

Diasporas in Development Potential and Challenges

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Diasporas in Development, potential and challenges

Definitions and Questions

Diaspora, from Greek, means dispersal or scattering. From its Greek origins, διασπορά, meaning sow and scatter seed, it refers to a scattered population with a common origin, that from a smaller geographic area becomes scattered wide and far.

Now it has become a concept related to experiences of communities of migrants living or settled, temporarily or permanently, in other countries other than that of birth or origins. More recently, the concept has been linked to the idea of network and has become part of an active policy with the support of governments, companies and associations. It sometimes refers to groups of different kinds but also to nationalities and may include not only permanently settled and with dual nationality but also recent emigrants, and even expatriates (working in a third country on behalf of a company or organization). The aim of the various types of diasporas are part of the debate and academic study.

In the last 10 years, there has been growing interest in tapping business opportunities and markets linked to the diasporas' human capital as well as the social capital of diaspora networks, as shown by 'high-level' conferences and fora.²

Also, at the same time, the European Union integrated the concept into stakeholder consultations and recognized its economic value in development policy and practice through its 2011 European Commission Communication on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility.³ In December 2014, the European Council reaffirmed called the EU to increase its capacity to engage with diasporas, additionally valuing knowledge, experience and technology such as ICT.⁴ The European Union has shown more reluctance to engage with the concept uncritically but has had projects on European diasporas connected to their mapping,⁵ security, peace processes⁶ and development.

² Hillary Clinton's Global Diaspora Fora of 2011 and 2012 had 75 countries meeting in Washington. The third annual Global Diaspora Forum (GDF) went global with multi-city events and live-streamed events from Washington, DC; Dublin, Ireland; and Silicon Valley, CA in 2013. "During the Forum, leaders in business, technology, investment and trade, government, and other prominent members of global diaspora communities aimed to uncover new ways of collaborating around innovation, technology and youth-focused engagements." See: <http://diasporaalliance.org/featured/global-diaspora-forum/>

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, 18 November 2011, COM (2011) 743 final.

⁴ European Council Conclusions on migration in EU development cooperation, Foreign Affairs (Development) Council meeting, Brussels, 112 December 2014, p. 5.

⁵ The European Commission commissioned study mapping diasporas in the European Union and the United States to RAND Europe and the Institute for the Study of Labor (Rand Europe and the Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), 2014)

⁶ (Vorrath, 2012) explains that diasporas are included in civil society forums as a dialogue component of the Peacebuilding Partnership on specific conflicts (Bosnia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Somalia) with participation of

Criteria to identify those who may take part in a diaspora

(Bakewell, 2009) proposes four criteria:

- 1) a movement from an original homeland, either forced or voluntary, in search of better livelihoods and safety.
- 2) a collective myth of an ancestral home
- 3) a strong group consciousness based on shared history, culture, religion
- 4) a sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries, the latter being the original homeland or several host lands at the same time.

(Adamson, 2008) argues that under the view of diasporic politics as a form of strategic social identity construction, there are 'political entrepreneurs' trying to create a transnational 'imagined political community' (Anderson, 2006). It is helpful then to think of the literatures on transnational networks and social movements emphasizing the strategic deployment of conceptual or ideal frames for political mobilization (Adamson, 2008). This argument is important in view of maintaining accountability and legitimacy in development cooperation. At the same time, it can be a reminder to distinguish those willing to engage in development work from those with other objectives. Besides, it can serve a reminder that diasporas are socially constructed and there may be willing participants to support a shared notion of development that is peaceful, inclusive and sustainable.

Development and Diasporas

Diaspora networks may contribute to the homeland development through various types of accumulated capital and contact with new social, economic and political ideas. They have local in-depth knowledge and act as inter-cultural bridges. On the negative side, they may hold disproportionate influence (Bakewell, 2009).

In 2012, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (Agunias & Newland, 2012) identified six key areas of diaspora contribution:

1. Remittances, either financial to family or hometown associations; or social through the sharing of ideas skills, normative structures and social practices that enhance democracy.
2. Direct investments
3. Human capital transfers
4. Philanthropy
5. Capital market investments
6. Tourism

How are diasporas mobilized and to which ends?

diaspora members and organizations. The European Peacebuilding Liaison Officer partner organizations selected such participants, or the latter approached the former.

According (Horst, et al., 2010) diaspora participation in development goes from a) passive participation, b) participation in information giving, c) participation by consultation, d) participation for material incentives, e) functional participation, f) interactive participation to g) self-mobilization.

