

# Building Institutional Cooperation between the Diaspora and Homeland Governments in Africa

The cases of Ghana, Nigeria, Germany, USA and the UK

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## Introduction

This policy brief disseminates the main findings of the latest policy-oriented publication produced by the African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC). This policy-relevant study was undertaken in order to gain a better understanding of how the interaction and engagement between the African diaspora and homeland institutions in the past ten years have facilitated the development of formal cooperation between the two entities. The study examined trends and developments from experiences, policy constraints and catalysts of best practices, and has identified key drivers for institutional cooperation between the diaspora and homeland governments from which valuable lessons can be learned.

This study, which is the first of its kind, is a collaborative effort involving institutions and researchers from both home and host countries working in the field of migration and development. It therefore articulates the voices and perspectives of diaspora and homeland researchers on a topic that

they themselves have identified as a research priority in this field.

The study was published in order to contribute to the policy dialogue currently taking place in the field from a perspective which has, thus far, been largely overlooked despite its critical significance. Furthermore, the study advances knowledge in the field by contributing to our understanding of the long-term sustainability of diaspora-driven development activities in the homelands. In this regard, the study not only addresses a new research agenda but also fills a knowledge gap in the field of migration and development.

This publication proposes policy measures and feasible strategies that can foster the development of formal, effective and sustainable institutional cooperation between diaspora and homeland governments, significantly increasing the contribution of the diaspora to the overall development of their countries of origin in a sustainable and large-scale manner. Enhanced institutional cooperation can also help the governments of Africa integrate

diaspora-driven development into their respective domestic development strategies, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and plans for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The book is intended to inform policymakers in the field of migration and development of the benefits to be gained from formal institutional cooperation with the diaspora development practitioners.

The study identifies five key policy areas that hold high priority in the discussion regarding the fostering of formal institutional cooperation between diaspora and homeland governments and the sustainable contribution of the diaspora to the development of their respective home countries. The five areas that the study recommends for targeted policy considerations and practical interventions are briefly outlined here.

## Diaspora involvement in homeland

In the past five years, the involvement of the diaspora in their respective home countries has been increasing tremendously. Moreover, the engagement of diaspora development practitioners in homeland development has been diversified, entrenched and broadened in scope and often cuts across both social services and financial sectors. For example, members of the diaspora have become active to varying degrees in health,

education, employment promotion, micro-entrepreneurship and business. Furthermore, diaspora development practitioners remain active at different levels in the homelands. They are involved in a broad range of development-related activities at the local, sub-national and national levels. Consequently, the interaction of the diaspora in homeland development has grown from simple to very complex and dense processes.

This is partly the result of the diaspora becoming better organised in the host countries through such structures as professional or development-oriented associations. In addition, diaspora organisations and associations in the host countries are gaining access to considerable financial resources, which enables them to sponsor, in a sustainable manner, development projects in their respective homelands. There is also a growing realisation among the diaspora that they have a responsibility to contribute to the development of the continent that they have left physically but not emotionally. This emotional attachment is the source of the spirit that prompts the diaspora to maintain ties with their countries of origin, which is translated into obligations and thus into concrete commitments and actions through projects and activities. Diasporas also feel that they are now in a strategic position to facilitate the process of transnational activities and networks and act as development bridge-builders between the West and Africa.

This strategic position particularly enables them to mobilise considerable resources (capital, knowledge and networks) for the development of the continent. Furthermore, as a result of inexpensive transportation and communications technology, diasporas consider themselves to be at home and abroad at the same.

The growing involvement and visibility of the diaspora in the development of the homelands has helped them to position themselves as critical development actors within development policy circles in the developed countries. In this regard, diasporas have become the key drivers for a diaspora-led development sector that can be considered separate from the traditional development cooperation sector within the domain of Western donor governments.

Nevertheless, although the development-related activities mediated by the diaspora in their respective homelands have become more complex and vast, the policy response from the home governments is ad hoc, fragmented and remains insufficient. This is an evolving reality that homeland governments have to address with appropriate policy measures in order to gain maximum benefits from the increasing engagement of the diaspora in the development of their countries of origin.

