to address also the international dimension of the conflict, particularly the critical role that African diaspora groups play with regard to homeland conflicts.

## **1.2. The scope of the study**

The scope of this action-oriented study covers the conflict-generated diaspora from Africa in the Netherlands originating in the conflict plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. More countries in these two regions have experienced violent conflicts than anywhere else on the continent.<sup>8</sup> Some of these countries like Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan in the Horn of Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and Rwanda in the Great Lakes region are still in the grip of violent conflicts either in the form of domestic power struggles or in border disputes. Some of these conflicts, as in Sudan, are of long duration with devastating results. The ravages of conflict have manifested themselves in the disruption of economic production, fragmentation of social fabrics, displacement of many people and enforcement of some of them to flee abroad in search of security and protection. A characteristic that these individuals share is that most of them are displaced from their original homeland because of protracted violent conflicts. This conflict-generated group constitutes the largest number of the African diaspora in the Netherlands. They are estimated to be around 55,000 individuals. For the breakdown of countries of origin, see table I below. The figures are based on estimates drawn from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) on January 1, 2004. According to the CBS, as of January 1, 2004, the total number of Africans from sub-Saharan Africa currently living in the Netherlands was 198,984.

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<sup>7</sup> Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs). 2003. “Sterke mensen, zwakke staten: Het Nederlandse beleid ten aanzien van Afrika ten zuiden van de Sahara in meerjarig perspectief”. (The Hague; Ministry of Foreign Affairs. October)

<sup>8</sup> This is indeed an aspect that the Development and Migration Policy Memorandum which is currently drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also clearly recognized. Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs). 2004. “Development and Migration, Policy Memorandum – July 2004” (The Hague; Ministry of Foreign Affairs. July)

*Breakdown by country of origin:*

Burundi	1,931
Congo DRC)	8,490
Eritrea	712
Ethiopia	10,236
Rwanda	1,388
Sudan	7,626
Somalia	25,001
<i>Total</i>	55,384

Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (CBS) data on January 1, 2004

Table 1 shows the total number of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Africans in the Netherlands originating from the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions on January 1, 2004.

The huge numerical strength of the conflict-generated diaspora makes them an important constituency to be taken into account for the promotion of peace and stability in the countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. More importantly, these diaspora groups have access to vast transnational networks which enable them to bring global processes to bear on situations in their homeland through different means. This is a result of an increased ability to maintain homeland connections through inexpensive travel and communications (including new technologies such as the Internet and e-mail and cheap phone calls). Furthermore, this massive leap forward in communications technology gives these diaspora groups the capacity to exert far greater influence on their homelands than ever before. It is this same capacity therefore that enables these diaspora groups to play a significant role in promoting peace and social stability in their respective countries of origin.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

The significance of this study lies in the fact that although there is considerable information and knowledge about the conflict dynamics on the ground, very little is currently known about the activities of the African diaspora both positive and negative with regard to the homeland. Yet it is now becoming apparent that diaspora groupings, thanks to inexpensive transportation and rapid communication, are exerting increasing influence on the politics of their homelands, sometimes with destructive consequences. Another significance of this study is its timing. This study is the first of its kind regarding the African diaspora in the Netherlands.

The study pays particular attention to two aspects. One aspect is the support, be it in terms of material, information or political strategies, that diaspora groupings provide to subversive local actors in their respective countries of origin and the negative impacts this could have on the domestic peace process. The other aspect is the role and potential of diaspora groupings for fostering conflict transformation, post-conflict reconstruction and, in the longer run, socio-economic development, in their respective countries of origin. The study particularly explores the ways to tap effectively the networks and the latent social capital of the African Diaspora and turn them into assets for the homeland in Africa. This is with the objective of joining forces for peace and also widening the civil society peace constituency in the Netherlands with respect to Africa. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the policy research on the prevention of conflict and conflict resolution from a significant yet neglected perspective. This dimension which is normally overlooked is the link between diaspora activities and dynamics of conflict in homeland. For the purpose of this study, the term diaspora is broadly conceptualised as people dispersed among diverse destinations outside their home country but who, despite being physically absent, maintain strong sentimental ties to their home which are translated into concrete obligations, commitments, actions and activities.

## **1.4. Methods of organisation**

Preliminary results of an initial feasibility study that we have undertaken reveal, on the one hand, that the diaspora has enormous untapped strategic potential for conflict transformation initiatives and development activities in their home countries, and on the other hand, that there is little empirical information available about them and their wide ranging social, economic and political networks and activities that span the globe.<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is hardly any documented literature available about the long-distance activities undertaken by the Congolese, Eritreans and Somalis in the diaspora and their impact (both positive and negative) on the course of political events in their respective countries of origin. It is in response to this serious lack of empirical data on the subject that this study undertook a wider interview of about 20 African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands. This was to obtain a reliable appraisal of the activities that diaspora undertake in their countries of origin. The empirical data in this study therefore are mainly gathered through in-depth interviews with focus groups, small group discussions and site visits, to, for example, organisations run by members of the African diaspora. Furthermore, the study draws on the little available documentary material on the subject as well as the experience of other diaspora groups and organisations elsewhere.

To start with the study first briefly considers how the present policy debates on the diasporic activities and interactions in the homelands are conducted. The debates centre on the discussion of whether the long-distance activities undertaken by the diaspora help perpetuate or resolve conflicts in the homelands.<sup>10</sup> The study then examines the role of the diaspora in conflict dynamics in the homeland through four significant dimensions. The four critical areas through which the diaspora interact with the homeland dynamics that are of policy interests are:

- Remittance and conflict in the homeland
- Diaspora political involvement in the homeland
- Diaspora civic-oriented involvement in the homeland
- Diaspora lobbying in the host country

The study concludes with a number of recommendations for policy options. It will identify broadly entry points, strategic actors and practical steps at which policy interventions might be initiated that facilitate a process enabling African diaspora groups from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions to become a greater force for constructive conflict transformation in their respective countries of origin. The ultimate goal of such policy formulation is to contribute to transforming the negative and destructive activities of the diaspora into positive and constructive gains for the homeland in Africa.

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<sup>9</sup> Junne, Gerd and Abdullah A. Mohamoud. 2004. "Mobilising African Diaspora for the Promotion of Peace in Africa, A Feasibility Study" (Amsterdam; SAHAN Research Bureau and The Network University)

<sup>10</sup> According to Yossi Shain, 'the ways in which diaspora involvement [in homeland] influence the prospects for conflict perpetuation or conflict resolution are of direct concern to the United States and other states that invest time and money in peacekeeping, diplomatic initiatives, and economic development in [ the conflict plagued regions in the world]'.  
Shain, Yossi. 2002. 'The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution' in *The Minority Rules, SAIS Review of International Affairs*, Summer-Fall, Vol. XXII No. Two (Baltimore; John Hopkins University Press. p. 115-144)

## 2. Current policy debates

The current policy debates on diaspora activities centre around the discussion of whether their long-distance interactions exacerbate or moderate the dynamics of conflicts in the homelands. The debates are contested by two policy camps. The first policy strand which is spearheaded by Paul Collier of the World Bank holds the view that the activities of the diaspora largely reinforce the dynamics that make homeland conflicts more protracted.<sup>11</sup> According to this proposition, diaspora make the life of those left behind much more difficult because of their militant and hard-line attitude to the conflict in the homeland which prevents a peaceful settlement. This is the predominant paradigm on the subject. The position of this policy strand stresses the malign impact of diaspora interactions in the homeland domestic political and power struggles. It thus focuses disproportionately on the negative impact of the long-distance diaspora involvement in the homeland. The main focus of this policy camp is on the political role that diaspora play with regard to homeland conflicts. This point of departure generally links the activities of the diaspora with security issues and then concentrates more on global rather than homeland security concerns. The central argument advanced by this policy camp is that diaspora groups particularly those residing in the Western countries finance homeland insurgencies engaged in violent conflicts. During the Cold War period it was rival superpowers and their allies who financed insurgent groups that waged wars against an incumbent government of a given country who was perceived as an enemy. However, since the Cold War ended, the financial support from external countries to locally operating rebel groups has drastically declined. It is now becoming apparent that some global operating diaspora groups have taken over the function of this destabilising enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.1. First policy camp

There are three critical areas according to the first policy camp where diaspora contribute to prolonging and making homeland conflicts more protracted. Firstly, diaspora provide substantial funding to the domestic conflicts through remittance transfers and this external resource funds destructive armed insurgency groups and thereby sustains conflict. For this reason, the argument goes, if a country has a large diaspora abroad its risk of renewed conflict is very much higher than a country with a small diaspora overseas.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, diaspora affect the domestic politics in the homeland negatively by taking hard-line positions which prevent the local leadership from reaching a negotiated solution and compromise settlement. Diaspora take hard-line political positions since exile creates a long distance outlook (which perpetuates simplistic categorical perceptions) different from the outlook of those inside the country.<sup>14</sup> Thirdly,

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Collier is particularly singled out because of his influential position at the World Bank. Paul Collier was the director of the Development Research group at the World Bank (from April 1998 to April 2003). On this position, Collier published numerous influential policy papers on the subject which from this optic very much informed the opinions and perceptions of the international policy community. Collier, Paul. 2000. "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy," Policy Research Working Papers (Washington D.C.; The World Bank. June); Collier, Paul and Anke Hoefler, 2000. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War", Policy Research Working Papers (Washington D.C.; The World Bank. May); Anderson, Benedict. 1992. "The New World Disorder" in *The New Left Review, Issue 193* (London; The New Left Review. May-June. p. 3-13); and Duffield. Mark. 2001. *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London and New York: Zed Books)

<sup>12</sup> For instance a recent study undertaken by RAND explicitly affirms that in the post-Cold War era, with foreign governmental support to insurgency declining, diasporas have become a key factor in sustaining insurgency wars. Byman, Daniel L., Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau and David Brannan. 2001. *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movement* (Santa Monica, California; RAND Cooperation)

<sup>13</sup> Paul Collier argues that, "If a country has an unusually Diaspora [abroad] its chances of conflict are 36%. If it has an unusually small Diaspora its chances of conflict are only 6%. So, diasporas appear to make life for those left behind much more dangerous in post-conflict situations" (Collier, 2000: 6).

<sup>14</sup> According to Terrence Lyons, "Uncompromising diaspora positions often constrain the ability of actors in the homeland to propose different ways to understand the struggle or to engage in constructive conflict resolution. The devotion to the cause by the diaspora may make it more difficult for political actors back home to accept compromise solutions that may be condemned as appeasement or treason among the émigrés. On some occasions, a move by a leader in a conflict to

diaspora often engage in political activism in the host countries in support of the struggle back home. They do so by lobbying the host government, international organisations and international media to support policies favourable to the insurgent groups in the homeland to which they are linked with. In this respect, they serve as representatives and ambassadors abroad for the cause of their warring comrades in the homeland.

## **2.2. Second policy camp**

The other policy camp represented by the researchers at the Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management such as Wolfram Zunzer challenge the proposition of the first camp.<sup>15</sup> They accuse the first camp of magnifying disproportionately the negative aspects of the diaspora, so that they overshadow their positive activities. They also blame the first camp for concentrating largely on the activities of the militant and hard-line groups in the diaspora. Yet the hard-line groups within the diaspora, although their activities are often visible, are neither the majority nor do they represent the whole diaspora of any given country. There are many diaspora groupings with different political and social-economic aspirations, and as such the diaspora should be carefully disaggregated. This policy camp does not deny that some diaspora groupings sponsor subversive activities in their respective countries of origin but they stress that it should be seen in its proportional context. They are of the view that the activities of the diaspora make both positive and negative contributions to homeland conflicts. They however suggest that adopting creative policy strategies that turn the destructive activities of the diaspora into constructive gains for the people in the homeland can reverse this negative tendency. The central argument of this camp is that positive activities of diaspora have a moderating influence on conflict dynamics in the homeland.<sup>16</sup> And there is enough evidence to support the contention that the positive potential of diaspora communities for conflict transformation in their home countries outweigh their negative potential to fuel conflict.

This policy camp overturns all the three examples put forward by the former camp to prove its point. They argue that the generalised hypothesis advanced by the first policy camp cannot be sustained by empirical research and practice in all cases. Firstly, the remittances from the diaspora are largely used to support individuals and families survive during conflict and to rebuild their lives afterwards.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, the largest share of the remittances are directly channelled to poor households and are used primarily for basic needs such as food, shelter, education and health care. Only a small portion of the remittances are used to finance domestic conflicts in the homelands. Domestic conflicts are caused not only by power struggles at the national level but they are also triggered by unequal distribution of the national resources, extreme social and economic imbalances, marginalisation and grinding poverty at different societal levels. The transfer of remittances indeed contributes positively to the reduction and stabilisation of the social tensions of the economically marginalised groups at the bottom of society. Secondly, the involvement of the diaspora in the politics of their home countries is not always negative. The simple fact that the diaspora are not a monolithic entity means that diverse political views and strategies of engagement are brought to the politics of their homelands.

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seek a negotiated outcome will be undermined by diaspora leaders committed to hard-line positions" (Lyons, 2003: 6).

Lyons, Terrence. 2003. 'Notes on Globalisation, Diasporas and Conflict', a paper presented in a workshop on Globalisation, Territoriality and Conflict at the University of California, San Diego Institute for International, Comparative, and Area Studies, January

<sup>15</sup> Wolfram Zunzer. 2004. "Diaspora Communities and Civil Transformation." Occasional Paper Nr. 26. (Germany: Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management) and Joerg Callies (ed.) 2004: 'When it is a Matter of War and Peace at Home ... The development of exiled /diaspora communities in the development of crisis and civil conflict management, Loccum Protokolle, www.loccum.de.