(Horst, 2013) proposes to reconceptualise refugee diasporas as active civil participants that can play a role in policy and practice through a combination of formal structures, informal networks and mutual aid. Five main trends have been observed, all related to the above-mentioned areas.

In the UK, there has been a compilation of a series of manuals and toolkits destined to diasporas as NGOs. What stands out is that the manuals are the same as for any other NGO in development work: *“not mere theory. It emerges from more than 20 years practical experiences of doing strategic planning with NGOs”* (James, 2012). In this case, it is observed an effort to transform diaspora members into development workers.

Trends in Diasporas Mobilization

1) Transfers to the country of origin - especially remittances – to financially support development projects. (IFAD, 2009) acknowledged the importance of credit unions and cooperatives in this regard, but also the difficulties they face to be allowed to fully help their countries.⁷ Transfers can also be done to acquire land, which may turn out to be a sensitive issue in the future.⁸ Finally, transfers can also be done through collective remittances for development projects, including shipments of equipment, as in Denmark (Trans & Vammen, 2011).⁹

2) Through business investment. Sometimes governments make possible for migrants to invest in businesses which they can manage from a distance using sites such as *‘WHO IS IN THE DIASPORA’*, geared to real estate acquisitions, and the purchase of land for building gated communities and business hubs.¹⁰

3) Formation of diaspora-led development organizations, with an emergent infrastructure in Europe including Italy, with the recommendation to support them with funding for social investment (Taylor, et al., December 2014, pages 24, 146-147). There are two institutions, among others, that could be of interest for Italy: 1) the COMIDE, of which COSPE is part, and 2) the ICMFD.¹¹ COMIDE website shows two projects in *Rwanda with Harvests of Friends and Compassion in*

⁷ (IFAD, 2009) on the African diaspora of more than 30 million individuals living outside their countries of origin, estimated that these migrants jointly contributed about US\$40 billion in remittances to their families and communities back home every year until 2009, being of utmost importance to the economic health of the region’s nations, and to recipient families. For the region as a whole, remittances far exceeded official development assistance, and for many countries they exceed foreign direct investment as well.

⁸⁸ For example, The Rwanda Diaspora General Directorate allows groups of 15 or more people to acquire land in Kigali for house construction, provided the project is approved by the Kigali City Council based on the Kigali Master Plan. <http://www.rwandandiaspora.gov.rw/>

⁹ (Trans & Vammen, 2011) describe an association with regular donations to Africa to support development projects, such as the shipment of used equipment in containers, typically destined for schools, universities, orphanages, or hospitals (41 associations), followed by the sending of collective remittances (27 associations), implementation of farming or smaller business projects, and provision of microcredit loans. The money may go to private entities as well as to public institutions.

¹⁰ See the section on Diasporas at <https://www.optiven.co.ke/properties>, active in Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, and Europe (accessed on 16 March 2018).

¹¹ 1) Since 2011, the CoMiDe project was established with the aim to enhance coherent migration and development policies by initiating cooperation between development NGOs, migrant organizations and

Rwanda and NWC -Nyamirambo Women's Centre. Fields of work mentioned are in the first case: humanitarian aid fundraising, advocacy, education development, cooperation, awareness raising, cultural activities, compassion to vulnerable people, and health. Topics tagged are, in the first case, development global issues, sport, culture, peace, health, water, education, entrepreneurship, compassion. In the second project, fields of work mentioned are education, development cooperation, cultural activities, and awareness raising. Topics tagged are education, health and development.¹² Italy shows 5 organizations with PADOR ID, namely registered with EuropeAid. PADOR is the Potential Applicant Data On-Line Registration, an on-line system in which potential applicants answer to calls for proposals, register and update regularly information about their profile (legal, financial, etc). Of those five, only *UISP sport per tutti* has the tag Peace under Topics.

The ICMPD studied projects on diasporas between 2013 and 2015, calling for new modalities of work after observing a series of limitations and difficulties. In their conclusions, though, the Peer-to-peer learning, exchange and networking stand out as effective ways to further develop the capacities of institutions dealing with diaspora engagement (Frankenhaeuser & Noack, 2015).

As for the role for policymakers, in the current context of diminishing direct cooperation aid, is rather envisaged as intermediary between social investors and companies/ sponsors. Policy intermediaries can include cities as it already exists in Antwerp (Taylor, et al., December 2014, page 147). This could be a path to explore. It could also facilitate the support by civil society organizations and NGOs to those starting projects and activity with social goals, including cooperatives.