## Imperatives of institutional cooperation

The study also reveals that the current contacts and relationships between the diaspora and policy institutions in the homelands are mainly informal, ad hoc and sporadic in nature. They are primarily based on individual and group interactions and directed specifically at family, village, community and local levels. In many cases, the access and reach of the diaspora to other societal and national levels is extremely limited. Such access depends largely on the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland and on the policies of the government towards the diaspora abroad. The current relationships, therefore, remain informal and have not yet become officially institutionalised. Consequently, this limits any efforts toward intensive and sustained development cooperation between the African diaspora and home-country governments.

For this reason, more needs to be done in terms of putting in place policies that facilitate the diaspora to establish contacts and access networks with institutions at the national level. In other words, the existing contacts need to be expanded from the family and local level to higher levels, in order to facilitate the process of institutional cooperation at the national level. This is already happening in some countries while in others it has not yet occurred.

Establishing structures of formal cooperation between the diaspora and homeland governments is critical in the partnership for sustainable development. Such cooperation provides a framework within which the engagement of the diaspora in the development of their home countries could be scaled up via official support from government institutions. It would also give the diaspora formal recognition within established development circles, as credible and indispensable agents for development in the homelands. Additionally, cooperation with homeland governments would endow the diaspora with a voice and political influence in decision-making processes regarding migration and development-related issues. Moreover, several diaspora organisations interviewed for this study have explicitly stated that formal partnerships would help motivate them to contribute more to the overall development of their countries of origin.

The study identifies tangible advantages to be gained from formal cooperation with the diaspora at several institutional levels, such as the African Union (AU) or the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), as well as at the country level and at sector level within a country. For instance, for continental level bodies, the development of formal partnerships will assist them to benefit from the lobbying, campaigning and advocacy capacities of those diasporas

residing in power centres where global decisions are made. The diaspora will capitalise its strategic position in the Northern countries to promoting policies that impact positively on the continent in terms of favourable policy changes, trade concessions, debt cancellation and appropriate development programmes among others.

At the country level, formal cooperation will make it much easier to draw on available skills and expertise. This will help compensate for the dramatic scarcity of skilled personnel which many countries on the continent are facing today because of the devastating effects of the brain drain. For example, governments can place skilled diasporas in critical institutions, both public and private, in order to improve and deliver adequate services. This kind of practical collaboration can easily facilitate the growth of solid institutional cooperation between the diaspora and the homeland government in the long run.

Similarly, institutional cooperation at the sector level within a country is critical. It not only facilitates a targeted integration of the skilled diasporas into homeland development efforts, but also boosts the efficiency and delivery of services to the sectors they serve. The sector level is also the most appropriate entry point and practical steps can be initiated to gradually scale cooperation up to national and continental levels. Although collaboration activities may

be initiated at the sector, national or continental levels, they can stimulate multi-layer engagement. When this occurs, it facilitates the establishment of sustained institutional cooperation between African governments and African diasporas. Such cooperation, in turn, facilitates the articulation of collective strategies for economic progress, viable political institutions and progressive social change on the continent.

## Key drivers for institutional cooperation

The study reveals the existence of key sectors that drive the fostering of formal institutional cooperation between diaspora and homeland institutions. This new insight is a significant finding in this study as it increases our understanding of the entry points that can greatly facilitate the formal engagement of the diaspora in the development of their respective home countries. Furthermore, the identification of specific sectors that are key drivers makes it possible to undertake initiatives geared towards targeted interventions in this area. It also helps homeland governments to focus their efforts on limited sectors that could make a difference in the cooperation between diaspora and homeland institutions.

For example, the case studies highlight the importance of a country identifying its own specific sectors in which the engagement of the diaspora can

further development goals, and invest resources and policy focus in these sectors in order to help advance institutional cooperation with the diaspora. What these particular sectors are depends on the historical, social and economic context of any given country. For example, in Ghana, civic institutions and individuals such as chiefs play a crucial role in fostering the engagement of the diaspora in the development of the country at municipality and village levels. The success of the local hometown associations (HTAs) in development in Ghana is the result of active cooperation with the chiefs (both those in Ghana and those living overseas as members of the diaspora) and local institutions. In Nigeria, however, the private sector plays a critical role in the participation of the diaspora in domestic development through business links. Investing more in this sector would greatly contribute to the fostering of sustained institutional cooperation between the Nigerian diaspora and the homeland. Through other sectors in each country, such as health and education, members of the diaspora can also transfer critical knowledge and innovative technological skills. An important lesson to be drawn from the present research, then, is that investing in the particular sectors that tend to attract diaspora engagement and fuel development in a given country reaps enormous benefit in terms of advancing institutional cooperation with the diaspora.

This study focuses only on the cases of Ghana and Nigeria in the homelands and thus the findings are limited and more comparative surveys are required. It should be seen, therefore, as a staging point for new research in this policy area. That said, Ghana and Nigeria have been forerunners on the continent in dealing with diaspora and development-related issues. The study reveals that they are far ahead of many other countries in Africa, especially those which have only very recently begun engaging with their diaspora. For this reason, both countries provide valuable lessons for best practices, which remain catalysts for latecomers to the field. More importantly, this study was primarily undertaken to document and disseminate examples of existing best practices and catalysts of constructive institutional cooperation among African diaspora organisations and African governments on the continent from which lessons can be learned for policy-making purposes.

## Sub-national development actors

The study shows that the contribution of diaspora organisations to the development in homelands can be considerably up scaled if they partner with sub-national development actors, both in the host and home countries. Key sub-national development actors include NGOs, private sector, philanthropists, municipalities and local governments. In the past few years,

diaspora development practitioners have been establishing, sponsoring and implementing projects in their respective homelands where, until now, they have sought little strategic collaboration with sub-national development actors.

The case studies show, for example, that current collaboration between various diaspora organisations, and between diaspora organisations and other development actors, is often limited and sporadic in nature. Yet, they are already involved in development-related activities on the ground. Despite this, and the fact that they strive for common goals, they largely operate separately with little or no collaboration. This limits the impact of homeland development activities in which they are involved. One of the reasons of why they have not seized the opportunity is a lack of awareness of each other's unique potential and added value. This stems from a lack of evidence-based knowledge and information, which can provide insights for policy measures and practical actions relating to the issue. In particular, local NGOs in the homelands have neglected to explore the benefits that diaspora development organisations can offer through collaboration, such as acquiring new technological skills and smart and innovative implementation of projects targeted at the welfare of communities and beneficiaries.

However, diaspora development practitioners can no longer operate in isolation. The recent global economic

crisis has left long-lasting consequences that have deeply affected the flow of diaspora remittances to their respective homelands. The crisis also affected the sustainability of community-oriented projects that diaspora development practitioners have been implementing in their countries of origin. This new development, therefore, compels the diaspora to enter into development partnerships with sub-national development actors. This can be promoted by raising awareness of the greater development benefits that are reaped from strategic collaboration through workshops and expert meetings, which bring together the diaspora and sub-national development actors. Such meetings would enable them to establish viable networks, to learn from each other's development related activities, to exchange valuable information, share best practices and positive experiences. It will also enable them to enter into strategic alliances and initiate joint development projects that could contribute more to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the homelands.

Diaspora development practitioners and sub-national development actors can make a difference if they join forces in the struggle to reduce poverty and boost domestic economies in the homelands. In other words, collaboration could substantially improve the impact of their work. The advantage of joining forces is that each development sector brings

its unique strengths and added value into the projects, leading to increased reach, capacity, efficiency and impact of the projects on development in the local communities. Such cooperation ensures that the diaspora gains access to professional expertise, practical experience, influential networks and resources from the mainstream sector. With sufficient facilitation, it will also substantially upscale the development activities undertaken by the diaspora.

In a nutshell, the potential for collaboration between the diaspora and sub-national development actors, as outlined above, has not yet received sufficient policy and research attention, despite its critical importance in the boosting of development in the homelands. Evidence-based research that will enable us to better understand how to foster effective development partnerships between the diaspora and sub-national development actors is urgently needed.

## Capacity building for diaspora policy

The study reveals the urgent need to upscale the capacity for diaspora-oriented national policy strategy in the homelands in Africa. There is a glaring lack of capacity among institutions dealing with diaspora and development-related issues on the continent. This capacity deficit is hampering the performance of those government officials in Africa tasked with overseeing



diaspora-related matters. Practically, it prevents policymakers from making well-informed policy choices and appropriate decisions in the field of migration and development. It also hinders the development of feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions that can help to maximise the contribution of the diaspora to the development of the continent.

The capacity building needs for a diaspora-oriented policy framework in Africa continue to grow. For instance, there are now more than 30 African countries that have established diaspora-oriented institutions and ministries in order to address diaspora issues more professionally. However, the newly appointed policymakers serving in these newly formed institutions lack essential access to useful and up-to-date information in the field, as research results are not targeted at them. Rather, the knowledge and policy insights produced so far in the field of migration and development are generally produced by researchers in the West and targeted at policymakers in the host countries.

This study bridges the North–South knowledge gap in the field of migration and development, by making available knowledge and information to policymakers in Africa who are currently largely left in the dark. The study produces knowledge and policy insights tailored to the specific policy-making needs of the newly formed diaspora representatives in Africa. The

study's insights could be of particular help in the formulation of informed policy positions and instruments that can be translated into feasible strategic interventions and realisable actions. It will also help them to acquire the capacity to develop a Migration and Development Strategy Paper (MDSPP). This is a long-term policy plan aimed at reaching out to the diaspora and making it easy for them to return, set up businesses, transfer badly needed knowledge, expertise and resources, thereby remaining deeply engaged with the development of their countries of origin. Until such a policy strategy paper is developed, the efforts of the newly tasked diaspora representatives on the continent will remain ad hoc, informal and less effective in terms of mobilising the diaspora for development in the homelands.

Developing a diaspora-oriented policy strategy must be a primary priority for every country in Africa that is striving to gain substantial benefits from the considerable resources of its diaspora overseas. At the same time, it will not be easy for many countries in Africa to design a national diaspora policy without acquiring sufficient technical knowledge in the field of migration and development. For instance, even though the two case study countries of Ghana and Nigeria are at the forefront of dealing with diaspora issues, neither have developed an official policy strategy on diaspora-driven or diaspora-oriented development. As a result, even in targeted policy proposals such

as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), diasporas are not considered as partners for development in the homelands. The same applies to those policies developed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this regard, although diasporas have emerged as critical development actors, they still operate outside the established development circles in the home countries. The same is also true in terms of practice, as diaspora-initiated development projects are not at all integrated into development activities implemented by the government at both the national and sub-national levels.

This lack of an official diaspora policy is not confined only to the homelands. It is also a challenge that the host countries studied here, with the exception of UK, are yet to address. For example, both Germany and the US have not yet formulated a national policy strategy for engaging diaspora organisations for development purposes. In contrast, the UK government has developed a diaspora-oriented policy framework which enables it to pursue policies that actively support the engagement of the diaspora in the development of their homelands. Such existing policy therefore helps to create a space in which the diaspora can operate as critical development actors, both from within the UK and in their countries of origin. Thanks to the diaspora-policy environment in the UK, members of the diaspora living there are better placed, in terms of ease of engagement in homeland development, than their

counterparts in Germany and the US. A key finding of this study is that the situation in the host country makes a significant difference in the scale of the diasporas' development interventions in their respective homelands.

One way that the international development community could address the urgent need to upscale the capacity for diaspora-oriented national policy strategy in the homelands in Africa is to establish an African Capacity-Building Facility for diaspora affairs, similar to the African Remittances Institute initiated by the European Commission (EC). Such a facility would support African governments to better harness the considerable social capital of the diaspora, assisting them in developing diaspora-oriented national policy strategies and helping them to undertake measures that facilitate the integration of diaspora-driven development into the overall national development agenda.



## How to order this book:

This book is available through the website of the African Diaspora Policy Centre [www.diaspora-centre.org](http://www.diaspora-centre.org)

Price: €15 (Postage and packaging not included)

If you have questions about the book please feel free to email us at: [info@diaspora-centre.org](mailto:info@diaspora-centre.org)



“...a timely and authoritative book that is bound to stimulate debate on the contributions of the African diaspora towards the development of both ‘host’ and ‘home’ countries. An important read for policymakers, advocacy organisations and students of migration and development in the European context.”

*Professor Fantu Cheru  
Research Director  
The Nordic Africa Institute*

“ADPC’s study introduces crucial voices and partnerships into the diaspora and development research agenda. Through this study, we gain the insights of both African and diaspora researchers through partnerships among them. These insights address pressing needs identified from the continent by policymakers there. The result is an essential guide to African diasporans and African policymakers alike who seek to maximise contributions to enhanced quality of life in Africa.”

*Jennifer Brinkerhoff  
Professor, Public Administration & International Affairs  
George Washington University*