

## Knowledge Platform for Migration Governance in Africa

### Platform Policy Brief 07

#### **Diaspora Engagement Model for Development**

This is the seventh policy brief by the Knowledge Platform (KP) for Migration Governance in Africa<sup>1</sup> coordinated by the African Diaspora Policy Centre. The platform is devoted to strengthening the interface between research, policy, and practice in the area of migration governance at continental, regional, national, and local levels. The motto of the platform is: organizing a knowledge network for better migration governance in Africa. It contributes to the migration and mobility dialogue from the perspective of Africa. Additionally, the Platform is committed to contributing to a better migration governance system that works for the benefit of all. The Platform organized its seventh webinar in April 2021 to reflect on how a workable Diaspora engagement model for development can be designed. The webinar also provides an opportunity for the platform's network to convene virtually, since they cannot meet face to face as long as the Covid-19 pandemic rages across countries.

#### **Introduction**

This policy brief is the product of a webinar organized by the Platform in April 2021 to examine how to initiate a workable Diaspora engagement model for development. In recent decades, governments all over the world have been adopting different tools to facilitate Diaspora engagement in homeland development. They have been experimenting with various Diaspora engagement tools at national and local levels based on the context of their respective countries. Currently, however, there is no uniform Diaspora engagement model for development that meets a global standard and that any country can adopt. Consequently, this lack of a workable model means that Diaspora engagement in the homeland remains largely informal, ad hoc, and fragmented.

In many developing countries, Diaspora communities constitute a great offshore asset due to the potential of their considerable human and financial capital. Indeed, Diaspora communities operate as potential agents of economic growth, inclusive development, and positive social change in their respective countries of origin. Diaspora communities are therefore increasingly seen as a critical development constituency in homeland development. This is the overwhelming reason why many developing countries are seeking to benefit from the resources (capital, knowledge, and networks) of their Diaspora communities overseas.

That said, many governments do not yet have a comprehensive instrument that they can adopt to engage the Diaspora in their respective national development plans in a structured and effective manner. As touched on earlier, the key challenge in this regard is the absence of a reliable 'road map' or a best practice blueprint for a Diaspora engagement model. To this end, developing a set of policies and practical toolkits for governments will advance Diaspora

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<sup>1</sup> A project assisted by the German government via the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The content reflects the author's views and the GIZ is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information in this document.

engagement efforts. Such a model will also enable governments to systematically scale-up development interventions by the Diaspora and achieve much more productive engagement in the future.

The webinar was devoted to presenting a set of tools that can be used to design a global Diaspora engagement model for development. The Platform experts powerfully debated the merits of the tools presented and their adaptability to different local contexts in different countries. They also offered suggestions, proposals, and practical advice that can be considered in the process of creating the model. Furthermore, they shared specific and evidence-based country experiences worth reflecting on in this endeavour. The webinar yielded a host of key indicators that will be used to lay the foundation for the steps needed to develop a blueprint for a Diaspora engagement model. It is expected that this exercise will produce a Diaspora engagement toolkit that will be available to governments across Africa in the near future.

## Setting the context of the model

The webinar's guest speaker<sup>2</sup> set the context of the model by explaining that Diaspora engagement is a stepwise process and requires concerted efforts across a broad front. In essence, it entails the further strengthening of the contribution already made by the Diaspora to development in their countries of origin. It also means recognizing the Diaspora as a potential resource and key partner in the development of the country. Cultivating a mutual partnership between Diaspora and governments in countries of origin requires a comprehensive policy approach at different levels and with defined goals. From the outset, the course of engagement must be guided by a series of logical steps carried out in sequential order. Furthermore, Diaspora engagement strategy works best as a two-way street, in which all parties see the clear benefits of working together. A key strategy for successful Diaspora engagement starts with a clear '**road map**' or a blueprint laying out the steps for engaging the Diaspora in homeland development. Generally, creating an enabling development environment is a precondition for engaging the Diaspora in homeland development. This is an environment that is conducive for Diaspora participation in developmental activities on a considerable scale in the homeland. For example, the governments of home countries that have successfully engaged the Diaspora in overall domestic development in a meaningful manner are those that have undertaken several critical steps towards this objective.