4) Direct personal involvement of diaspora members in development initiatives. There are various ways to involve them.

One is to be a volunteer amid other staff. UNDP, the United Nations Development Program's Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) projects supported diaspora volunteers to Rwanda, to both UN and government offices in 2005-2007, for three-week to three-month development assignments as expatriates, at much lower costs than hiring fully professional consultants.¹³ (Touray, 2008) showed an average stay of less than two months, where the transfer of knowledge to counterparts in host institutions was constrained. According to (Bigombe, 2008), diaspora volunteers were sought mainly in North America.

Transfer of knowledge is not a purely technical matter, depending on clear rules, previous trust building and exchanges, to ensure effectiveness. In addition, evaluation and monitoring should be specific to this type of activity. (Bigombe, 2008, page 42) noted that "*UNDP could do far more to build*

communities in four European countries: Italy, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria. CoMiDe raises public awareness about migration and development issues with most African migrant organizations involved, through research, conferences and debates, training courses and workshops, partnership fairs and lobby meetings. Training and online learning is promoted as well as networking and cooperation are supported to facilitate information sharing good practices of Diaspora organizations actively engaged in migration and development as well as development cooperation practices. See examples at <http://www.comide.net/>

2) The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) is an inter-governmental organization with UN Observer status, created in 1993 at the initiative of Switzerland and Austria. The purpose of the Centre is to promote innovative, comprehensive and sustainable migration policies.

¹² CoMiDe Projects at <http://www.comide.net/search/> after choosing country Rwanda, accessed on 17 March 2018

¹³http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/Research%20and%20publications/Annual%20reports/RW_rp_rwanda_annualreport2007.pdf

partnerships and explore possible synergies with Rwandan NGOs and civil society organizations”. UNDP continues its work in Rwanda and its calls to NGOs.¹⁴

Another way is to engage in community and rural development, sometimes through partnerships with home associations and cities. African Diasporas are organized along hometown / villages and ethnic lines hence these organizations are described as *Hometown Associations* in the traditional development literature. They contribute in kind, with remittances, supplies, but may also operate scholarships programmes. The Hometown Associations also exist in other countries such as Mexico, and they help identify local needs, calling for participatory structures such as cooperatives for women. Oxfam Novib in The Netherlands work with Hometown Associations (Gonouya, 2008).

5) Participation in networking events and policy dialogues. The Rwandan government is reaching out to its diaspora through a new set of institutions, events and policies.¹⁵ The analysis of diaspora members as actors cannot be uncritical, for some may enjoy privileges or suffer prejudices with respect to other members in the same diaspora. For example, those well settled in developed countries may command more resources, authority, esteem, than those in Africa. Sometimes, political cultures consent patrimonial networks to enjoy uneven gains through globalized neoliberalism (Davies, 2008). This potential challenge needs consideration because it reinforces inequality.

Conclusions

From the above discussion, a *diaspora is a group stemming from the same homeland that has maintained a shared identity, is engaged in dynamic transnational networking and motivated enough to become an actor in policy frameworks, such as development, peace, gender, education and human resources*.

This definition may help identify those motivated to participate in development and peacebuilding. It also means that not all expats and migrants are part of or form diasporas. This is contested concept that is taken as a natural by-product of migration or as the building of a socially constructed actor for various purposes. Some diasporas may be exclusivist and closed to other members of the same group of origin or may be open and inclusive to pluralism. Others can be mixed, with those of the group of shared origin and nationals of their host lands. In fact, no diaspora is a single entity but multifaceted and diverse. Not all migrants form diasporas, and not all in the same diaspora may share the same motivation.

The key point is to remain aware and focused on the values and ideas of what development is for the organization and group, and with which aims projects are carried out.

¹⁴ For example, the GEF small grants programme, at <http://www.rw.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/operations/Procurement/Notices/GEF%20SGP-Call%20for%20project%20proposals.pdf>

¹⁵ Since 2007, Rwandan President has invited the diaspora living abroad to the National Dialogues, mentioned in ‘*Rwanda: Inama y’Umushyikirano, The Inside Story*’ article at <https://redpepper.co.ug/rwanda-inama-yumushyikirano-the-inside-story/>, of 13 December 2012. Accessed 16 March 2018. See also the video on youth ‘*Meetup with the Rwandan Youth Diaspora in Brussels*’ at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjtzezPPyAk>. Accessed on 16 March 2018.

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