<sup>16</sup> Newland, Kathleen and Erin Patrick. 2004. *Beyond Remittances: The Role of Diaspora in Poverty Reduction in their Countries of Origin* (Washington D.C.; Migration Policy Institute)

<sup>17</sup> (Van Hear 2003); and Cheran, R. 2003. "Diaspora Circulation and Transnationalism as Agents for Change in the Post Conflict Zones of Sri Lanka" (Toronto; York University)

There are therefore cases where the active involvement of the diaspora in the struggles in their homelands has resulted in positive political changes in the domestic situation.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, diaspora contribute positively to peace initiatives in the homeland through their lobbying activities in the international media, international organisations and in the host countries where they reside. Diaspora initiate these advocacy activities to galvanise support, persuade and also pressurise the international community to take punitive measures against rebel groups, factional leaders and governments in their respective homelands which they regard as oppressive, undemocratic and dictatorial. In this respect, diaspora serve as positive bridge-builders to the international political actors and organisations supporting the peace and democratisation process in their homelands. It is in this endeavour that some individuals and groups within the diaspora act as pro-active peace ambassadors for the homeland they have left behind physically but have not abandoned emotionally.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the truth lies in between. This is the preliminary picture emerging from the aforementioned policy debates. The empirical research results available that could substantiate either position are still very limited. Further empirical research and more diverse case studies that go much deeper than mere policy reports are necessary in order to reach reliable conclusions. Thus, undertaking wider basic research and the collecting hard data would greatly improve our understanding of the nature, patterns and dynamics of the diaspora interactions with regard to their respective homelands.

### **2.3. Available evidence**

Let us now briefly turn to how the available evidence and empirical based facts inform the policy paradigms outlined above. It should be stated at the outset that most of the existing documented empirical evidence on the subject is informed by the activities of Irish, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sikh and Kurdish diaspora. There is hardly any documented knowledge and information about the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora in the Netherlands or elsewhere in the Western countries. One explanation is the comparatively late emergence of the African diaspora communities. The phenomenon of the contemporary African diaspora is of very recent origin. It is largely the result of violent conflicts and wars that have flared up in many African countries since the early 1990s. It is for this reason that most Africans residing in the Netherlands are conflict-generated diaspora. More importantly, it is because of their recent origin -- now just a decade old -- that we know very little about the activities of the African diaspora as compared with the older and well-established diaspora. This is an area which is still waiting to be explored as the interactions of the African diaspora with their homelands in Africa have not yet been sufficiently studied. This reality therefore compels us to gain insights and build up knowledge about the activities of the African diaspora in the Netherlands in the conflicts in homeland. A knowledge that will equip us to explore possibilities of a new attitude that would enable African diaspora groups to relate to one another and to the conflict back home in new and more constructive ways. African diaspora are potential strategic partners to be aligned to the Dutch government efforts to foster conflict transformation activities in their respective countries of origin. Indeed, working with the diaspora in the Netherlands and in other Western countries can be an opportunity to undertake conflict resolution efforts outside the immediate arena of the conflict. The chief reason is that many violent conflicts in the homelands also directly affect the lives and well-being of others residing beyond state boundaries such as diaspora in far-off lands that share family and ethnic ties with the people engaged in the conflict. This reality means that while attempting to resolve a violent conflict in a

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<sup>18</sup> Nassery, Homira G. 2003. "The Reverse Brain Drain: Afghan-American Diaspora in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Reconstruction" Online at <http://www.aisk.org/reports/diaspora.pdf>; and M. Ashraf Haidari, M. Ashraf. 2004. "Rebuilding Afghanistan: The Diaspora Role" in *The Asian Magazine*, 10 October

<sup>19</sup> Mohamoud, Abdullah A. 2003. "African Diaspora and Development of Africa, Report for the African Diaspora Summit in the Netherlands" (Amsterdam, 16 December)

given country we also need to address the diaspora audience beyond the immediate geographic boundaries of the conflict's arena.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this effort might work to decrease polarisation among the diaspora and generate alternative new options for constructive conflict resolution.

## **2.4. Transnational networks**

This is an aspect which has been paid insufficient attention in the debates between the two policy camps briefly summarised above. Yet, transnational networks are the most important modern instrument facilitating the involvement of the diaspora in the homelands whether the interaction is positive or negative. It is a given fact that contemporary diaspora actively make increasing use of transnational networks as instruments for mobilisation, collaboration and organisation across space. For instance, a diaspora being a people dispersed among diverse locations forges innovative patterns of vast transnational networks at different levels. Members of a diaspora form these transnational networks to keep in contact with one another across countries and continents and remain connected with the homeland in different ways. It is through these activities that diaspora construct a pattern of local-global linkages and transitional networks that span the globe. In other words, diaspora use transnational networks to facilitate two important interactions. One is the interaction between the host and the homeland and the other is the interaction among the diaspora's countrymen scattered in different host countries around the globe. However, it is still not clear how the transnational networks are deployed since diaspora use these networks as an informal instrument and this has not yet been sufficiently studied.

Since the late 1980s, two major developments propelled by the impact of the current globalisation process have accelerated the dynamics of the transnational networks mediated by the diaspora. The first development is the revolution in transport technology that has made travel cheap, quick and convenient. Cheaper, quicker transportation permits diaspora to make far more frequent visits to their original homelands and enables friends and families to reciprocate these visits, thereby cementing the transnational ties. The second development is the rapid and massive leaps forward in communications technologies, such as the Internet and e-mail and inexpensive phone calls which enable widely dispersed diaspora to maintain contact cheaply and effectively for the first time in history. Consequently, the current globalisation process has on the one hand accelerated the growing number of cross border transitional migrants while on the other hand it has decreased travelling and communication costs.<sup>21</sup>

The transnational networking of the African diaspora is not a new phenomenon but it has become intensified thanks to the inexpensive transportation and communications technology. One concrete result is that diaspora can now exert a far greater influence on their homelands than ever before. African diaspora are in a unique strategic position in this ever globalising world as being scattered in different economic and power centres around the globe. The huge presence of African diaspora in such powerful political centres as London, Paris, New York and Washington where global policy decisions are made has an especially important strategic significance. Their strategic position enables the African diaspora to facilitate the process of transnational activities and networks and also allows them to act as bridge-builders between host countries like the Netherlands and their respective countries of origin. Furthermore, the position also enables the African diaspora to build up and establish alliances with vast transnational social, economic and powerful political networks at different levels. All these noted advantages mean that the African diaspora are in a position to channel resources, information, innovative

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<sup>20</sup> (Shain 2002)

<sup>21</sup> According to Naim Moises, "Globalization has greatly expanded the means through which people in one country can remain actively involved in another country's cultural, economic, and political life. In fact, money transfers, travel and communications, networks of associations of nationals living abroad may be creating a powerful tool for development."

Moises, Naim. 2003. "The New Diaspora" *Foreign Policy* 131. p. 95-96

ideas, intellectual capacities and skills, peace-making practices and democratic political habits from the Netherlands and the West in general to their countries of origin. The policy challenge is how to harness these diaspora-mediated benefits and turn them into constructive gains for the people in the homeland.

Another aspect worth noting here which the debates between the two policy camps have not addressed is the impact of the activities facilitated by the transnational networks both positive and negative on the situation in the homeland. This however depends very much on the domestic situation in the homeland. For instance, if the homeland is peaceful and politically stable, the impact of the increased diaspora involvement in the domestic situation is likely to be positive. There are already positive examples of diaspora involvement in countries such as Ghana and Cape Verde, although they fall outside the scope of this study. In both countries, the positive impact of the diaspora interaction with homeland development has been widely documented. In Ghana, the diaspora plays a very important role in community developments as well as in commercial activities; while in Cape Verde, the diaspora has been actively involved in reforming the political institutions and in advancing the democratisation process in the country.<sup>22</sup> However, if the situation in the homeland is not stable the impact of diaspora interaction in the domestic dynamic is likely to be negative. For example, if the situation in the homeland is not stable, the diaspora tends to invest more in partisan and politically-related activities that are destructive as some of the examples cited in the subsequent sections of the study demonstrate. As Pérouse de Montclos affirms, “Failed states export their problems abroad. In return, the political behaviour of some migrants sometimes reflects shady businesses at home”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in this case, there is a direct correlation between the domestic situation in the homeland and the long-distance behaviour of the diaspora. This last aspect thus brings us to the homeland government’s role in the process. The homeland government is responsible for the creation of an enabling political environment that would persuade the diaspora to invest in constructive activities in the homeland. However, in situations where the state has collapsed from the centre, a vicious circle can be created where neither the domestic authority nor the diaspora are capable of breaking the impasse, as has been seen in Somalia. The role and the response of the homeland governments to the diaspora’s involvement in the domestic situations both positive and negative is an important area worthy of thorough research but it is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice to state here that both the workings of the informal transnational networks and the particular domestic situation in a homeland are important aspects that should be considered in the debates about the nature and the magnitude of the diaspora involvement in the domestic dynamics in their countries of origin.

This study examines the activities of the African diaspora in the Netherlands in their home countries within the framework of the four specific sets of policy areas noted above. The four policy areas are selected because of their direct link with the interactions of the African diaspora both in the homeland and in the host-land. African diaspora interact with the homeland in diverse ways but in the context of this study four policy areas are identified because of their prominence. Within the framework of these four policy areas that this study attempts to provide a better understanding to the extent that the activities of the African diaspora in the Netherlands validate and inform empirically the conceptual debates advanced by the rival policy camps discussed above.

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<sup>22</sup> In the case of Ghana, see Nicholas Van Hear, Frank Pieke and Steven Vertovec. 2004. ‘The contribution of UK-based diaspora to development and poverty reduction’, A report by the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford for the Department for International Development, (April); In the case of Cape Verde, see Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos. 2005. ‘Diaspora, Remittances and Africa South of the Sahara: A Strategic Assessment’, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Monograph Series, no. 112, (March).

<sup>23</sup> (Pérouse de Montclos. 2005)

### **3. Remittance and conflict in the homeland**

Much attention has been paid in the news media and in the policy publications to the role diaspora play in funding armed militias and insurgency groups and sustaining conflicts in the homeland. This is due to the sheer volume of remittances transferred to developing countries by the diaspora and transnational migrants.<sup>24</sup> The current volume of remittances transferred by international diaspora (migrants) is estimated to be \$93 billion per year; and with the addition of remittances paid through unofficial channels the total amounts to possibly \$300 billion.<sup>25</sup> In 2000, it was estimated that over 60% of this amount goes to developing countries.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, most remittance flows to developing countries go to Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by Eastern and Southern Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa receives only 1.5 percent of remittance flows. The largest share of the remittances is generated in the European Union, followed by the United States and in the Gulf States in the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> However it is not yet clear how much a percentage of the remittances is used to finance the perpetuation of conflicts or in the reduction of the poverty which is one source of the social tensions of the economically marginalised groups at the bottom of society. The problem is the lack of hard data. For instance, there is much less hard data available on the ways that the financial remittances of the diaspora are allocated due the lack of empirical research on the ground.

This reality therefore makes the policy discussions noted above somewhat superficial since they cannot substantiate their different arguments with empirical facts and hard data. This is in fact a problem which is not without consequences for this study. What is certain, however, is that diaspora that matter and who could have a greater influence on developments in the homeland are those who are located in the rich Western countries, such as the Netherlands. The location enables them not only to mobilise financial resources and networks that fuel conflict but also makes them the sources of relief and welfare for those remaining in the homeland.<sup>28</sup>

The interviews conducted highlight important general findings. According to the individuals and organisations interviewed there are two types of remittance: *individual and collective remittances*. In other words, remittances are sent both individually as well as collectively.

#### **3.1. Individual remittances**

The proportion of individual remittances is considerably larger than that of collective remittances. The individual remittances are transferred on a regular basis and are mainly sent to families and relatives to meet subsistence needs, health care, housing, and paying school fees. Contrary to the popular view, remittance funds are not used purely for consumption. Some of the remittances are used to finance businesses with the aim of building up private capital in the family. For example, diaspora and their extended families who have remained behind invest in the local economy by setting up family companies, hotels and restaurants and transport businesses which in turn generate employment opportunities for the unemployed. The remittances sent by individual members of the diaspora tend to be constant and have become a

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<sup>24</sup> Ratha, Dilip. 2004. "Why should we care about remittances?" Notes for a meeting of experts convened by the Global Commission on International Migration, Geneva, 21 January

<sup>25</sup> World Bank, 2004. *Global Development Finance: Harnessing cyclical gains for development* (Washington D.C.; World Bank) Online at: <http://www.worldbank.org/prospects/gdf2004/>

<sup>26</sup> Nyberg Sørensen, Ninna, Nicholas Van Hear and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, 2002. *The Migration-Development Nexus Evidence and Policy Options, State of the Art Overview* CDR Working Paper 02.06 (Copenhagen; Centre for Development Research)

<sup>27</sup> (DESA 2004)

<sup>28</sup> According to Van Hear, "The influence of the diasporas on their homelands depends on the resources they can mobilise, and this in turn depends on where they are located. The resources that can be mastered by Afghans or Somalis in Western countries or working in oil rich Gulf states are rather greater than those that can be generated by Afghan refugees in Pakistan or Iran, or by Somalis in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen, or Kenya". (Van Hear 2003) <http://www.migratieinformatie.org> [accessed 12 August 2004].

reliable lifeline for increasingly impoverished households in Africa with relatives abroad. To this end, remittance directly helps poor people in Africa cope with poverty. This empirical evidence substantiates the argument advanced by Emmanuel Akyeampong that “in the contemporary global context in which African governments are dependent on Western financial institutions for the running of their economies, at the micro-level the economic survival and prosperity of families have become equally dependent on having family members in the diaspora”.<sup>29</sup> Some of the interviewees explained that it is impossible to use individual remittances to finance conflicts particularly in the countries in the midst of conflicts or just emerged from conflicts where civil wars have destroyed the economic livelihood and the basic public services have broken down and the majority of the people are unemployed. This is in fact the current situation in all the countries of the conflict-generated African diaspora resident in the Netherlands included in this study. In such a situation the needs of the families, relatives and friends left behind are manifold and demand considerable financial commitments.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, individual African diaspora in the rich Western countries are less wealthy when compared with diaspora from other development countries although they are much better off in comparison to the diaspora who remained in Africa. In short, the remittances sent by individuals to the homeland are not and cannot be used to finance domestic wars. This is because of the considerable financial needs of the families and extended families and friends caught up in a dire economic crisis due to the rampant conflicts and civil wars in the homeland. This is the general agreement of the organisations and individuals interviewed in this study.

### **3.2. Collective remittances**

A different picture emerges with respect to collective remittances. The amount of collective remittances sent home is much smaller than the amount of individual remittances. Furthermore, collective remittances are not transferred on a regular basis. Collective remittances are normally collected in times of relative stability as well as in times of crisis. A very important aspect that plays a role with regard to collective remittances is the nature of the diaspora’s categorisation. For instance, members of the diaspora can be categorised as *active, passive and silent*, with the silent members being in the majority.<sup>31</sup> In times of relative stability in the homeland, the core active members mobilise mainly passive members for a collective cause such as raising funds for locally based income generating community projects, building village schools, health centres, construction of potable water facilities, etc. However, in time of crisis, whether natural or man-made, the core active members (who play the role of organising cadres) also mobilise the silent majority for a collective cause. This collective cause, if it is worth mobilising for, must be a one that diaspora groups view as affecting their interests directly in different respects. This however is not a regular practice but is undertaken intermittently. The silent majority is mobilised typically for specific causes which are viewed as particularly grave such as earthquakes, droughts and other major natural disasters. They are also mobilised to help aid their kin and ethnic groups who are in conflict with other ethnic rivals in the homeland for different

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<sup>29</sup> Akyeampong, Emmanuel. 2000. “Africans in the Diaspora: the Diaspora and Africa” Commissioned Article for Centenary Issue *African Affairs* 99: 395. p.183-215

<sup>30</sup> The Somali Online Voting Booth recently made a survey with the question: who do you send money to? The results were not surprising. For instance, 29 percent of the respondents send money to their mother, 16 percent to their father, 8 percent to their grandparents, and 37 percent to other relatives. Only 4 percent of the respondents actually send remittances for community development projects in their villages and home towns, while 6 percent admit that they finance political activities.  
<http://www.somalipress.com>

<sup>31</sup> Shain and Barth note that, “Core members are the organizing elites, intensively active in diasporic affairs and in a position to appeal for mobilization of the larger diaspora. Passive members are likely to be available for mobilization when the active leadership calls upon them. Silent members are a larger pool of people who are generally uninvolved in diasporic affairs (in the discursive and political life of its institutions), but who may mobilize in times of crisis”  
Barth, Aharon and Yossi Shain. 2003. “Diasporas and International Relations Theory” in *International Organization* 57 (Summer). p. 452

reasons. This last instance illustrates that the collective remittances of the diaspora are also used to finance domestic conflict. Nevertheless as the analysis in the preceding paragraph indicates, collective remittances finance relief and community-oriented welfare projects as well as conflicts and civil war. This is the general consensus of the organisations and individuals interviewed in this study. There is however a dilemma worth noting here regarding collective remittance which was highlighted by a Somali interviewee. According to the interviewee,

*The homeland community to which the individual belongs normally appeal for financial help for collective needs, and the individual feels they have to comply. However, the members of the community are engaged in different activities and the armed militias are also members of the community. The trick is that in many instances the diaspora are not aware of what they are financing. This is a grey area that cannot be easily verified. What is true, however, is that some financial resources from the diaspora indirectly support the conflict.*

### **3.3. Funding collective remittances**

A question which seems to be of critical importance and which has not yet been answered is 'how much of the collective remittances fund community welfare activities and how much is used to fund conflict?' The answer to this question is not easy to determine since the members of the diaspora interviewed in this study could not provide satisfactory responses. The answer to this question requires further investigation in the homeland through extensive interviews with diverse political groups, actors, civil society organisations, human rights groups, journalists, peace activists and locally operating international NGOs and agencies. It also requires the active involvement of, and monitoring by, the EU embassies based in the capitals of the target countries so as to ascertain the volume of the diaspora remittances that are allocated to both efforts. Gaining this information is very important. Among other advantages it will essentially enable the concerned policy makers to formulate targeted policy interventions against the diaspora groupings in the Netherlands that finance the activities of violent and destructive rebels and militias that perpetuate conflicts in the homeland.<sup>32</sup> The ultimate objective is to design policy instruments that should maximise the benefits of the diaspora remittances for the promotion of peace and poverty reduction among the poor and vulnerable populations in the homelands, while minimising its negative effects.

Active and organised militias and rebel groupings normally require considerable financial resources to sustain themselves. For instance, they require financial resources to provide food and accommodation, military uniforms, equipment, transport and weapons for their fighters. Therefore, rebel groups must generate or receive these considerable financial means from diverse sources. In this connection, a critical question to which we did not receive a satisfactory answer from the African diaspora individuals and organisations interviewed is: how much of their resources do militias and rebel groups generate domestically and how much do they receive from overseas supporters including the remittances from the diaspora? One obvious answer is provided by some of the African diaspora interviewed. While some militia groups and armed rebels in the homeland like those active in the vast hinterland in Congo are partially sustained by the support they receive from the neighbouring countries; others occupy and control profitable fixed resources on the ground like those of the Somali militias in the south of

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, it was suggested by Newland and Patrick that "Donor governments should intervene to stop fundraising in the diaspora for support of destructive communal conflicts, possibly using the mechanisms of the G7 Action Plan within the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF). Donors should also reward cooperative efforts among various elements of diaspora that are divided by class, religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation, and act as an honest broker among fractious groups". (Newland and Patrick 2004)

Sander, Cerstin. 2003. *Migrant Remittances to Developing Countries. A Scoping Study: Overview and Introduction to Issues for Pro-Poor Financial Services* (London; UK Department for International Development (DFID). June)

Somalia. Somali militias in the south of the country sustain themselves by controlling banana plantations as well as ports where they collect exorbitant fees from the imported goods as well as the international ships calling on the ports as a transit. Another point the interviewees noted is that diaspora are not the only overseas agents that finance armed rebel groups and militias operating in the homeland. Western-owned private companies also fund rebel groups that control areas where fixed and profitable natural resources are to be found. In return, Western companies get permission from the rebel groups to exploit the precious natural resources found in the areas they control. Nevertheless a conclusive answer to the question raised above can only be acquired through a deeper empirical study of the homeland political dynamics.

During the collection of the materials for this study, our interviewees often stated that some of the collective remittances are indeed used to finance the conflict back home. But the collective remittances that the African diaspora in the Netherlands transfer to finance violence is paltry when compared with the money they allocate to sustain families, invest in business, and channel to welfare activities and development-oriented projects in the homeland.<sup>33</sup> One explanation that the interviewees provided is that the conflict-generated African diaspora in the Netherlands are smaller in numbers, not actively organised and not yet well-established compared with others already settled in France, Germany, Belgium and the UK. Examples given are the huge numbers of well-established and active Congolese in France and Belgium, Eritreans and Ethiopians in Germany and Somalis in the UK, etc. Implicit in this explanation is the idea that the African diaspora in other EU countries such as France, Belgium, Germany and the UK do more to finance the insurgency movements back home than the diaspora in the Netherlands because of the factors noted above. If this argument is empirically proven then it creates a policy challenge beyond the Netherlands which can better be addressed at the EU level. Responding to this formidable and complex policy challenge will require a two pronged strategy. The first strategy is to undertake a wider empirical study of the remittance behaviour and the general activities of the African diaspora in diverse EU countries, notably France, Germany and the UK where they mainly reside. This EU-wide empirical study is crucial in order to build up a strong knowledge base on the subject for sound policy-making. The second strategy is the need to develop an EU-wide policy instrument that addresses the involvement of the African diaspora and the impacts this could have on the domestic peace process in the homeland.

### **3.4. Existing evidence**

In the context of the African diaspora in the Netherlands, the existing evidence and empirical facts of the remittances transfer discussed in this section validate the argument of the second policy camp: that the remittances transferred by the African diaspora in the Netherlands are largely used for family subsistence, social welfare activities and development projects and only a small fraction of it is allocated to finance domestic conflicts in the homelands. This is the preliminary conclusion. It is not yet clear what kind of conclusion would be reached if an empirical study were to be conducted among the African diaspora in other EU countries which is beyond the scope of this study. It may, however, be a different conclusion than the one reached here.

The preliminary conclusion noted above, however, does not mean that the African diaspora in the Netherlands are wholly in favour of peace and communal reconciliation in their home

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<sup>33</sup> In 2003, a case study undertaken by A. King in Somaliland has come to the conclusion that collective remittances whether they are invested in community development projects or in violence are almost negligible compared to the volume of family upkeep and business flows. King, Alexandra. 2003. *Hargeisa Urban Household Economy Assessment* (FEWS Net, FSAU, Save the Children UK, Municipality of Hargeisa and Candlelight. 24 April) Online at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2003/fews-som-16may.pdf> However, a reliable conclusion can only be reached if more case studies are undertaken in different countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions.

countries. According to the interviewees, there are diaspora groupings in the Netherlands that are opposed to peace both in their attitudes and their actions. They staunchly support active armed militias in their respective countries of origin although the support at this moment is more moral and less in material aid. An example given is that of the Rwandan diaspora in the Netherlands, some of whom take uncompromising political positions regarding the conflict in the homeland and support locally operating hard-line groupings that do not want compromise. This is due to the fact most of the Rwandan diaspora in the Netherlands are from the ethnic Hutus, which reproduces the hardened and poisonous relations between the two main ethnic communities in Rwanda. Highlighting this example is important because, while some of African diaspora groupings in the Netherlands take moderate positions, others pursue hard-line stances regarding the conflict in the homeland. Among other factors, this is because of the different domestic circumstances in the homeland situations. Remember the observation already noted above that if the situation in the homeland is stable the behaviour of the diaspora tends to be positive and vice versa. This differentiation is indeed significant. Nonetheless, this is what one concerned interviewee lamented,

*In many diaspora groups in the Netherlands the positive forces for peace are in a minority. However if the majority of the diaspora are for peace and democratic dialogue they could definitely counterbalance and neutralise the destructive forces both in the diaspora and in the homeland.*

Nevertheless much of the discussion and research on African diaspora so far undertaken in the Netherlands concentrates exclusively on financial remittances. For example, at the University of Amsterdam, there are five Ph.D. theses currently being written on remittances sent by African diaspora in the Netherlands to their respective homelands. Most of these are based on case studies of the Ghanaian diaspora in this country. Similarly, development agencies such as Novib and Cordaid discuss and draft project proposals about remittances as if it is the only activity in which the African diaspora are engaged. Also the dominant focus of other donors has been largely on the patterns and uses of financial remittances in reducing poverty in the homeland.<sup>34</sup> However the transfer of remittances is not the only mechanism through which the diaspora influence developments in their homelands. There are also other mechanisms (though less studied) through which the African diaspora interact with their homelands and influence domestic dynamics. One of these aspects to which we shall now turn, is the diaspora's political involvement in the homeland.

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<sup>34</sup> House of Commons International Development Committee. 2004. *International Development – Sixth Report, Beyond the myths of migration* (London; The Stationary Office by Order of the House. 29 June) Online at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmintdev/79/7902.htm>

## **4. Diaspora political involvement in the homeland**

We now turn to a second policy area which is just as important as the financial remittances discussed above. This second policy area concerns the political involvement of the diaspora in the homeland politics. It is an area that has not yet been sufficiently studied. In general, there is still a very limited knowledge base for policy-making about the non-financial influences of diaspora in homeland development.<sup>35</sup> As such there is an urgent need to sponsor wider basic research and a more systematic collection of data which goes beyond policy analysis. Considering the critical nature of diaspora involvement in the homeland at present, it is thus imperative to invest heavily in a stronger knowledge base for policy-making purposes. In addition to the patterns and uses of financial remittances, it is also therefore crucial to gain a better understanding of other forms of interaction between diaspora and their countries of origin. Financial remittances are not the only means through which diaspora influence developments in the homeland. For instance, in many countries, diaspora are the main source of foreign direct investment (FDI), market development such as outsourcing of production, philanthropy and tourism. In addition to these, there are also other flows which Peggy Levitt describes as '*social remittances*' such as social capital, innovative ideas, technology transfers, knowledge, political contributions, democratic habits and attitudes, social values and cultural influence that are equally as significant as financial remittances.<sup>36</sup> Although they cannot be easily quantified, these non-financial flows may have even more profound impacts in affecting the attitudes of society towards the perception of freedom and tolerance of differences, human rights issues, governance and political practices in the homeland.

Most of the existing literature which informs the predominant perception on the subject stresses that the involvement of the diaspora in the homeland politics is largely negative. Accordingly, the activities of the diaspora are seen as serving to complicate the political process in the homeland. This is the position advanced by some of the World Bank researchers cited earlier.<sup>37</sup> However, some of the recent studies on the subject posit contrary explanations. The researchers of this alternative proposition suggest that the long-distance activities of diaspora have a moderating impact on conflict dynamics in the homeland. For instance, they argue that the involvement of diaspora in the homeland politics sometimes help to avert and neutralise violent conflict by promoting and funding non-violent forms of opposition.<sup>38</sup>

Let us find out how the activities of the African diaspora in the Netherlands empirically corroborate these contrasting positions. However before going any further, one basic fact needs to be stated. This is that most of the conflict-generated African diaspora in the Netherlands are forced to leave home as a result of political problems. Worsening domestic political turmoil has resulted in protracted civil wars and violent conflicts that make it difficult for them to stay in their homeland. This is in fact the foremost reason cited by the interviewees in explanation of why diaspora largely relate to the development in the homeland along political lines instead of civil society or other non-political lines. As Ross Herbert observed, "people who are forced

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<sup>35</sup> According to Kathleen Newland and Erin Patrick, "One-dimensional thinking about diasporas solely as a source of funds may lead to programming that produces unintended consequences. In addition to financial flows, diasporas have impact on political development, policy reforms, social attitudes, foreign relations, conflict resolution (or perpetuation), technology transfer, cultural preservation, leadership development and philanthropy - among other things". (Newland and Patrick 2004)

<sup>36</sup> Peggy Levitt describes 'social remittances' as "the ideas, behaviour, identities and social capital that flow from receiving country to sending country communities".  
Levitt, Peggy. 1998. "Social Remittances: Migration-driven, Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion" in *International Migration Review* Vol.32, No.4, Winter. p.926-948

<sup>37</sup> (Collier and Hoeffler 2000)

<sup>38</sup> Zunzer 2004); (Cheran 2003); (Newland and Patrick 2004)

under such political circumstances do not always leave home”.<sup>39</sup> The interviewees related further that it is therefore normal for diaspora to view the conflict in the homeland exclusively through a political lens. For example, according to Salih Kaki from the Sudan Civil Society Forum (SCSF), one thing that most diaspora share is that they are politically involved in the developments in the homeland.

*This is for the simple fact that most of us are victims of the bad politics back home. It is because of this painful experience that we have developed this prevailing tendency of supporting different political groupings at home that wage divisive politics and do not want to compromise. There are now attempts by some of us to break this totalising tendency and relate to the situation back home in a non-political manner. For example, we want to foster conflict transformation in Sudan through the civil society channels. In this respect we want to promote peace through development by focusing on other very important non-political issues, such as community help projects and socio-economic developments. It is in this way that we can positively contribute to the reduction and transformation of the social conflict among the economically marginalised groups in the homeland. We therefore need to stop thinking only along political lines. However, changing the old attitude will not be easy but it is our realisation now that as diaspora we can be more effective in promoting peace in our homeland if we stop relating to the situation back home mainly through political activities.*

#### **4.1. Negative political involvement**

Certain aspects of the long-distance involvement of the African diaspora in the homeland’s political dynamics tend to aggravate the domestic situation. As the interviewees pointed out there are seven critical ways that the involvement of diaspora in the homeland politics could have a negative impact. Firstly, diaspora largely attempt to seek a solution of the political problem in the homeland by supporting rival political groups locked in deadly power competition and do not want to find reconciliation for the common good. In doing so, diaspora have no qualms about providing financial resources, networks and war materials to political groupings that use violence as a means to their political ends. However, the rival domestic political groups sponsored by the diaspora pursue sectarian agendas that are detrimental to the collective nation-wide political interests in the homeland. For example, most of the rival domestic groups generally pursue narrow political interests that do not transcend ethnic, religious and regional issues. This prevailing tendency therefore makes diaspora groups become affiliated to different and rival political constituencies back home that are immersed in fragmented politics. In this respect, diaspora support the fragmentation of politics and political actors which is having a destructive impact on the situation in the homeland. More damagingly, the support of diaspora for violent rebel groups helps to boost the profile and financial powers of the self-styled warlords and faction leaders thereby ensuring the perpetuation of the violent and the destructive politics they pursue. One example of this is related by Mohamed Guled of the Somalische Vereniging Amsterdam en omgeving (SOMVAO). According to Guled,

*There are individuals among the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands who travel regularly to Somalia and Kenya carrying sometimes more than 10,000 Euros in cash which they give to the militia and faction leaders in order to buy favour. They do this in the hope that they will acquire positions in the emerging Somali government when their chosen faction leader becomes president or prime minister or a minister. The individual freelance activity of the diaspora helps to boost the financial power of the self-styled warlords and faction leaders and this ensures the continuation of the*

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<sup>39</sup> Herbert, Ross. 2003. e Africa: The Electronic Journal of Governance and Innovation, (September) Online at: [www.saiia.org.za](http://www.saiia.org.za)

*violent and the destructive politics they pursue. Another problem is that the financial support from the individuals and groups in the diaspora perpetuates the dominance of warlords, faction leaders and rebel groups in the political theatre and prevents the emergence of an alternative non-violent civilian leadership in the homeland.*

Secondly, diaspora complicate the political settlement in the homeland by demanding unrealistic political concessions through the local political organisations with which they are affiliated. This is because diaspora tend to be ignorant of dynamic social processes that have taken place since they left. In this regard, diaspora think in terms of old social realities that no longer exist. Consequently, the unrealistic demands of the diaspora result in the perpetuation of political chaos in the homeland. The domestic political parties cannot construct a stable political system in the homeland because of the negative influence of the diaspora. Yet, the diaspora do not suffer from the consequences of the political turmoil in the homeland which they perpetuate, as one interviewee stated.<sup>40</sup>

Thirdly, diaspora employ undemocratic means to affect the political arrangement in the homeland. Diaspora find it difficult to believe that political conflict in the homeland can be resolved through a peaceful and democratic dialogue. They think that endless talks and peaceful negotiations will not bring a solution to the enduring political turmoil in the homeland. They therefore believe that the conflict has to be solved by force and thus give assistance to those groups who are using military means to tackle the political problem. According to one interviewee,

*The political behaviour of the some of the African diaspora groupings in the Netherlands towards their homeland is as uncompromising, rigid, categorical and undemocratic as that of the African ruling elites and governments they abhor and denounce as illegitimate. Diaspora are undemocratic as they often reproduce the undemocratic political behaviour in the homeland. The only difference between the two is that African diaspora live in the midst of a host society which practices democratic norms and that they seem to be immune to this ethos. Some African diaspora groupings support both morally and materially those destructive domestic forces that want to change the political power in the homeland through undemocratic means. The main reason is that African diaspora in the Netherlands are also the product of the society that produces the undemocratic power elites in the homeland.*

The consequence is that some diaspora groupings and individuals in the Netherlands now support diverse armed militias in their respective homelands which have refused to negotiate and bring about a peaceful end to the conflict. A possible scenario is that these warmongering armed militias could become a problem in the homeland in the future when peace is restored. They could become a problem to the future government of the homeland since they are not used to resolving differences through peaceful means but by force. The members in the diaspora are now sowing the seeds of this likely scenario that could have a dramatic effect on peace and stability in the homeland in the future. However many individuals in the diaspora are not aware of this problem, as they cannot think of the negative consequences of their current activities in the long term. The challenge here is to learn how the negative activities of the diaspora groupings in the Netherlands can be turned into constructive gains for the people in the homeland.

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<sup>40</sup> In another context, Benedict Anderson described the long-distance involvement of diaspora in the homeland political dynamics as the following: "While technically a citizen on the state in which he comfortably lives, but to which he may feel little attachment, he finds it tempting to play identity politics by participating (via propaganda, money, weapons, any way but voting) in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat – now only fax time away. But this citizenless participation is inevitably non-responsible – our hero will have to answer for, or pay the price of, the long-distance politics he undertakes". (Anderson 1992)

Fourthly, African diaspora groupings often reproduce and sometimes multiply the social and political fragmentation and other sectarian cleavages already existing in the homeland. African diaspora form interest groups based on religious, ethnic, regional, political and many other particularised networks in the host countries like the Netherlands. The multiplication of interests along dozens of competing lines does not promote the cohesion of a community either in the homeland or in the diaspora. Diaspora are free to organise themselves along all sorts of interest lines but it is the depth of the fragmentation that is detrimental. Widening further the divisions already existing makes the rebuilding of harmonious internal relations among the diaspora groupings much more difficult. An example provided is the Rwandese diaspora in the Netherlands who number a little bit over 1300 and yet have 13 organisations representing diverse interest groupings. This extreme fragmentation reinforces not only the strained divisions of the Rwandan community both in the diaspora and in the homeland, but also undermines their collective strength. This particularised tendency among the African diaspora in the Netherlands therefore negatively retards the process of transforming the society in the homeland into a cohesive community which is the foremost precondition of building stable nation states on the continent. *It is also through this particularistic tendency that African diaspora influence the foreign policy of their host governments like the Netherlands sometimes in particular ways which are not constructive in the political dynamics of the homeland.*

Fifthly, African diaspora groups use the modern media such as Internet, and mobile phones as well as newspapers and radio stations they man in the host countries to influence, incite hatred and manipulate the perceptions of the homeland public, spread misinformation, propaganda and divisive political positions. Glancing at the websites visited by Ethiopians, Congolese, and Eritreans gives a sufficient indication. The Internet in particular has become an important media platform among the diaspora groups to vent anger, frustration and carry out destructive political campaigns. Furthermore, African diaspora provide media platforms to opposition parties and rebels they support that are active in the homeland. Diaspora make media available to these opposition forces to ventilate their political views (which are mostly non-compromising and largely destructive) and increase their profile and influence both among the homeland public and those in the diaspora. Terrance Lyons observes that,

‘Often many of the media sources are run from abroad partly because you cannot run a newspaper in many of these war zones or create a website, or record videotapes or do radio shows, but you can in New York, London, Hamburg, Lisbon, and elsewhere abroad. An example that I know best is that Ethiopian politics, the debates, the way that the conflict is framed is largely framed by Ethiopians here in Washington and Western Europe particularly in Germany, because they have the newspapers, the websites and the radio shows. Within Ethiopia it is very difficult to run some of these media operations, it costs money. Newspapers are regularly closed down in Ethiopia and so a lot of the debate about what is acceptable and what is not unacceptable from a political point of view are set or established by the people in the diaspora and then filtered back home’.<sup>41</sup>

Preliminary results of an initial study that we have undertaken reveal that media platforms are used by governments, rebel groups and diaspora groups for destructive and narrow gains which are hampering conflict transformation in homelands. Media platforms can be used for fostering constructive dialogue and social harmony among diaspora groups as well as for education and information sharing. It is therefore important to make individuals and groups in the diaspora conscious both of the negative as well as the positive side of the media platforms.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This is a radio interview given by Terrance Lyons which is conducted and transcribed by Julian Portilla in 2003. The whole transcript can be found online at:

<http://www.beyondintractability.org/iweb/audio/lyons-t-4-diasporal.html>

<sup>42</sup> (Junné and Mohamoud 2004)

Sixthly, African diaspora groupings transfer equipment to domestic insurgents and armed militias such as computers, powerful radios, mobile phones and TV satellites.

This modern communication equipment enables insurgents operating in jungles and in remote hinterland areas to constantly communicate with the outside world.

One diaspora interviewed noted that ‘the wonder of modern technology is the sight of mobile phones in the African villages that do not have electricity and fixed telephone lines’.

Furthermore diaspora provide skills to the militias in their homeland such as computer programming, etc. Diaspora transmit the skills by returning to the homeland more frequently thanks to high speed travel and cheap flights. The skills provide domestic militias and insurgent groups with the know-how to use the modern equipment they receive from abroad. In fact, this is how the transnational practices facilitated by the diaspora work. African diaspora have now become enmeshed in new strategic networks that transfer modern skills expertise and resources from the global to the local. In this transnational practice African diaspora are forging new patterns of local-global linkages and networks which may not always be positive.

Finally, some African diaspora groups in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the EU act as political wings abroad for the armed militias who are waging violent conflicts in the homeland. An example is the African diaspora group representing the Burundian Front National de Libération (FNL) militia group in the Netherlands. The group acts as a political wing and as interlocutor with the Dutch government, lobbies for policies favourable to the rebel FNL. However, after the FNL militia massacred Congolese refugees in a Gatumba refugee camp in August last year, Agnes Van Ardenne broke diplomatic contacts with the rebel group. She also vowed to take the diaspora group representing of the FLN militia in the Netherlands to the International Court of Justice since according to her they are agents of a ‘terrorist’ group.<sup>43</sup> This case makes explicit how a diaspora group in the Netherlands is actively involved in providing an international network and political support for a violent rebel organisation operating both in Burundi and Congo (DRC).

Another aspect related to the discussion above from a different perspective that is worth noting here is the serious contradiction between the attitudes and actions of some of the African diaspora groupings and organisations regarding homelands and their social position in the Netherlands. Most of the diaspora interviewed came to the Netherlands seeking refuge from the political conflicts in their homeland and they were granted to stay in the country on humanitarian grounds. This dramatically changed the social position they had while there were at home. In the Netherlands, they are expected to regard themselves as members of civil society rather than political society. Yet, being oblivious to the social position and identity changes they went through (such as obtaining a new nationality) some of them still act as if they are political agents abroad for political parties in the homeland. In other words, despite being in exile some African diaspora groups are still negatively involved in the political conflicts in their homeland, which forced them to leave home in the first place. This is a contradiction that individuals and groupings in the diaspora have to address, as they cannot at the same time be members of the civil society in the host country and the political society in the homeland. The issue also raises the question of loyalty and the choices that the diaspora have to make between the host country and the homeland. One Rwandan interviewed stated that the Rwandan government has refused to enter a dialogue with us. This statement raises questions, notably: who are you and where is your social base since you are in the diaspora and not in the homeland? Are you a member of a political or civil society? Furthermore, some diaspora take hard-line positions regarding the conflict in the homeland for different reasons. However, one important reason identified is that diaspora are outside the political process in the homeland that is dynamic and changing, a fact to which some of them seem oblivious as they still entertain the old realities that no longer hold on the ground.

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<sup>43</sup> NRC Handelsblad, Monday 23 Augustus 2004, p.3.

## **4.2. Positive political involvement**

There is however a flipside to the story narrated above. The diaspora interviewed have also spoken of the positive involvement of the diaspora in their homeland politics. The diaspora interviewed explained that the ‘meddling’ of the diaspora in the politics of their home countries is not always negative. The simple fact according to some of the interviewees is that the diaspora are not a monolithic entity. Diaspora entertain diverse political views and strategies of engagement that are brought to bear on the politics of their homelands. There are cases where the active involvement of the diaspora in the struggles in their homelands has resulted in positive political changes in the domestic situation. This involvement as the interviewees explain takes different forms.

Firstly, diaspora proactively support positive political forces in the homeland by transmitting valuable new political ideas and practices that help the promotion of a democratic political life in the homeland. The purpose is to nurture and inculcate democratic political habits in the minds of the political society that gradually neutralise the prevailing authoritarian tendency in the power politics on the continent. The eventual aim of this activity is to contribute to the process of promoting democratic political and governance habits in Africa.

As one interviewee put it,

*Being diaspora resident in the Netherlands and in other Western countries, we are privileged to live in democratic societies and are thereby exposed to democratic political dealings and practices. This experience enables us to transfer or bring back valuable new political ideas and practices that can help the promotion of a democratic political life in Africa.*

A significant communication tool noted by the interviewees for disseminating these valuable new political ideas and practices are online forums that are able to link various positive political forces both in the homeland and in the diaspora into organised discussion and action groups. This is a tangible example of how the diaspora provide support to the constructive forces on the ground that are struggling to restore order and political stability in the homeland.

Secondly, diaspora help positive political forces at home to make contact with important and powerful political networks abroad. Some diaspora interviewed said they were members of the established political parties in the Netherlands. This strategic position enables them to facilitate valuable networks for the political parties in the homeland through the established political parties with which they are affiliated in the Netherlands. These networks thus boost the moral and political clout of the positive forces on the ground. This is also another tangible way that diaspora contribute to international efforts which impact positively on their respective homelands in terms of peace building, conflict transformation and building a stable governance.

Thirdly, African diaspora, through the Dutch civil society organisations and others in the West to which they are linked with play a role in pressure groups which aim to influence the political developments in their respective African homelands. African diaspora promote and demand democratic and well-functioning public institutions that are accountable to the people, transparent, and respect the freedom of expression and protest. African diaspora in fact ventilate through their forged transnational networks a radical political change that is now profoundly reshaping the political thinking and expectations of the people on the continent.

Fourthly, diaspora contribute positively to the peace dialogue and political settlement by making their expertise available to the rival political parties in the homeland in order to help them settle their political differences through negotiation and binding agreements. Diaspora interviewed cited concrete cases both present and in the past. A present case cited is the contribution of the Somali diaspora in the Nairobi peace negotiations between the political factions in 2003/2004. Somali diaspora made their expertise available to help enhance the articulation and negotiating

capacities of the local protagonists. For instance, Somali diaspora have undertaken to draft strategic documents which served as a basis for dialogue between the conflicting factions in the homeland.<sup>44</sup> Another example is that of the Eritrean diaspora who helped draft the first constitution of the country after it separated from Ethiopia in 1993. In turn, the diaspora were given voting rights in the future elections of the country.

The diaspora interviewed also spoke of past experiences such as the activities of strong networks of South African diaspora whose huge contributions and personal sacrifices eventually helped end the rule of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Other cases were also mentioned where the diaspora returned equipped with valuable new ideas and public management skills that improved the governance practices in the homeland. One example often cited is the president of Uganda Yoweri Museveni who returned from exile in Europe and succeeded in putting an end to the enduring political chaos in his homeland. Museveni did even better as he succeeded in building up a stable and prosperous country from ruins within a short period of time – a remarkable achievement.

Finally, during the post-conflict reconstruction period, the diaspora due to their generally advanced educational levels can assist new governments in drafting treaties, agreements and constitutions, identifying policy priorities for social, economic and political reconstruction, and formulating strategies for implementation. They can also provide advice to the governments in the homeland on diverse policy issues ranging from rebuilding justice systems to disarming the armed militias. An example cited is the Sudanese diaspora who are now actively involved in supporting the nascent regional government in the south of Sudan on different fronts. It is in this way that the diaspora contributes to the rehabilitation of political institutions and civil administrations badly weakened or devastated by conflict. Yet, the organisations interviewed were of the view that although diaspora can and are already playing very important roles in peace and political settlements in the homeland, their invaluable potential has not been sufficiently harnessed by either the homeland or the host country governments. The strategic role that the diaspora can play in peace building and reconciliation efforts has also been emphasised by recent studies on the subject.<sup>45</sup> If we make up the balance in this foregoing discussion, we can conclude that African diaspora groupings in the Netherlands make both positive and negative contributions to homeland conflicts. What is not clear, however, is the magnitude of the impact of long-distance diaspora involvement in the homeland situation. The answer to this question is not easy to determine as the limited empirical data currently available cannot provide a reliable conclusion. Thus, further empirical research on the ground is essential in order to ascertain the extent of the impact of the diaspora interaction on the homeland situations.

### **4.3. Diaspora as information source**

African diaspora have the comparative advantage of being able to bridge the information gap. They can bring information about political and human rights violations committed by the governments and rebel armed groups in the homelands to the attention of the outside world.

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<sup>44</sup> Zunzer corroborates this interview when he notes that, "many Somali participants at the [Nairobi] conference came from Western diaspora communities in Australia, Canada, England, Italy and the USA. All factions brought their experts from the diaspora to advise them politically on all issues on the agenda, from questions of power sharing to approaches to rural development" (Zunzer, 2004:33).

<sup>45</sup> Some of these studies suggest that, "Beyond seeming migrants as a source of resources for development and reconstruction, steps could be taken to give diasporas a more active voice. These could include involving diasporas in international forums to co-ordinate resources flows from donors and from diasporas for development and reconstruction. In addition, diasporas could be allowed greater influence in peace-building and reconciliation efforts. Since nongovernmental organisations have become increasingly involved both in advocacy and in the delivery of aid, and often have direct lines of communication with diasporic groups, they are well placed to act as interlocutors promoting diaspora participation". (Nyberg Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002)

Some of them already act as a conduit of information. For instance, they provide reliable information about the political situation on the ground to the concerned policy makers in the Netherlands and other EU countries who are involved in the peace process from a distance. This valuable information to which the diaspora alone have access through informal channels and reliable local contacts is usually vital for the formulation of an appropriate policy aimed at improving the situation pertaining to conflict resolution, stability and good governance in the homeland. This is how Francois Xavier Kanyamihinda of Dusabane – Nieuwe Generatie van Rwanda expressed it,

*when it comes to certain African countries with protracted violent conflicts, one realises that it is hard to get the true picture of what is happening on the ground. These are the countries where democracy and freedom are still at a low ebb and where 'official' sources cannot be trusted. For the Dutch government to properly implement its African policy, it is very important to rely upon reliable and accurate information. Sometimes, the Dutch embassies and even the Dutch monitoring organisations on the ground cannot get accurate information due to the complexity of local conditions and social networks and the ignorance of local languages. We therefore believe that diaspora organisations in the Netherlands are well-placed to gain access to that kind of sensitive information that is needed to formulate appropriate policy strategies aimed at improving the situation pertaining to conflict resolution, stability and good governance. The added value of our position is that we have regular contacts in so many ways with groups and individuals at different social and political levels back home and we are continually updated on the situation in the homeland".<sup>46</sup>*

This advantage enables diaspora groups to bring better quality information, views and perspectives to human rights activists, journalists, development practitioners and policy makers in the Netherlands involved in the peace process in their homelands from a distance.<sup>47</sup> It also enables many groups and individuals in the diaspora communities to be seen as a strategic potential for working on the efforts to contribute to constructive conflict transformation in their countries of origin. African diaspora tend to believe that peace and stability are the foremost preconditions for social advancement, economic progress and sustainable development. Some of the African diaspora organisations interviewed in this study have indicated their active involvement in the promotion of peace on the continent. A good example is the Friends of the Blind in Congo (*Vrienden van Blinden Congo*) established by the Congolese diaspora in the Netherlands. In the words of the organisation's George Mikwasa, "of course we are actively involved in the peace efforts in the Great Lakes. For example, recently in collaboration with our Rwandan brothers we discussed the possibilities of finding peace in the region and the role we can play in this effort".

Furthermore, African diaspora in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the West play a major role in highlighting the human rights violations that take place in their homelands. They take up this issue by informing concerned actors, organisations and government decision-makers in the

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<sup>46</sup> See further the online debate on the Africa Policy Memorandum of the current cabinet initiated by NCDO in 2003. Online at: [www.afrikabeleid.nl](http://www.afrikabeleid.nl)

<sup>47</sup> This is a point that the Minister for Development Cooperation Agnes van Ardenne has also recognised. For instance in an online debate on the Africa Policy Memorandum initiated by NCDO in 2003, Van Ardenne stated that "African Diaspora are in a unique position as they live in two cultures, or between two cultures, and thus have the advantage of intimate knowledge about different social situations, local conditions and networks and cultural experiences in Africa to a far greater degree than people with a Dutch background. The comparative advantage as an added value enables the African Diaspora to bring better quality information and different views and perspective to human rights activities, journalists, development practitioners and policy makers in the Netherlands involved in the peace process in their respective countries of origin from a distance". Online at: [www.afrikabeleid.nl](http://www.afrikabeleid.nl)

Netherlands about certain political and human rights violations of which the international community is often unaware. For instance, using informal channels and reliable local contacts, African diaspora provide information on the whereabouts of arrested journalists, human rights activists, politically motivated persecutions etc. They are also consulted by human rights organisations and other agencies such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross, to help verify information, locate local networks, provide advice and background situational analysis. African diaspora engage in these activities on a voluntary basis.

## **5. Diaspora civic-oriented involvement in the homeland**

This is the third policy area, and the one which has received the least policy attention. It is also the area which has been least studied in comparison to other policy areas. Yet, this area, as the diaspora attest, is where the activities of the diaspora are largely concentrated. It is also an area where the activities undertaken by the diaspora directly contribute to peacemaking efforts in the homeland. In this study, the rubric ‘civic-oriented’ includes activities such as community-oriented development and business investment as these are central to the non-political involvement of the diaspora in the homeland domestic situations. Members of the diaspora interviewed related that for the most part they contribute to peace and political stability in the homeland indirectly through *civil society, development* and *business* engagement. A simple answer that the diaspora interviewed provided is that they see themselves as natural allies of the civil society rather than the political society in the homeland. It is thus normal that they focus on civic-oriented activities and thereby help nurture and widen the civil society peace constituency in the homeland. The impact of this civic-oriented diaspora involvement in domestic development in the homeland can be better observed at sub-national, local and village rather than national levels. The diaspora interviewed hold the view that a viable peace in the homeland needs to be initiated not only from the top-down, but also from the bottom up, in a spirit of diligence and complementarity. They therefore argue that peace building can only be effectively promoted if national, sub-national and local activities are simultaneously undertaken at different levels and are consciously linked between different strategic sites and actors. It is from this optic that African diaspora contribute to peace and conflict transformation efforts at sub-national and local levels through civil society construction, livelihood development and business investment in the homeland.

### **5.1. Civil society construction**

Diaspora promote peace and political stability through the construction of civil society associations in the homeland in different ways. For example, some diaspora first set up a civil society association in the host country and then return home and establish a local branch in their hometowns in the country of origin. They also bring with them organisational know-how, financial management and administration skills and the ethos of collective associations that they impart to the domestic cadres manning the organisation. The transmission of this form of diaspora social remittance – which according to Levitt comprises *normative structures, systems of practices* and *social capital* - helps to augment the knowledge capacity of the social activists in the homeland.<sup>48</sup> The importance of this initiative by the diaspora is that they would remain committed to nurturing and consolidating the nascent civil society association they set up in collaboration with the positive domestic forces in the homeland. In this respect, the sustainability, consolidation and success of the domestic civil society organisation is largely dependent on the commitment and the support by the diaspora. One interviewee responded that,

*If we are one of the stakeholders in a civil society organisation in the homeland we will help ensure its sustainability. This commitment will be sustained. This is for the simple reason that we partially own the organisation and that ownership forces us to continue investing in it. In addition to this, the social and cultural affinities we share with beneficiaries at the location have a compelling obligation for us that we would remain involved in the project for a long period of time.*

This is a positive new development that needs to be appreciated. A decade ago one would not have imagined that diaspora would have acquired the mental attitude and also the means and

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<sup>48</sup> (Levitt 1998)

capacities to guarantee the construction and the growth of civil society associations in the homelands. It is testimony that it is not only the donor agencies that are contributing to the development of civil society in Africa. In an earlier study undertaken among the African diaspora in the Netherlands, we observed that diaspora are gradually developing a more externally-oriented attitude. For instance, whereas in the past they were primarily concerned with integrating socially and economically in the new host country, many of the African diaspora are now also developing an outward-looking concern with development in Africa. While their first concern is with promoting their social mobility and position in the Netherlands, they are also intent on contributing to the social change, welfare and the sustainable development in Africa. The challenges involved in combining these two different activities are indeed formidable given the weakness of their social and economic position in the new homeland. Yet, the African diaspora in the Netherlands are stoically responding to these two different challenges arising from contemporary global inequality.<sup>49</sup>

Some other members of the diaspora interviewed say that they provide support to civil society organisations that are already set up by the domestic forces in the homeland. Since the mid-1990s there has been a noticeable increase in the formation and proliferation of local NGOs, civil society associations and welfare organisations in the conflict-plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of African regions. They are filling a vacuum created by the weakening or the collapse of governance structures at all levels of society. Diaspora provide support to the already existing civil society organisations by sending them office equipment mainly computers, telefaxes, as well as literature and other important information with the aim of enhancing the skills and capacity of the staff running those organisations. As one interviewee noted: “most of the advanced computer websites used by civil society associations as well as rebel organisations are set up and designed by IT skilled diaspora abroad”. Furthermore, skilled personnel among the diaspora periodically return home for a short period of time to provide workshop training, skills in project designs and implementation and management expertise. Diaspora organisations collect money to pay the travel costs of the diaspora experts volunteering to undertake capacity-building assignments at home. The purpose of the diaspora efforts is to enhance not only the capacities and organisational structures of the civil society networks but also to instil the local community with a collective and a civic-minded mentality. This civic-minded awareness-raising component of the diaspora activities is promising as it can help nurture the development of the social capital of the local community in the long term. In this civil society formation process at the local level, diaspora are playing an indispensable role because of the limited resources and capacities of the local forces when it comes to formal structures and organisations. In this respect, diaspora are forming an organic part in the process since they are participating actively in domestic social transformations in the homeland. This is indeed an important dimension which is not widely known, is under-appreciated and also requires further study.<sup>50</sup> A remarkable observation to note here is that the long-distance involvement of the diaspora in the domestic dynamics in the homeland is creating forms of civic institutions and associations which are hybrid in their mould as the experience in some pockets in Congo and Somalia makes clear. These new forms of civic association are emerging as local processes yet they are partially shaped by ideas, knowledge and experiences informed by the outlook and the world view of the transnational African diaspora as well as the international NGOs active on the ground.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> As we discovered in that earlier study two factors contribute to the changing mindsets of the African diasporas in the Netherlands. The first is their numerical strength. This numerical increase has made African diaspora conscious of their power to contribute to positive efforts both here and in Africa. The second is that some of the African Diaspora communities have now been settled in the Netherlands for long enough to feel that they are now in a financial and intellectual position to help the people in Africa to cope with harsh social, political and economic reality. (Mohamoud 2003)

<sup>50</sup> Mohamoud, Abdullah A. 2002. 'Het nieuwe Afrika groeit van onder af' in NRC Handelsblad. 5 August (page 8) .

<sup>51</sup> Mohamoud, Abdullah A. 2003. *Institutional and Capacity Enhancement: An African Perspective, a report for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (The Hague; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sub-Saharan Department. March)

Another important aspect highlighted by the diaspora interviewed is the proactive role they play in the creation of civic administrations at the village and district levels in the areas where the local NGOs they support operate. According to them some of the civil society organisations they support have now been operating on the ground for quite some time and have already built up reliable social infrastructures. They have done this by active mobilisation of broad cadres representing diverse interests in the local community such as village heads, community leaders, chiefs, religious figures, educated and experienced professionals, traders and businessmen for a long period of time. One very significant achievement of this process is its success in binding such diverse sections of the community into a collective social force. Therefore building on this rudimentary social infrastructure already laid out, diaspora are taking one step further which is the constitution of civil administration structures at the local levels. According to one interviewee,

*Lack of civil administration is lawlessness. Civil society institutions and organisations cannot guarantee peace and social stability on the ground because of the particular nature of the work. Thus, the setting up of local civil authorities and administrations is very much needed in order to consolidate the progress that civic institutions have made so far. It is for this reason that we want to move one step further and contribute to the efforts of constructing viable governance at the sub-national and local levels. This is important since viable governance can only take root in the homelands if it is anchored in solid sub-national and local social institutions.*

The construction of civil administration from scratch is not an easy enterprise. The diaspora interviewed said that they are undertaking this task by channelling more social remittance resources into activities geared to enhancing and upgrading the administrative and governance capacity in the homeland. These include providing training in order to raise qualified local administrators and also sponsoring the organisation of seminars, workshops and public discussions, etc, where information, skills, experience and new ideas are exchanged and shared. Others responded that they channel more funding and expertise into democratisation projects in the homelands that are geared to promote social emancipation, empowerment, political participation and good governance. They therefore sponsor civic-oriented projects (which are sometimes set up in collaboration with local activists) that are geared to capacity enhancement and genuine social emancipation. As one interviewee explained,

*The reasoning being that empowered and emancipated people are best positioned to use their maximum potential for self-development and to make a break with the past and take their destiny into their own hands. We in the diaspora identify these socially-oriented projects as priorities in building peace constituencies and good governance culture in our countries of origin. We also urge and persuade the mainstream donor development organisations in the Netherlands in the public discussion forums to orient more of their development assistance in the homelands towards these efforts.*

This clearly illustrates that some of the African diaspora in the Netherlands are setting the agenda for an alternative approach to post-conflict domestic social restructuring and democratic development in the homeland.

Another aspect relating to the peace process which has received little publicity is the innovative manner in which some diaspora groupings and organisations are addressing the conflict back home. For instance, some members of the diaspora interviewed related that they are attempting to foster the peace process in the homeland by mobilising and promoting alternative and genuine non-political peace makers from civil society both in the homeland and among the diaspora. These “alternative” peacemakers include public personalities such as poets, writers, musicians, prominent scholars, sports stars such as football players, etc. These notables are selected on the basis that they have a moral authority and command public respect across ethnic, clan and group

lines and, above all, cannot be accused of seeking political office. This is how Mohamed Guled of the SOMVAO organisation put it,

*Since 2003 we have been trying to mobilise and promote alternative and genuine non-political peacemakers from the civil society actors both in Somalia and among the diaspora. The peacemakers from the civil society that we are trying to mobilise so as to play an active role in promoting peace in the homeland are those who have a moral authority and command a public respect across ethnic, clan and group lines and above all do not seek a political office. The groups we want to take the lead in the peace process are known public figures such as poets, writers, musicians, prominent scholars, sport stars such as football players, etc. For example, in 2003 we hosted a widely attended public meeting among the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands at which a well respected and a very prominent Somali poet spoke who was on a peace mission in Europe. The speech of the poet was inspiring as it raised our consciousness and taught us that it is possible to mobilise respected figures in the community, wherever they are, who are willing to use their social status for fostering conflict transformation in the homeland. The tour of the poet in Europe was intended to raise awareness, mobilise and persuade the Somalis in the diaspora to contribute to the peace initiatives undertaken in Somalia. The peace tour of the poet has now been dubbed the Hadarawi Peace Initiative (HPI). Hadarawi is the name of the poet. Under the Hadarawi Peace Initiative, we have organised several meetings and a major conference in the Netherlands on 25 September, 2004. That September conference produced concrete outcomes such as the setting up of network peace committees in several cities in the Netherlands where most Somalis reside as well as wider peace networks across Europe.*

This innovative initiative is commendable and deserves to be more widely publicised. It is indeed a unique initiative that other diaspora groups can replicate in their peace-making efforts in their homelands.

## **5.2. Livelihood development**

Some diaspora organisations interviewed related that they contribute to the peace and political stability in the homeland through livelihood development at the local level. They explained that in many instances domestic conflicts in the homeland are caused not only by power struggles at the national level but are also triggered by unequal distribution of the national resources, extreme social and economic imbalances, marginalisation and grinding poverty at different societal levels. Accordingly, these multiple dimensions of the conflict need to be addressed at several levels. Diaspora interviewed stated that they address some of the economic causes of the conflicts and thereby make a positive contribution to the reduction and stabilisation of the social tensions of the economically marginalised groups at the bottom of society. They undertake this effort by setting up community and welfare projects at local levels. There is now a wide range of African diaspora established associations engaged in a variety of activities. There are hometown associations, self-help group associations, ethnic associations, alumni associations, religious associations, professional associations, charitable organisations, development NGOs, humanitarian relief organisations, investment groups, etc. These diverse associations organise fundraising events and collect money for a variety of welfare and development projects and business investments back in Africa.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> As C. Ndofor-Tah notes, "the types of activities include community-to community transfer, identity-building/ awareness raising, lobbying in current home on issues relating to ancestral home, trade with and investment in ancestral home, transfers of intangible resources, support for development on a more 'professional' basis and payment of taxes in the ancestral home".  
Ndofor-Tah, C. 2000. *Diaspora and Development: Contributions by African Organisations in the UK to Africa's Development* (London; AFFORD)

Diaspora in general and the African diaspora in the Netherlands in particular have been engaged in various forms of development projects in their countries of origin for quite some time. However, their activities were not previously visible because the number of people and associations involved in such endeavours were very small and the projects were few. Recently this limited commitment has assumed a more comprehensive dimension. Since 1996 a significant number of African diaspora groups and associations have embarked on sponsoring small-scale development projects in different parts of Africa. So far no concrete figures are available about the number of projects that the African diaspora in the Netherlands sponsor in Africa. A separate study is required to ascertain the actual number of projects that African diaspora now sponsor in Africa as no such study has as yet been made. Nevertheless, at the micro-level the small-scale development projects sponsored by the African diaspora despite their limited nature contribute considerably to the social welfare of the poor. Most of the development projects sponsored by the diaspora are geared to rehabilitating health centres and facilities, building schools, setting vocational training centres, supporting rural farmers and helping create income-generating activities for the destitute and marginalised groups in society. In the wider context, these activities symbolise a new pattern of global and local networks and linkages – a new trend.

Diaspora undertake these community projects through individual and collective efforts. For example, in some instances, individuals and groups within a diaspora donate cash, materials and needed equipment to various bodies and institutions in the homeland which help improve community facilities at village and town level.<sup>53</sup> And as some researchers observed these efforts contribute greatly towards poverty alleviation among individuals through job creation, and provide needed services to the communities through the provision of basic public goods and service delivery.<sup>54</sup>

### **5.3. Concrete cases**

Concrete cases of collective efforts undertaken by the African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands can be cited. One such case is that undertaken by the Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA) set up by the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. HIRDA supports education and health projects and micro credit schemes for women in two provinces in southern Somalia. HIRDA is by far the most successful self-help organisation of the Somali diaspora in the Netherlands. The organisation collects and remits donations amounting to more than €200,000 per year to Somalia. HIRDA enjoys a wide transnational networking relationship with other organisations established by the Somali diaspora in Europe and North America who engage in similar development activities in Somalia.

In an interview, the director of the HIRDA organisation, Mohamed Basweyne outlined their current activities in Somalia. One of the current projects that HIRDA sponsor is education and in particular vocational training. HIRDA has set up vocational training courses to provide skills to child soldiers as well as the many unemployed youths roaming around the towns. The youth are trained to become carpenters, farmers and bricklayers for housing constructions. The purpose of this skills training is that after they complete the training, they can get work as, for example, carpenters. Some of the first groups have now opened two carpenter shops in the two provinces where the training courses are running. HIRDA targets the youth to prevent them from joining the numerous armed militia groupings that perpetuate the wars and civil conflict in

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<sup>53</sup> Chikezie, Chukwu-Emeka. 2000. "Africans Help their Homelands" in *West Africa*, 13 November. p. 12-14

<sup>54</sup> Asiedu, Alex B. 2003. "Some Benefits of Migrants Return Visits to Ghana" a paper presented at International Workshop on Migration and Poverty in West Africa at Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex, March 13-14

the area. Militias often recruit the youth for banditry schemes. Unskilled and unemployed youths are easy targets for the militia. HIRDA also targets the militia leaders since some of them have already gained some skills through formal education but cannot use them anymore because of lack of meaningful employment. HIRDA employ some of the militia leaders as teachers at schools, nurses in the town clinics and security guards etc, so as to give them a means of living outside the militia life.

According to HIRDA's director,

*Our organisation directly contributes to the peace and stability in the homeland by stopping the youth joining the many armed militia groupings by giving them vocational training so as to earn a living without practicing violence. We are therefore reducing the conflict in the locality by targeting the youth and militia leaders who are the main source of the violent conflict since most militias in the areas where we are operating are child soldiers.*

One problem which the director of HIRDA related to us is the complaints that his organisation hears every time it convenes community meetings in the areas where it operates. For instance, many of the local community leaders complain that the diaspora must stop sending money to rival militia groups in the region that are locked in constant wars and whose violence has become a source of recurring communal tensions in the area.

Another area in which HIRDA engaged in the homeland is agricultural development. HIRDA has bought land, set up a farm and provided shelters in the farm to 20 destitute families. The families are provided with training, fertiliser, seeds, and two tractors to farm the land. The aim of the project is to generate an income for the poorest of the poor that have no one else to whom they can turn for help. In a situation where the scarcity of resources is the source of the conflict, this modest development project can make a difference particularly for the poor. According to the director of HIRDA, "with limited financial means, big results can be achieved. This is what we have realised since we started the community-oriented project in the homeland. The comparative advantage we have as a diaspora is that we are culturally linked with the people on the ground. This cultural affinity means that we are very familiar with the social environment on the ground. It also enables us to know whom we should trust; the reliability and the commitment of the local actors we work with; and even the prices of the domestic goods we need for construction, etc. This intimate background information has been a source of the success of our organisation on the ground. We therefore provide an example of a best practice, and today even some of the donor organisations who are also active in the area want to learn lessons and emulate. The reason is that despite the greater financial means of the donor agencies, the rate of return still remains a minimum because of the limited knowledge of the complexity of the social environment on the ground."

Another example of a community-oriented project initiated by the diaspora is that of the Friends of the Blind in Congo (*Vrienden van Blinden Congo*) established by the Congolese diaspora in the Netherlands. The organisation was established to help the blind people in Congo who are mostly concentrated in large cities such as Kinshasa. The organisation collects money, medicine, equipment and material donations that are transferred to them directly. The foundation now assists and provides financial and medical services directly to about 4000 blind people in Kinshasa. This assistance also indirectly benefits the many others who help the blind people. Their number is estimated to be around 32,000 people. The Friends of the Blind in Congo collaborates with its sister organisation in Congo. The present political climate encourages the Congolese diaspora to establish NGOs abroad with the aim of contributing to the social welfare and the well-being of the disabled Congolese in their homeland.

A third example is the DIR organisation, which was established by the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands. DIR means a thin thread in the national language of Ethiopia and refers to the

Ethiopian saying that many thin threads can together bind a lion. The inspiring message of this age-old proverb is the need to combine forces in order to make a difference. DIR strives to improve the social and economic position of the Ethiopian community in the Netherlands. In addition to this task, DIR is also one of the leading African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands that are active in the field of knowledge transfer and capacity enhancement to Africa. DIR now supports five projects in Ethiopia including computer-training centres, church activities for peace dialogue and community agricultural projects. In these projects, DIR creates employment opportunities for the unemployed and provides benefits to more than 1000 people. According to Mulugeta Asmelash, 'our target is to realise 100 small-scale private development projects in Ethiopia within five years from now'.

These are just few concrete examples of the ways in which the African diaspora in the Netherlands have taken the initiative and are setting up community-oriented development projects for the poor and the helpless in their home communities in Africa. In this context, African diaspora are directly and efficiently contributing to the reduction of the poverty which is one of the chief sources of conflict for those at the bottom of society.

#### **5.4. Business investment**

African diaspora promote peace and social stability in the homeland through business investment and setting up private enterprises. The building up of diaspora-financed private wealth generates employment opportunities for the unemployed and thereby directly contributes to the reduction of the grinding poverty and boosts the overall growth of the domestic economy in the homeland.

African diaspora make business investments in the homeland both as individual and group efforts. For instance, diaspora individuals in collaboration with family members staying behind in the homeland set up small-scale businesses such as supermarkets, restaurants, beauty salons, internet-providers and hotels, etc.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, diaspora groups pool money and invest in the homeland mainly in service sector activities such as import and export companies, telecommunication and transport enterprises. Other diaspora while remaining in the host country play a mediatory or intermediating role by linking Dutch companies with companies in their homelands and elsewhere in Africa. In doing so, they help facilitate the connection of overseas businesses with businesses in Africa that could not afford to promote their domestic products and secure markets abroad. While some of the African diaspora return home with money, creative business practices, valuable entrepreneurial spirit and skills and important overseas contacts that are badly needed. Some of the returning African diaspora enter into collaborations with Dutch businessmen and enterprises.<sup>56</sup> The aim of these collaborations is to set up joint ventures in Africa. In this respect, they facilitate the transfer of finance and technical know-how from Holland to the local enterprises. The African diaspora in the Netherlands thus engage in all these different activities in order to promote business enterprises in their respective countries in

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<sup>55</sup> A recent field work study in Morocco empirically affirms that Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands in collaboration with their extended family members who have remained behind invest in the local economy by setting up family companies, hotels and restaurants and transport businesses which in turn generate employment opportunities for the unemployed.

See further the PH.D dissertation by Hein de Haas completed at the university of Nijmegen (September 2003)

<sup>56</sup> A benefit that can be reaped from this business collaboration is the likely increase in trade and business dealings between the Netherlands and some of the countries that African diasporas are originated. For example, a study undertaken by James E. Rauch showed that in Canada a 10% increase in the numbers of diasporas from a given country eventually increases Canadian exports to that country by 1.3 percent and imports from there by 3.3 percent. This is indeed a positive sign as it empirically affirms that international trade flourishes between countries that export people and countries that import them.

Rauch, James E. 2001. "Business and Social Networks in International Trade" in *Journal of Economic Literature* 39, December. p. 1177-1203

Africa. This is of vital importance as most Africans in Africa now engage in informal trade for their livelihood. This is due to the shrinkage or collapse of the formal national economies in many countries in Africa. For example, the informal trade is now the biggest market economy in Africa currently generating more than 60% of domestic wealth.<sup>57</sup>

Although African diaspora both individually and collectively invest in the local economies of their respective countries in Africa, these efforts remain small in scale because of the limited capital and the professional practices involved. Of course, the inflow of financial capital helps to boost the local trade but its impact will be limited at least in the short run. It is thus imperative as one interviewee suggested to encourage diaspora to put together large amounts of money and invest collectively in large-scale corporations in the homeland. Large-scale corporations have the capacity to generate employment opportunities for many and also stimulate the growth and expansion of the domestic economy.

### **5.5. Mediate trade networks**

There are valuable mediating roles that African diaspora in the Netherlands play to boost the business sector in Africa through overseas trade with Africa. They do this by facilitating trade networks and also setting up of joint ventures between established Dutch companies and companies in Africa. Regarding the facilitation of trade networks between companies in the Netherlands and companies in Africa, a firm that plays a crucial role at the moment is that set up by Rachel Tocklu. Tocklu who is originally from Eritrea is an African in the Netherlands diaspora. Tocklu set up a firm named Teampro in Rotterdam in 1996. Teampro advises enterprises from Africa on how to do business professionally with Companies in Europe and vice versa. Teampro's main task is to help build partnerships between the economies of both sides that bring mutual benefits to all the stakeholders. In this respect, Teampro skilfully combines two very important activities. The first is to promote trade links between African and European companies and business enterprises. Teampro achieves this by organising trade and investment seminars as well as trade exhibitions and the exchange of missions. In addition to this, Teampro assists and also carries out feasibility studies and market research in the field for Dutch companies and others in the EU who wants to discover new markets in Africa. At present, Teampro mediates trade links with several countries both in Africa and in South America. Teampro now promotes trade relations with the Netherlands and other EU countries in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. According to Tocklu, "Teampro works the other way round. Teampro helps entrepreneurs from Africa to come to the Netherlands and get acquainted with their Dutch counterparts. We also organise trade seminars and 'active match-making' opportunities that bring entrepreneurs from different countries together thus reducing the networking hardships involved. Teampro hopes that a frequent exchange of trade missions will result in durable trade relations, which contribute to growth and development of the partner countries in Africa."

The other activity is to transfer valuable trading know-how, knowledge economy and creative business practices from the Netherlands to Africa. As Tocklu explains, African businesses whether they are small, medium or large, lack, among other things, the professional capacity to market their products and the know-how for public relations. These are some of the drawbacks that Teampro addresses. In this context, Teampro arranges for the Dutch companies with which

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<sup>57</sup> "Employing 40 million people, or 60 to 70 per cent of the labour force in Africa and producing 25 per cent of its gross national product, the informal sector or the underground economy has been omitted from national planning, most importantly it has been neglected by structural adjustment policy makers.....The ILO reported that the informal sector absorbs 75 per cent of new entrants in the labour market. In recent years the ILO stated that the rate is even higher as public sector workers are retrenched and urbanization and population growth continue unabated."  
Xaba, Jantjie, Pat Horn and Shirin Motala. 2002. *The Informal Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, Working Paper on the Informal Economy* (Geneva; Employment Sector, International Labour Office. October). p. 10

it liaises to make available trainers and marketing expertise to help assist the business capacities of its clients in Africa. As Tocklu states, “the added advantage of Teampro is the strategic position it occupies which enables it to have access to extensive networks both in the Netherlands and in the countries in Africa where it has clients. Also, we the founders of Teampro have a specific affinity, sensitivity, cultural experience and knowledge of conditions and societies in the African countries where we operate”.<sup>58</sup> Teampro provides a link which has hitherto been missing and as such its networking activity is vital: it brings together contacts and opens up markets for entrepreneurs both in the Netherlands and in Africa for which it is greatly appreciated by all stakeholders. Yet, as Tocklu laments, “despite all these benefits and the added value that Teampro brings into the trade relations between the Netherlands and Africa, the Dutch African Business Council does not consider us to be a useful partner in this venture”.

Regarding the setting up of joint ventures between Dutch companies and companies in Africa, a company worthy of note is the Team Addis Business firm set up in Ethiopia by Elias Haroon, a member of the Ethiopian diaspora who returned home from the Netherlands. Haroon who originally came from an entrepreneurial family in Ethiopia decided to return home for a sabbatical leave from his IT job in the Netherlands. But before he left from the Netherlands he managed to set up important networks with Dutch companies, businessmen and entrepreneurs in the private sector. At home, he set up Team Addis Business in Addis Ababa. TA Business as it is abbreviated is a Dutch/Ethiopian company emphasising its double identity. According to Haroon, the managing director, TA Business focuses on stimulating and promoting trade relations between Ethiopian and Dutch companies. In addition to this, TA Business advises and assists in bridging the cultural barriers regarding business dealings between Ethiopian and Dutch entrepreneurs. It also facilitates the process that enables the Ethiopian and Dutch companies to enter reliable joint ventures which brings mutual benefits to all stakeholders. TA Business smoothes the process by using the extensive transnational networks it has built up both in Ethiopia and in the Netherlands.

I interviewed Haroon at his flower farm outside Addis Ababa. During the interview it was clear that he radiated an aura of entrepreneurial energy which could easily inspire the business community in the country. Perhaps, what some business communities in countries like Ethiopia need is not only to be exposed to creative business practices but also the infusion of entrepreneurial spirit that returned diaspora can bring with them. I was in Addis Ababa for a conference on Migration and Development in Africa organised by the Global Coalition for Africa. The main focus of the conference was to highlight the implications of migration for policy in both migrant receiving and sending countries, as well as on the need for international collaboration to better manage migration. Thus, the conference had a policy focus which was driven mainly by donor interests of managing migration rather than channelling their benefits to the continent. In this respect, the conference had not thought about helping African diaspora living in the rich world become involved and make a contribution to development in Africa. Outside the conference hall, some of us were lucky enough to see how the contribution of the diaspora to the economic development in Africa works in practice as we visited Haroon’s flower farm. Haroon set up the flower farm in collaboration with a Dutch business partner, and he explained to us that he got the land from the Ethiopian government on a lease and his Dutch business partner provided the start-up capital. The land is now prepared for farming flowers and there are now 20 people working on the land. Haroon estimates that when the flower farm is ready for tilling it will require a work force of about 400 people. Most of the farm workers will be drawn from the destitute villagers inhabiting the area. The farm will therefore create job opportunities and a means of living for destitute villagers who are mainly women that have stayed behind after the men migrated to the capital city.

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<sup>58</sup> For further information, see the website of Teampro, <http://www.teampro.nl>.

According to Haroon,

*The current government of Ethiopia is relaxing investment restrictions and is creating an enabling environment for the diaspora to invest in the country. The relaxation of investment climate in the country is now attracting Ethiopian diaspora mainly from Germany and the United States to return and buy properties and set up companies and joint ventures. Perhaps, the current government has now realised that a good investment climate is central to economic growth and poverty reduction. It is a fact that a vibrant private sector with sufficient resources creates jobs, provides the goods and services needed to improve living standards, and contributes taxes necessary for public investment in health, education and other services. This is the experience to which I was exposed while I was working in the private sector in the Netherlands and this is the message that I am trying to promote here in Ethiopia.*

Most of the African diaspora whose interviews are cited in the last two sections believe that growth, economic development and the creation of private wealth are catalysts to sustainable means of livelihood and the reduction of the grinding poverty which is one of the main sources of conflict in most countries in Africa. They are also convinced that their individual and collective efforts are addressing this very important source of conflict which is not always directly addressed in conflict resolution processes. According to them, poverty, unemployment, scarce resources, social marginalisation and unequal distribution of meagre national resources are the chief underlying causes of the ongoing conflicts in different countries in Africa. Yet, while most of the time the political causes of the conflict are addressed, its economic causes are very much neglected. This is the dominant policy line that donor countries, NGOs and other international organisations involved in the peace process in the conflicting countries in Africa usually pursue. African diaspora are therefore addressing the material causes of the conflict and thereby contributing to the stabilisation and reduction of conflicts which the scarcity of sufficient resources have exacerbated. Their efforts have short-term and long-term benefits. Regarding the short-term benefits, the development projects and private companies they set up in the homeland are providing jobs and means of livelihood to economically marginalised groups in society and in this way contributing positively to stabilisation of localised conflicts. Regarding the long-term benefits, the creation of considerable and widespread economic growth and development can help reduce the social tensions and conflicts resulting from resource shortages and material scarcity. Furthermore, African diaspora believe that they are addressing the resolution of conflict at sub-national and local levels due to their development-oriented interventions that do not receive sufficient policy attention. The message of the African diaspora is that the causes of the conflict are not only political and cannot be addressed only through political interventions. The causes of the conflict also have material roots. It is thus imperative to address both the political and the economic causes of the conflict simultaneously and in a complementary spirit for its effective transformation.

## **6. Diaspora lobbying in the host country**

Lobbying in the host country is the fourth significant dimension of diaspora interaction with the homeland dynamics. The diaspora have a long tradition of lobbying. Diaspora lobby both for factional and for collective ends. Furthermore, diaspora engage both politically and non-politically-oriented lobbying activities in the host country. There are three sorts of lobbying activities in which the African diaspora in the Netherlands are involved. The first is lobbying against the governance practices of an incumbent government in the homeland of which they disapprove. The second is lobbying for sectarian interests or policies favourable to particular groups in the homeland. The third is lobbying for collective ends at a continent-wide level such as pressing for debt cancellation, trade concessions, the opening of markets for products from Africa and enhanced aid budgets in the social services and the informal economy that cater for the poor.

Lobbying is an important tool that diaspora use to influence policy options and strategies of policy-makers in the host countries. They also use lobbying to pressure homeland governments to adopt different domestic as well as foreign policies that suit their political preferences. According to Shain, “diaspora may influence the foreign policies of their host countries. This is especially true of diaspora integrated into democratic societies, where they often organise as interest groups that influence the foreign policy of their host government. Equally, diaspora in far-off lands may actively influence the foreign policies of their homelands. When they achieve transnational economic or political clout (or both), diaspora can, and do, directly affect identities and homeland policies”.<sup>59</sup> It is because of this direct involvement in the homeland politics that Shain suggests that diaspora should be seen as “third level” players in the peace negotiations determining the fate of their homelands. This is in addition to the “domestic” and “diplomatic” categories. Therefore, host states and other external actors should recognise the important role of the diaspora as political players in homeland conflicts and try to influence them accordingly. The logic behind this argument is that many violent conflicts also directly affect the lives and well-being of others residing beyond the homeland such as diaspora living in far-off lands. This reality thus makes it imperative, while attempting to resolve a violent conflict in a given country, to also address the diaspora audience beyond the immediate geographical boundaries of the conflict’s arena.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, diaspora use lobbying both for positive and destructive ends with regard to the conflicts in the homeland. The policy challenge therefore is how to maximise and benefit from the positive aspects of the diaspora’s lobbying activities and minimise their negative effects with regard to the domestic situations in their countries of origin.

### **6.1. Lobbying against homeland government**

In the 1960s diaspora lobbying activities mainly took the form of protests against the domestic policies of governments in the homelands. The diaspora typically campaigned in the host countries through organising petitions and demonstrations to show their disapproval of the domestic politics pursued by the government in the homeland. They also undertook these campaigning activities to pressure the government in the adopted home country to take punitive measures against the government in the homeland such as reducing its economic aid or severing its diplomatic relations.

This was however the time of the Cold War when ideology, geopolitical and economic interests played a dominant role. And it was the interplay of these different interests that determined to a

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<sup>59</sup> Shain, Yossi and Martin Sherman. 2001. “Diasporic Financial Flows and their Impact on National Identity” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 7, no. 4, Fall. p. 1-36

<sup>60</sup> (Shain 2002)

greater or lesser extent the effectiveness of the lobbying activities of the diaspora in a host country. Other aspects which played critical roles were the foreign policy that the government in the homeland pursued and the global political camp to which the host country was aligned. For instance, if the diaspora lived in a host country which saw the foreign policy pursued by the government of their native homeland as detrimental to its interests, the lobbying activities of the diaspora tended to have an influence on the policy-makers in government circles. In other words, it was the Cold War global political rivalries that largely dictated the effectiveness of the diaspora campaigns against the government in the homeland.

The lobbying activities of the diaspora were not only targeted at protesting against the undemocratic and oppressive political practices of the governments in the homelands. Diaspora also campaigned to expose the violations of human rights and persecution of minorities and others because of their religious beliefs and political views. In fact, their lobbying activities were instrumental in relating to the outside world the voices and yearnings of those inside the homelands that would not otherwise be heard, and of which the policy-makers in the host country were often unaware. For instance, diaspora using informal channels and reliable local contacts (to which they alone have access) were providing information about the whereabouts of arrested journalists, human rights activists and politically motivated persecutions, to the human rights organisations, journalists and policy-makers in the host country. In this respect the protest lobbying in which diaspora were traditionally engaged served a useful purpose as it was most often aimed at saving the people in the homeland from political tyranny and oppression. However, as will be seen below, among certain diaspora groups this traditional way of lobbying changed after the 1990s.

## **6.2. Lobbying for particular interests**

Since the 1990s many countries in Africa that were ruled by tyrannical leaders have collapsed. The political oppression perpetuated by the ruling dictators over three decades had finally resulted in societal explosion. The social and political turmoil then led to violent conflicts and destructive civil wars in numerous countries in Africa. Eventually, the violent conflict led some of these countries to collapse totally, making them ungovernable. One of the chief reasons for this total collapse was the fragmentation of the former political elites into warring factions with irreconcilable political differences that are all pursuing sectional interests rather than the public good. For example, almost all the countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa have collapsed from the centre. This means that most of these countries no longer have a central government. And even those that have maintained a vestige of central authority, see that power contested by dozens of rival political factions all of whom are competing to capture the power of the state for their own sectional interests.

The response of the conflict-generated diaspora in the Netherlands to such development has not been constructive. Since there are hardly any effective central governments remaining in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa countries, lobbying against mal-governance is no longer possible and the diaspora have opted instead to lobby for the cause of the political faction in the homeland with which they identify. However, the political factions supported by the diaspora tend to pursue narrow and sectarian interests that only serve to perpetuate the political fragmentation in the homeland. In this respect, the long-distance involvement of the diaspora in the homeland power struggles is only reinforcing the divisive domestic politics. It also makes it impossible for the rival political factions to achieve reconciliation for the common good of the whole population in the homeland. In this respect the diaspora are part of the problem rather than of the solution.

One common lobbying activity that the diaspora often undertake is to organise public meetings which are aimed at influencing Dutch foreign policy with regard to the homeland politics. The diaspora also use some of these public meetings to advance their private agendas which only

serve to aggravate the political situation in the homeland. A Rwandan interviewee who asked to remain anonymous stated that:

*Some diaspora groupings and organisations organise frequent public gatherings which seem on the surface to be democratic and constructive platforms but in reality they aim to organise political support for one of their interest groups in the homeland. And behind the seemingly democratic platforms initiated by the diaspora there is often a hidden agenda pursued by the organisers which is not as democratic as is publicly stated. Some of these diaspora groups act as the political wing abroad of the rebel groups violently waging conflicts in their respective homelands. They lobby and represent the political interests of the militia groups they are linked with in the homeland. In this respect, their lobbying campaigns in the Netherlands are only geared to promote politically motivated and sinister activities that harden the already strained communal and ethnic relations and sharpen further political divisions in the homeland. The irony is that such diaspora groupings and their clubs get subsidies from the Netherlands organisations in order to finance their destructive activities. Nevertheless, it is through this particularistic tendency that certain African diaspora do influence the foreign policy of the Dutch government sometimes in particular ways which are often not constructive in the political dynamics in the homeland.*

It is thus imperative to recognise that many diaspora groups and organisation in the Netherlands lobby for factional interests which are destructive and only serve to promote the continuation of conflict in the homeland. This factional tendency which is still pursued by many African diaspora groups often reproduces and sometimes multiplies the social and political fragmentation and other factional cleavages already existing in the homeland. The policy challenge therefore is how to maximise and benefit from the positive aspects of the diaspora lobbying activities and minimise their negative effects with regard to the conflicts in the homeland

### **6.3. Lobbying for collective ends**

African diaspora are strategically placed to lobby in the host countries for collective ends both for the homeland and the continent as a whole. This however would require making the lobbying potential of the African diaspora in the Netherlands a tool for promoting peace and political stability in the homelands. There are two ways in which the lobbying potential of the diaspora can be positively utilised for collective purposes. The first is to purposefully stimulate the diaspora to lobby for the cause of the positive forces in the homeland -- forces whose activities transcend factional interests. In doing so, the diaspora have to consciously make a switch from lobbying for destructive political-oriented purposes to constructive civil society-oriented purposes. Positive forces for which the diaspora should lobby include peace activists, human rights actors and organisations, journalists, civic-minded community associations, constructive political elites, women peace movement members among others in the homeland. Supporting these positive forces and also lobbying for their cause in the host countries will give them the necessary power and a political clout with which to counterbalance and neutralise the negative activities of the destructive forces in the homeland.

The second way to realise the lobbying potential of the diaspora is to purposefully stimulate them to undertake campaigning and advocacy activities geared to influencing the Dutch government, EU and international efforts to impact positively on Africa in terms of policy changes, development programmes, debt cancellation, trade concessions, democratic governance and human rights issues. This is an area where the mainstream development agencies such as Hivos, Cordaid, ICCO and Novib among others can considerably benefit if they link up with the African diaspora organisations in their campaigning and advocacy activities.

## **7. Conclusions**

We will now bring together the most important issues identified and examined in the previous sections of this report and draw a number of conclusions and options for policy recommendations. The initial objective of the study was limited, and had two relatively straightforward aims. The first purpose was to gain a better understanding of the role that the African diaspora in the Netherlands play with regard to homeland conflict. The second purpose was to assess the potential and peacemaking capacities that African diaspora groupings in the Netherlands possess that can be effectively harnessed in fostering the resolution and transformation of conflicts in their respective countries of origin. The focus of the study was specific. It was a case study of the conflict-generated diaspora from Africa in the Netherlands coming from the conflict-plagued countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions.

However as the research of the study progressed it became apparent that the involvement of the African diaspora in the homeland dynamics had many facets and required a widening of the focus of the study and the adoption of a broader scope. It was in fact necessary to consider the role that the African diaspora play not only in the conflict dynamics but also in the political stability and economic development of the homeland. In doing so, we then set out to examine the interaction of the African diaspora in the homeland dynamics through the four areas that have been examined as sections in the body of the report. The four areas were chosen because of their policy relevance to EU diplomats, UN peace mediators and other international and regional organisations active on the ground in the countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. They were also chosen because of their policy interest to practitioners in the mainstream development agencies and policy makers in the government in the Netherlands involved in the peace process, political stability, poverty reduction and economic development in both regions from a distance.

The main aim of broadening the scope of the study was to explore ways and creative strategies through which the activities of the African diaspora can be integrated into the overall policy designs and practical operations which are geared to promoting peace, political stability and poverty reduction in the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. Another aim was to suggest policy options through which the contribution of the diaspora to the positive changes in the homeland can be maximised while minimising the negative effects of their long distant involvement in the domestic situation. The overall objective of the study was to provide an input into the regional policy proposals designed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote peace and security, political stability and good governance in the countries in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions. The ultimate goal of such policy formulation is to contribute to transforming the negative and destructive activities of the diaspora into positive and constructive gains for the homeland in Africa.

In this policy report, we have attempted to review the predominant theoretical and policy debates on diaspora interaction in the homeland in order to update and provide the readers with sufficient background information. The debates centre around the discussion of whether the long-distance activities undertaken by the diaspora help perpetuate or resolve the conflicts in the homelands. While one policy camp puts more emphasis on the negative aspects; the other policy camp emphasises the positive aspects of the diaspora interaction in the homeland situations. The difficulty we encountered during the initial phase of the study was that the empirical case studies and field research data currently existing on the subject upon which both policy camps base their contrasting arguments is largely informed by the activities of Irish, Sri Lankan Tamils, Sikhs and Kurds in the diaspora. These are old and long-established diaspora as compared with the African diaspora who are of more recent origin. This is one of the reasons why there is hardly any documented knowledge and information about the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora in the Netherlands or elsewhere in the Western

countries. This is an area which is still waiting to be explored as the interactions of the African diaspora with their homelands in Africa have not yet been sufficiently studied.

To overcome the paucity of published materials, we have complemented the meagre existing studies on the subject with extensive field work in the Netherlands and in Britain. The study thus compiles data from primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 20 African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands. It was also collected at a specially-organised, one-day workshop among a number of African diaspora organisations and experts. In that workshop we presented the preliminary results of a study on the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora in Netherlands in helping perpetuate or resolve conflicts in their respective countries of origin, and asked for feedback. The primary data collected among the African diaspora in the Netherlands is further supplemented by additional interviews and small group discussions with African diaspora organisations, institutions and scholars on the subject in Britain. Furthermore, in this study we have systematically reviewed in detail some of the most important literature on the subject. This is to take stock of what is known about the long-distance activities undertaken by the diaspora and their impact on the course of political events in their respective countries of origin. This study is therefore a *staging point* for a new area of research which has been overlooked despite its critical significance. This is the link between the African diaspora activities and dynamics of conflict in the homelands. The study thus constitutes a “pioneering survey”.

Here some of the main findings of the study are summarised:

- Most of the African diaspora in the Netherlands have come from the countries located in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa regions which have been severely affected by protracted civil wars and other violent conflicts. This affirms the direct relation between the violent conflicts and the increasing number of Africans migrating to the Netherlands since 1990. The numbers of the African diaspora that have come from both regions are estimated to be around 28% and therefore are the largest group in the African population in the Netherlands. In this respect, this huge numerical strength makes them potential strategic actors and an important constituency to be aligned with Dutch government efforts to foster conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction activities in their respective countries of origin.

- We started this study with the assumption that diaspora provide the fuel for the perpetuation of the homeland conflicts and as such their long-distance involvement in the homeland dynamics is largely negative. This study has revealed a different picture from that initially assumed. For example, as the research of the study progressed, we found out that the interaction of the diaspora in the homeland’s dynamic has both positive and negative aspects: it has two sides and is not a one-sided involvement in domestic affairs. And in the case of the African diaspora organisations interviewed their positive contribution to the situations in the homeland outweighs their negative meddling. For instance, some African diaspora groupings contribute positively to the peace process in the homeland by providing reliable information on the political situation on the ground to the concerned policy-makers in the Netherlands involved in the peace process from a distance. This valuable information to which the diaspora alone have access through informal channels and reliable local contacts is often vital for the formulation of an appropriate policy aimed at improving the situation pertaining to conflict resolution, stability and good governance in the homeland. On the other hand, some of the diaspora do indeed contribute negatively to homeland conflict through propaganda, money and lobbying in the Netherlands for policies favourable to armed militias in the homeland. The evidence of this study nevertheless refutes the claim made by the World Bank researchers already discussed that the involvement of the diaspora in the homeland is largely negative. The challenge however is to find out how the negative activities of some diaspora groupings and organisations both in the Netherlands and elsewhere can be turned into constructive gains for the people in the homeland.

○ The study showed the value of working with the diaspora (who live in our back yards and are easily accessible) in understanding the complexity of the conflict in the homeland since they are directly involved through long-distance activities. The reason is that one can easily get a fair picture of the dynamics of the conflict in the homeland from the diaspora without undertaking a costly field trip abroad. Although the long-distance activities of the diaspora is a secondary level of a conflict, it directly feeds into the primary level of the conflict in the homeland. For instance, many violent conflicts in the homelands also directly affect the lives and well-being of the diaspora residing in far-off lands. This reality therefore means that conflict resolution entails addressing the diaspora audience beyond the immediate geographical boundaries of the conflict's arena. Diaspora should therefore be seen as "third level" players in the peace negotiations determining the fate of their homelands. This is in addition to the "domestic" and "diplomatic" categories. Host states and other third parties should recognise the independent role of the diaspora as political players in homeland conflicts and try to influence them accordingly. This task can be better approached if the vast transnational networking capacity that the diaspora already possess is functionally integrated to a far greater extent into the foreign and development policy initiatives undertaken in the host countries. This is with the aim of making better use of the immense potential of the diaspora for conflict transformation and development activities in their countries of origin.

○ A significant finding revealed in this study is that very little empirical knowledge is available about the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora groups residing in the Netherlands and in other EU countries. The study also found that there is an acute lack of information and reliable hard data on the impact of these diaspora mediated long-distance activities (both positive and negative) on conflict transformation and peace building, post-conflict reconstruction, political stability and development in their respective countries of origin. Reviewing the existing studies on the subject has shown a dearth of documented information about the economic, political, transnational networks and human resources potential of the African diaspora that can be tapped for the benefit of Africa.<sup>61</sup> Because of this absence of documented material, most of the data in this policy report was collected through interviews with African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands. In this respect, this study is just a *staging point and preliminary survey* aimed at taking stock of the knowledge and information available on the subject. It does not pretend to be exhaustive or complete. Much more empirical research and a systematic collection of data on the long-distance activities of the African diaspora residing in the EU countries is needed. The study identified four critical research and policy areas in which the African diaspora are directly involved in one way or another where we need to gain better insights and build up a deeper knowledge base. The four areas identified are the most important aspects through which the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora make both positive and negative contributions to the conflict dynamics in the homelands. The study revealed that in all the four areas except financial remittances there is still a very limited knowledge base for policy formulations. It is this evidence that makes it imperative to invest heavily in building up a strong knowledge base not only of financial remittances but also of social remittances such as the social capital that the diaspora transfer and with which they accordingly influence the development in the homeland. The study has raised important policy-oriented questions that cannot be effectively answered because of its limited nature. There is still a need to know more about the various long-distance activities in which African diaspora (not only those in the Netherlands but also in other EU countries) are currently engaged with regard to the homeland. We need to formulate proper strategies to mobilise, raise awareness and involve them in the development efforts of Africa. We need to design appropriate

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<sup>61</sup> The limited research and publications on the African diaspora that are currently available are mainly produced in the United States. They largely focus on the traditional subjects such as history, anthropology, identity and culture with little emphasis on contemporary challenges that African societies now face. Unfortunately, these utility-less subjects that do not add much value to finding solutions of the most pressing challenges that African societies are grappling with today still remain predominant in contemporary research discourse on Africa and the African diaspora in the Netherlands and in the West as a whole.

strategies in which the untapped potential of the diaspora can be effectively harnessed for the benefit of Africa; to formulate options and ways that the government policy makers and the donor NGO practitioners in the Netherlands can link up with the African diaspora as added value in the spirit of partnership. Further there is an urgent need to identify mechanisms and channels to enable the African diaspora to better connect with development in Africa. The study revealed that the African diaspora in the Netherlands are small in numbers and also not well-established as compared with much larger African diaspora residing in Britain, France, Germany and Belgium etc. For this reason wider policy-relevant follow-up research is warranted that covers the African diaspora residing in the four countries noted above so as to obtain better empirical knowledge of their long-distance activities with regard to their countries of origin. Gaining this diaspora-wide empirical knowledge will make possible the formulation of a diaspora policy not only at a country level but also at the EU level. Addressing the long-distance activities undertaken by the African diaspora at the EU level is imperative at this particular period of time. It is absolutely vital if we want to mobilise the financial resources, transnational networks and human capital of the sizeable number of African diaspora residing in the EU countries for the promotion of peace and political stability in their countries of origin.

## **ANNEX**

### **Organisations visited and persons interviewed**

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Sudan Civil Society Forum (SCSF)  
Van Ostadestraat 200  
2526 GJ Den Haag  
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***Mobilising African Diaspora for the Promotion of Peace in Africa***

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