## Key pillars of the model

The guest speaker systematically presented the key pillars of the model, which amount to a set of best practice indicators that successful countries have adopted to fully engage the Diaspora in homeland development. The presenter explained that successful countries have invested upfront in more political and institutional resources in order to create an enabling environment on the ground. Effectively addressing the pillars of the model listed below is not an easy task. They require both time and political commitment to a long-term goal. This is important since Diaspora engagement requires serious preparation. Likewise, Diaspora engagement is best approached as a process rather than a single activity, or even a series of

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<sup>2</sup> The Platform is very grateful to guest speaker Mr. Badara Ndiaye, who provided a presentation on the model during the webinar. Mr. Ndiaye is a former consultant on Regional Migration Policy Engagement for ECOWAS. He is also an expert in the field of labour migration, migration policies, migration governance, and diaspora engagement. Mr. Ndiaye is active in Senegalese civil society associations, including as President of DIADEM (Diaspora Development Education Migration) and President of the West African Platform on Migration (MIGRAFRIQUE).

one-time actions. In short, getting the process right beforehand is a recipe for successful Diaspora engagement in homeland development.

The guiding pillars (indicators) for a successful Diaspora engagement strategy are summarised below. The importance of these pillars cannot be underestimated. For instance, the Scorecard tool that the African Union has developed for the member states (MS) is based on these pillars and, specifically, on their value with respect to benchmarking Diaspora engagement. The eight pillars underpinning the model are sketched in the figure below. Each of the pillars will then be briefly described in hierarchical order.



## Political Will

The primary pillar is the existence of a strong **political will** at the highest level of government for Diaspora engagement in homeland development. This requires a committed leadership that sees the Diaspora as a force for positive change that should be partnered with for the development of the homeland. In this regard, a dedicated figure, such as a president or a prime minister, can make a difference, as the experiences in Mexico, India, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Nigeria exemplify. All these countries have made the Diaspora a key enabler for achieving development goals on poverty reduction. Likewise, they have accumulated a

wealth of experience that other countries can learn from and potentially adopt in their own context. A good example in the context of Africa is the leadership role played by the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, who established the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) in 2001. He personally appointed a special advisor for Diaspora issues, tasked with mainstreaming Diaspora-driven development within key government ministries. He also instructed Nigerian Embassies and High Commissions around the globe to encourage Nigerian Diaspora to come together under the platform of NIDO and contribute to development efforts in Nigeria. The establishment of NIDO has significantly helped the institutionalization of cooperation between the Diaspora and the government, and it has deepened the involvement of the Nigerian Diaspora in the country's development, particularly in knowledge-intensive parts of the economy such as the private sector as well as health and education.<sup>3</sup>

## Knowing your Diaspora

The second pillar is **knowing your Diaspora**. This means having access to reliable information about the whereabouts and profiles of the members of your Diaspora population overseas. Collecting and documenting accurate Diaspora data in advance is essential. The aim is to know more about the profiles of the Diaspora across different countries and regions around the world. In practice, this requires undertaking mapping exercises and understanding what the Diaspora has to offer, what it is willing to offer, and what it, in turn, expect from the government.<sup>4</sup> To this end, 'knowing your Diaspora' is the second principle of engaging the Diaspora in homeland development. Obtaining baseline data in advance increases understanding of the nature of a country's Diaspora. Conducting a mapping exercise is an important first step as it can provide accurate baseline information about: the size and composition of the Diaspora; generations; their geographical locations; how they organize themselves; levels of education; breakdown of professions and skills. All this information is needed to develop a targeted outreach strategy towards the Diaspora. It is also necessary for understanding the needs, expectations, and development potential of the Diaspora before any policy action is formulated.

## Diaspora Policy

The third pillar is the establishment of a **national Diaspora policy**, as well as the capacity to translate it into feasible strategic interventions and achievable actions. As every action starts with a defined policy strategy, developing a national Diaspora policy remains a key priority from the outset. Such a policy allows policymakers to plan strategically and establish a workable plan with short-, medium-, and long-term goals for engaging the Diaspora in homeland development. Furthermore, the existence of such a policy guides policymakers to focus on easier and more achievable actions that are less expensive (i.e. that avoid bigger and costly ventures). This, in turn, demonstrates quick and tangible results to members of the Diaspora who potentially want to connect to the development of the country. More importantly, having a national Diaspora policy contributes to building, strengthening, and institutionalizing the relationships between a country of origin and its overseas migrants in a productive and sustainable manner.

<sup>3</sup> See Adepoju, Aderanti (2008), 'Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: A contribution to the Swedish Government White Paper on Africa', *Current African Issues*, The Nordic Africa Institute, No.37.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see: Ranneveig Agunias, Dovelyn & Kathleen Newland (2012), *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries*, Cham: IOM-MPI publications.

## Enabling Environment

The fourth pillar is the creation of a **Diaspora-friendly environment** on the ground, coupled with sound domestic institutions (both public and private). In practice, this means establishing sound legal, regulatory, and/or institutional frameworks that encourage the participation of the Diaspora in homeland development. It also means improving the investment climate in the homeland, by, for example, reducing administrative burdens, bureaucratic red tape, creating greater transparency in regulations and licensing requirements, and more consistent application of property law. Another enabling policy act could be to devise institutional mechanisms aimed at supporting Diaspora returnees with administration, registration, logistical support, and business counselling for those seeking to set-up development-related projects or businesses in the country. The creation of a Diaspora-friendly environment is an important precondition for engaging the Diaspora in the overall development of the homeland. In short, having a Diaspora-friendly environment will, in turn, motivate the Diaspora to contribute more to the development of the country. Moreover, it is a key step because rapprochement between Diasporas and the government of their respective countries of origin often encourages Diaspora to relate to the situation back home in new, different and, crucially, constructive ways.

## Consultation Mechanism

The fifth pillar is developing a **consultation mechanism** with the Diaspora. Such a mechanism facilitates regular communication with the Diaspora in order to build confidence and trust with the homeland government. The mechanism also facilitates the development of formal channels of communication between the Diaspora and the homeland government, which make it possible to direct the input of the Diaspora into the formulation of sound policy in their respective countries of origin. Currently, communication with the Diaspora remains ad hoc and fragmented in most cases and there are no reliable channels of communications to facilitate a constructive dialogue between the Diaspora and homeland governments in most developing countries in the South at this time. Hence, organizing annual homecoming summits, creating Diaspora leadership task forces, or setting up Diaspora advisory councils similar to that in Mexico can contribute to this process. A reliable channel of communication between Diaspora and homeland governments would encourage the formal recognition of Diaspora as credible and, indeed, indispensable agents for development in homelands among established development circles. Additionally, formal, and strategic cooperation with homeland governments would endow the Diaspora with a voice and political clout in decision-making processes regarding migration and development-related issues.

## Outreach Mobilization Strategy

The sixth pillar is to develop an effective **outreach mobilization strategy** geared towards reaching out to the Diaspora and connecting them structurally with homeland development. There are several mobilization strategies that can be utilized by governments to reach out to the Diaspora and effectively engage them in homeland development. The first, as outlined above, is knowing your Diaspora. In other words, government policymakers must know beforehand how Diaspora in host countries are organized, their locations, the key sectors they are involved in (at home and abroad), and the diverse ways in which Diaspora are mobilizing themselves for homeland development. Policymakers must also be informed about the needs, interests, skills, capabilities, and potential of the Diaspora in order to design workable engagement policies and practices. The second aspect of a successful outreach

strategy is informing your Diaspora. This is done by producing and disseminating information aimed at informing the Diaspora about the local social and economic conditions, development needs, and opportunities in the homeland. Likewise, the setting up of a 'one-stop shop' facility that provides much-needed information for Diaspora returnees contributes to an effective mobilization strategy. Developing a national 'Diaspora Guide' of the kind implemented by the Government of Rwanda also helps. The advantage of such a guide is that it provides relevant information for the Diaspora regarding issues such as rules and procedures, investment opportunities, return provisions, and so on. It can also provide information about how the Diaspora can contribute to the development of the homeland and what the government can do for them. The third instrument that can be utilized to reach out to the Diaspora are embassies and consulates located in host countries. Embassies and consulates are in a strategic position to play a role in efforts to identify, mobilize, and connect potential Diaspora returnees to homeland development schemes.

## Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The seventh pillar involves establishing a **mechanism for multi-stakeholder partnerships and cooperation** at the national level. The aim is to incentivise key stakeholders and strategic partners in diverse sectors of the economy to participate in efforts geared towards leveraging and engaging the Diaspora more deeply in national development. Hence, mobilizing and establishing a multi-stakeholder partnership among potential stakeholders in different sectors of the economy is critical, not least because Diaspora engagement in domestic development cuts across different sectors, public and private, in the domains of economy, politics, and society. Indeed, building up a solid multi-stakeholder partnership and cooperation at the local and national level is the cornerstone of engaging the Diaspora in the national development agenda. This is the lesson learned from countries with successful Diaspora policy and practice, such as Mexico and India. Key multi-stakeholders that must be mobilised to work together include:

- **Government representatives:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministries of Development, Planning, Labour and Finance; central banks; local authorities, municipalities, etc.
- **Private sector representatives:** Chamber of Commerce; Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises such as Diaspora-owned and money transfer companies directly involved in Diaspora remittances transfers.
- **Civil society representatives:** grass-roots development NGOs; Diaspora returnees, and philanthropists involved in community welfare programmes.

The aim is to build a local constituency and coalition of partners representing diverse sectors of the economy with the aim of advancing and deepening Diaspora engagement in domestic development. In short, establishing a mechanism for multi-stakeholder partnerships is essential to achieve an integrated approach to Diaspora engagement at the national level.

## Diaspora-Oriented Programmes

The eighth pillar requires the development of **Diaspora-oriented programmes** on the ground. Diaspora development organizations, professionally organized groups, and individuals are already involved in the development of the homeland in different ways. Yet, their interventions remain informal, ad hoc, and fragmented. As a result, Diaspora development is not structurally aligned with key economic and social sectors of the national development agenda, such as health, education, and private development (i.e., SMEs).

Fortunately, the newly agreed Post-2015 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a window of opportunity for homeland governments to seize. Migration targets were explicitly incorporated under the goals on economic growth, employment, and decent work (SDG 8), inequality (SDG 10), and means of implementation (SDG 17). In this regard, homeland governments, in partnership with the Diaspora, can translate the migration-related goals and targets into realizable national development programmes within a foreseeable period. This requires each homeland government to identify key priority areas and develop strategies that allow Diaspora to make tangible contributions. In addition to such goals and targets, homeland governments must develop indicators to monitor the precise contribution of the Diaspora to achieving the SDGs within the context of each country.

## Conclusion

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. There is also no magic formula in the Diaspora engagement business. Ultimately, success is based on convincing, regular dialogue, and creative organization. Fortunately, there are already evidence-based lessons available for governments to learn from in terms of engaging the Diaspora more effectively in national development. These lessons inform the eight pillars briefly outlined above, which facilitate the benchmarking of any Diaspora engagement efforts undertaken by a government of any country. Thus, the pillars provide a guidepost to any government that is serious about committing to partnering with its Diaspora in its national development agenda.

The pillars are systematically organized in a manner that enables government policymakers to easily understand what they can do, how they can do it, and the resources needed to achieve both short- and long-term goals in this regard. Furthermore, the pillars assist government policymakers in assessing what measures have already been put in place and the gaps that must be addressed to establish a successful Diaspora engagement model for development. The pillars presented here will enable government policymakers to develop a checklist, which they can tick off as they work towards an appropriate Diaspora engagement model. We acknowledge that having all the pillars in place simultaneously is a monumental task for any country and demands much effort, time, and resources that are not easily marshalled. We therefore suggest that the pillars be put into place within a reasonable period, based on the capacity and context of each country. Crucially, successful translation of the pillars of this model into an action plan requires the training of any government officials tasked to do it.

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The analysis in this policy brief is informed by the knowledge, experience, and expertise of the African migration policy experts who participated in the seventh webinar organized by the Knowledge Platform for Migration Governance in Africa. The added value of the African migration policy experts in the policy discussion in the field, devoted to strengthening the institutional capacity of migration governance, is tremendous. The experts articulate a less familiar African narrative in the discussion, closely informed by insider observation, local perspective, specific country experience, and deeper understanding about the complexity and challenges of the multi-facets of migration and mobility dynamics on the continent, which receive little policy attention. The experts who participated in the seventh webinar of the Platform represented different partner countries in Africa, namely: Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia.