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**DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION
AND ASYLUM IN DEVELOPMENT**

WORKING TOGETHER WITH REFUGEE DIASPORAS IN DEVELOPMENT

DISCUSSION PAPER

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AUTHORS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a growing realisation that development NGOs need to broaden their scope of work and should include those refugee communities in Europe who are involved in the development of their countries of origin. Conflicts and political instability often make it more challenging for refugee diasporas to engage with their countries of origin through formal or institutional channels. Nevertheless, refugee diaspora groups remain active in peace building, reconciliation, capacity building for civil society, human rights, gender empowerment, and economic development. They also run projects funded by international donors. In this way they often have a say in future policies and programmes affecting their countries, including influencing EU policy and implementing projects advocating refugee protection. As transnational actors their agendas and scope extend to both countries of origin and of destination.

The aim of this paper is to explore the scope of work that refugee communities undertake for the development of their countries of origin, and the partnerships they develop with NGOs, development organisations and donors, by identifying their strengths, weaknesses, and cooperation challenges. The findings are based on the experiences and views of stakeholders collected through consultation in the framework of the DomAid project in 2013-2014.

The paper contends that there is a potentially wide spectrum of cooperation between diaspora groups and development actors, but that these opportunities remain context specific. Namely, being clear about the terms and objectives of the partnership and its limits, ensuring ownership and remaining needs-driven are some of the key elements of a successful partnership. The paper highlights the diaspora groups' transnational character and demonstrates that their involvement in their countries of origin is in direct relationship with integration in the country of settlement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'diaspora as agents of change' has gained significant global momentum over the past decade in the context of migration and development. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of the economic, socio-cultural and political influence and engagement of diasporas in their countries of origin.¹ UN agencies, states, international donors and influential organisations have reached out to include diasporas in their scope, by supporting their actions financially or through capacity building, thus strengthening their networking capacities at both the local level and across borders.

The European Union, in its Commission Communication on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (2011), recognised that 'at both EU and Member State level, the contribution of diaspora organisations to development policy and practice are increasingly valued.'² This raises the question of how to increase the impact of diaspora contribution to development, how to better foster synergies and enhance partnerships with development actors. Several pilot projects and programmes, by different donors, have provided an opportunity to turn discourse into practice, while at the same time shedding light on a number of issues and challenges.

The aim of this paper is to inform on the development practices of refugee diasporas in Europe, and how potently diaspora groups and NGOs can interact when cooperating towards development goals. Multiple actors in the field of development are looking for ways to increase cooperation with stakeholders and to more effectively expand the development impact of migration and diasporas. The paper reflects a growing understanding of the need for civil society organisations and development organisations to be more 'inclusive' of the target groups and beneficiaries they are representing, and work more closely with refugee representatives and migrant-led organisations in decision-making and in their activities. This is the case for development cooperation, advocacy and support for migrants and refugees in hosting countries. It also aims to reinforce the point that refugees and migrants are not mere recipients of aid, but active transnational agents that can bring about change, and that their empowerment and integration is beneficial not only for them as individuals but also for communities across borders.

The paper was produced in the framework of the DomAid (Dialogue on Migration and Asylum in Development) project, implemented by ECRE and partners between 2012 and 2014, which involved consultations with various stakeholders aiming to gather information on practices and challenges of diaspora work in development. Stakeholder consultations took the form of meetings with NGOs, donors and diaspora representatives, a public seminar and a workshop on the involvement of refugee representatives in civil society advocacy.³

2. DIASPORA: CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The term diaspora encompasses a wide variety of expatriate communities. It may range from extended kinship groups to professional and labour networks; from small grassroots community groups to large, established organisations. Members of diasporas engage transnationally in a range of ways. According to the IOM and MPI, diasporas' involvement with their countries of origin falls under six broad categories: peacebuilding, political engagement, business interaction, financial and cultural contribution, knowledge sharing and project implementation.⁴ Such engagement can be on an individual or collective basis, and it can take the form of a one-off or more regular activity. Furthermore, diaspora members may assume several identities and often maintain strong ties and allegiances to multiple countries.⁵

I. DEFINING DIASPORAS

The concept of 'Diaspora' signifies 'the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland'.⁶ In the early to mid-twentieth century it referred to specific cultural groups such as Jewish and Armenian peoples. By the turn of the century the term was used more broadly to signify an exiled group of people, voluntarily or forcibly, who shared a sense of common identity and long-term connection to their homeland.

Over the last decade the notion of diaspora has become deeply intertwined with the migration and development discourse.

1 See for example Bonjour 2005; Hein de Haas 2010; European Commission 2005; Kenneth Hermele 1997; Horst 2008; Naik et al. 2008; Ionescu 2006; Libercier and Schneider 1996; Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002; Raghuram 2009

2 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.

3 The Public Seminar 'Refugees as development actors' was organised by ECRE, the Danish Refugee Council and Maastricht University in Brussels on 18 March 2014. Participants included the Afghan Human Rights Network (UK), Katib Cultural Association (Denmark), African Diaspora Policy Centre, Forum Syd, the Diaspora Programme of the Danish Refugee Council, Comic Relief, AFFORD, GIZ, ICMPD, ICMC, Norwegian Agency for Development, European Commission (DG DEVCO), African Union, UNDP, IOM, UNHCR. The advocacy workshop included refugee representatives and organisations based in different European countries (Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Hungary, Germany) and donors such as OSF and EFTA (EEA grants for civil society organisations).

4 Rannveig Agunias D. and Newland K., (2012), *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries* (Geneva and Washington DC: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Migration Policy Institute (MPI)).

5 Horst C., (2013), 'The Depoliticisation of Diasporas from the Horn of Africa: From Refugees to Transnational Aid Workers', *African Studies*, Volume 72, Issue 2, 242.

6 Diaspora', Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster.com (n.d. Web. 15 Dec. 2014) <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora>

By this connotation, diasporas are understood as migrant groups in a host country who continue to share a collective consciousness, are committed to the maintenance or restoration of their homeland through transnational activity, and are in some cases anticipating an eventual return.⁷

The host country contributes to the creation of a diaspora too, and consequently there may be stark contrast between the character of two diasporas from the same country of origin but which are settled in two different countries. The objectives of various diaspora groups can differ widely, with some groups more focused on advocating for migrant and refugee rights in their country of settlement, and others more focused on the development of their country of origin. It is also important to note that many diaspora organisations do not define themselves or their network as part of a 'Diaspora', either in name or concept.

Diaspora members' connection with their various countries of allegiance may be complex and diverse. According to Sinatti and Horst (2014) it may not conform to a 'binary mobility bias' in which diaspora members experience a direct and exclusive allegiance with their country of origin first, and host country second.⁸ The often encountered presumption of diasporas' intrinsic desire and intention to return home, even temporarily, means that the complexities of transnational migrant connections are not taken into account. This presumption has been criticised as essentializing diasporas, drawing on assumptions of inevitable and homogeneous sense of rootedness in country of origin. In reality, the complexity and unpredictability of war and displacement may mean that diaspora members assume several identities and maintain strong ties to multiple countries.⁹ Diasporas in practice are not always an actual community, or if they are they may not always be inclined to act as a unified 'national' or cultural entity. The diversity of diaspora identities and objectives across Europe has led NGOs to focus on their role and services, i.e. what it is that the diaspora group is doing. This may be particularly relevant with refugee diasporas, which are the focus of the following section.

II. REFUGEE DIASPORAS

Although most initiatives focusing on diaspora engagement do not distinguish between refugee and other diasporas, research and practitioners in the field have identified a number of distinctive characteristics.¹⁰ These characteristics were also echoed in the consultations with diaspora groups and stakeholders in the framework of the DomAid project.

The conflict and post-conflict settings from which refugee diasporas emerge impact differently on their ability to engage with other actors, their level of commitment, as well as the nature of activities they get involved in. Refugee diasporas mobilise as a force for change in their countries of origin during and after conflict. Some tend to continue to be active in political opposition, making use of the resources, freedoms and rights available to them in the safety of democratic society. Diaspora members often feel that freedom of speech and the possibility to mobilise politically in the country of settlement allows for new possibilities in engaging in political opposition. In fact the contribution of the country of settlement in creating and sustaining refugee diasporas is significant. Alternatively, others tend to avoid homeland politics out of fear, frustration or because they want to prevent being labelled as such.

Conflict settings affect the nature of development activities refugee diasporas participate in. When there are greater and more acute needs in the countries of origin in conflict, refugee diasporas may be more motivated to focus on humanitarian and emergency needs, medical care, poverty and migration.¹¹

Another important factor affecting the possibility to engage in partnerships is the legal status and situation in which refugees and asylum seekers find themselves. Participants in DomAid consultations underlined that the precariousness and uncertainty that most refugees and asylum seekers face in European countries today saps their ability to participate, as safety, and the need to secure a long-term status, takes priority. The ability to engage with their country of origin also depends on the potential risks refugees may face in engaging with external actors.¹² Several studies indicate a strong link between integration in the country of settlement and engagement in the country of origin.

There can be a high level of fragmentation among refugee diasporas, along national, regional, clan, religious, political, socioeconomic, or gender lines. These divisions often reflect respective histories in the countries of origin.¹³ The Somali and Ethiopian diasporas, for example, display a high degree of fragmentation along various of the abovementioned lines. Fragmentation often follows the lines that gave rise to the conflict in the country of origin. The post-conflict experience may have a great impact on the shaping of diasporas and their members' engagement. The trauma of the flight and the reasons that have led refugees to leave their homes (persecution, violence, discrimination and threats or acts of harm) are rarely left behind. Refugees who have escaped conflict or oppression often find themselves in situations where they

7 Horst C., (2006), *Transnational Nomads: How Somalis cope with refugee life in the Dadaab camps of Kenya* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2006): 32-33; Horst C. et al. (2010), 'Participation of Diasporas in Peacebuilding and Development: A Handbook for Practitioners and Policymakers', PRIO Report, 2 (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), p.9. 'Diaspora groups' is used in this paper to encompass all sorts of migrant and refugee groups and organisations in host countries.

8 Sinatti G. and Horst C., (2014), 'Migrants as agents of development: diaspora engagement discourse and practice in Europe', *Ethnicities*, 7 April 2014: 1.

9 Sinatti and Horst, (2014), pp. 1 and 13; Horst (2013), pp. 231, 236 & 238

10 Pirkkalainen P. and Abdile M., (2009), 'The Diaspora – Conflict – Peace – Nexus: A Literature Review', DIASPEACE Working Papers, 1; Horst et al., (2010), pp. 19-20

11 Ibid

12 Horst et al., (2010), p. 19; Horst (2013), p.235

13 Horst (2013), p.229

either fear or are subject to surveillance in their country of settlement, and consequently show increasing distrust.¹⁴

III. DIASPORA IN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

While migration was once viewed as a sign of development failure, the past decades have seen a turnaround in perspectives on the subject, resulting in a broad recognition and a proliferation of studies on the development impact of diasporas and migrant groups. Through DomAid project consultations with stakeholders, it was demonstrated that diasporas mobilised for development make crucial contributions to the lives and livelihoods of people in countries of origin. The impact of financial remittances has been affirmed, and understanding has increased on other fundamental aspects of migration and development, including the influence of migration on global economy and growth. Multilateral financial agencies, including the World Bank, annually demonstrate the significance of diaspora remittances on development: in 2013 diaspora remittances to developing countries were three times larger than official development assistance, amounting to \$414 billion.¹⁵

In policy dialogues, and international fora on migration and development, civil society has often expressed its concern that diasporas are not being adequately included. This has led to increased advocacy for better integration of diaspora and civil society perspectives in multilateral projects and policy-making, and enhanced dialogue between diaspora, NGOs and development organisations.

Migration and development have featured together in a number of international policy agendas: these include the Global Commission on International Migration in 2005; the UN High Level Dialogues on International Migration and Development in 2006 and 2013; the Global Forum on Migration and Development (which has taken place annually since 2007); the second UN Conference on Sustainable Development; Rio+20 in 2012; the follow up to the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development in 2014; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Post-2015 development framework (Post-2015 Agenda). Amongst the goals of the Swedish Chairmanship to Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in 2013-14 was to explore the possibilities of enhancing the positive contributions of migration (whether conflict induced or not¹⁶) to inclusive economic and social development, through policy work in the two fields.¹⁷ The second UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (HLD) in New York 3-4 October 2013 resulted in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopting a concluding Declaration that acknowledged the contribution of migrants to development in countries of origin, destination and transit. The HLD and UNGA recognised migration as a cross-cutting key factor for sustainable development that needs to be addressed in a coherent and comprehensive manner. The UNGA called on all relevant international and regional actors to work together to begin developing new approaches to the issue.¹⁸ The UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has further asserted that better management of migration is essential, along with fully harnessing the development contribution of migrants.¹⁹ A comprehensive approach to migration is therefore expected to be amongst priorities of the MDGs Post-2015 development framework.

At the European level, the Commission Communication on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM; 2011) recognised that 'at both EU and Member States levels, the contribution of diaspora organisations to development policy and practice are increasingly valued. As initiators of development projects in countries of origin, they have established themselves as agents for development vis-à-vis both policy makers and donors'.²⁰ The Council Conclusions on the GAMM also identify migration as a priority area, and in the last few years have regularly restated its importance. The Council has touched upon the importance of new, holistic approaches to migration, new legal channels into the area and generally maximising the potential benefits of migration, as well as emphasising taking migrants' perspectives into consideration in the process.²¹ In December 2014 the Council reiterated the need to increase capacity to engage with diasporas in context of the above.²²

In 2013 the European Commission adopted a Communication in which the EU recognises the need for a comprehensive alternative to traditional approaches, affirming the intention for future EU action on migration and development to address the full range of impacts, positive and negative, of migration on economic, social, and environmental development in

14 Horst (2013), pp. 235-6 and 239

15 World Bank, 'Migration and Development Brief 23 - Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook* Special Topic: Forced Migration' (6 Oct 2014), 4, Migration and Remittances Team, Development Prospects Group.

16 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2013-2014, 'Programme Document' (Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden, 2013), p. 11

17 Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), 'GFMD 2013-2014 Concept Paper: Unlocking the potential of migration for inclusive development' (GFMD, 30 April 2013), pp. 2, 3-4

18 UN General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 3 October 2013, 3 October 2013, A/RES/68/4

19 UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (UNTT), 'Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General'. New York: UNTT, 2012.

20 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

21 Mainly in the framework of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, See Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, No. 9417/12, 3 May 2012.

22 Council Conclusions on migration in EU development cooperation, Foreign Affairs (Development) Council meeting, Brussels, 12 December 2014/ST 16901 2014 INIT, 12 December 2014, p. 5

order to better harness and maximise the benefits of migration.²³ One of the ways forward that was identified in this Communication is through the contribution of diaspora groups, in countries of origin and destination.²⁴ The Communication underlines the importance of integrating forced migration flows in the new comprehensive approach, the need to avoid the criminalisation of irregular migration and to provide for new legal routes. The importance of an inclusive policy dialogue, involving diaspora organisations amongst others, is also highlighted.

Finally, the Council Conclusions on Migration in EU Development Cooperation of 12 December 2014 have placed renewed emphasis on the contribution, not only economic, but also through transfer of knowledge, experience and technology, as well as in the framework of national reconciliation processes, that diaspora members can offer for the development of their countries of origin; and the need to reinforce the capacity of stakeholders to engage with diasporas and to channel its contributions in line with national development priorities.²⁵

3. DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS AS DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

Diaspora initiatives can be professional networks, individual or community initiatives, migrant associations, or umbrella organisations and platforms. In the framework of the DomAid consultation, participants found that the main stakeholders in this area are community-based diaspora groups, umbrella organisations bringing together smaller community based groups, international charities and NGOs, government agencies and intergovernmental bodies.

I. AREAS OF DIASPORA DEVELOPMENT WORK

Diaspora organisations are involved in a wide variety of projects in their countries of origin. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) have identified six key themes of diaspora contribution:²⁶

- » Financial remittances to family or hometown associations; social remittances through the sharing of ideas and skills, normative structures and social practices that enhance democracy. This functions as a 'brain gain' that offsets the occurrence of 'brain drain', through the counter-flow of trade relations, new knowledge, innovations, attitudes and information.
- » Direct investments in the country of origin to boost economic growth, fund business development and professional networking, and pay for public infrastructure.
- » Human capital transfers such as temporary return programs, to use the skills of diaspora members to fill knowledge and experience gaps (teachers, mentors, research developers or professional practitioners)
- » Philanthropy or private donation to different causes. Private philanthropic enterprises are often able to undertake high risk policy innovation and demonstration projects, which are otherwise unfeasible for corporate or government agencies.
- » Capital market investments which can mobilise savings for long-term investments and wealth creation
- » Tourism as a primary source of foreign exchange earnings, job creation and economic stimulation. Diasporas can open new markets and promote their country of origin, and as tourists themselves, travel in a way that boosts small and local economies.

Finally, some diaspora groups are primarily involved in advocacy for human rights and social justice in their country of origin. Diaspora groups develop partnerships with other human rights organisations, local groups, media and academics in the country of settlement. Examples include the Afghan Human Rights Network (AHRN) in the UK, leading the Campaign for Human Rights in Afghanistan organised by members of the Afghan diaspora to support and improve human rights standards accompanied by a project to strengthen civil society structures in Afghanistan.²⁷ Another example is the International Commission on Eritrean Refugees, based in Sweden, an advocacy and lobbying group created by exiled Eritreans that advocates for the rights of Eritrean refugees, asylum seekers and victims of trafficking worldwide, collects data and conducts research, and facilitates networking between individuals and organisations to support refugees living in camps and outside. Through the internet and use of other media, ICER and partner refugee groups, like the Eritrean exiled radio Erena and the Agenzia Habeshia (Italy), act to shed light on the conditions in Eritrea, the human rights abuses and the reasons that force people to flee.²⁸

23 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Maximising the Development Impact of Migration - The EU contribution for the UN High-level Dialogue and next steps towards broadening the development-migration nexus. 21 May 2013. COM (2013) 292 final

24 COM (2013) 292 final

25 Council Conclusions, 12 December 2014: para 11, p. 5

26 Agunias R and Newland K., (2012), Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries (Geneva and Washington DC: International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

27 See <http://www.echra.org/our-work> and <https://facebook.com/pages/European-Campaign-for-Human-Rights-in-Afghanistan/149458751821047>

28 For information on ICER see https://www.facebook.com/pages/International-Commission-on-Eritrean-Refugees-ICER/192281294154326?sk=info&tab=page_info; Erena Radio <http://www.arena.org/index.php>; Agenzia Habeshia <http://habeshia.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/AgenziaHabeshia>

II. THE ADDED VALUE OF DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT

According to stakeholder contributions to the DomAid consultation, diaspora groups offer fresh ideas and relevant cultural, ethnic and/or national perspectives. This is what diaspora groups themselves also consider as central to their added value as a development actor.

While the benefits of partnering with diaspora organisations differ, depending on the organisation and context, certain qualities, expertise and the added value are often common, examples of which are listed below:

- Local knowledge and insight is a key benefit of Diasporas working in development. Diasporas have in-depth knowledge and access to information that cannot be offered by NGOs and other development organisations, in particular, historical perspectives and access to up-to-date media, contacts and information networks in local languages.
- Diasporas are often able to implement projects in geographical areas that are hard to access for other organisations. Depending on the context, diaspora organisations can be better placed to assess the security situation, may face less local scepticism and may be less likely to be targeted. Many countries are only accessible to nationals or former nationals for investment and travel. NGOs often tend to support or delegate projects to diaspora actors where the tasks in inaccessible areas do not pose a heightened risk.
- Diaspora groups tend to have a more sustainable interest in the development of their country, because of family, social and historical links that reflect a personal stake in the future of their country; a strong 'affective capital' made of emotional commitment and personal motivation to contribute to its development.²⁹ Many donors and NGOs share the view that the commitment of diasporas is of a long-term nature, which is key in supporting the sustainability of peace processes and development.
- Diaspora engagement in development also brings benefits to integration in the country of settlement, by building links with civil society, donors, institutions and media, and empowering the diaspora community to raise their voice and continue their engagement. By mobilising to support their country of origin, diasporas become more dynamic actors in the country of settlement; they are stakeholders in at least two communities.

4. PARTNERSHIPS WITH DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS

Diaspora organisations may be involved in development projects in different ways, ranging from simple information sharing to fully fledged partnerships. According to PRIO, diaspora participation in development processes varies in the range of passive participation, participation in information giving, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and finally, self-mobilization.³⁰ With the exception of self-mobilization and interactive participation, in all the rest diaspora involvement is only partial and primarily follows decisions and plans already taken by donors or other organisations. In the case of interactive participation, joint analysis is the basis which can lead to action plans and the creation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. In this way local ownership is ensured. Self-mobilization goes one step further; diasporas are proactive, design activities and take decisions irrespective of other organisations' priorities, and maintain full control.

In most of the cases however, diaspora organisations rarely have the capacity to self-mobilise and maintain full control. Partnerships essentially reflect power relations between the two sides, in terms of project management, capacity, responsibilities or decision-making. Although actors may play distinctive roles the two sides may not, necessarily, be equal. Knowledge and understanding of the background and history between countries is necessary in order to ensure that partnerships between diaspora organisations and larger development actors are protected from power imbalances. In public perceptions, the concept of 'development' is seen as a process driven by Western actors, whilst diaspora organisations are usually perceived as the less prominent actor.

I. DIASPORA AND NGO PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

In practice, partnerships between diasporas and NGOs may take different forms. Below are some of the types of partnerships between diaspora groups and NGOs, as identified in the DomAid project consultations:

Inclusion as beneficiaries in mainstream funding: Diaspora groups are encouraged to access available schemes for development cooperation and peacebuilding. Many funding programmes also include extra measures to train applicant diaspora groups in the process of application and project planning. Mainstream funding programmes often require participating organisations to raise a portion of the overall funds themselves (co-funding).

Implementation of development projects: Diasporas and NGOs may collaborate to implement development projects run jointly, which have been initiated by one of the parties involved, or diaspora organisations may be funded by NGOs to implement their own projects independently. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Diaspora Programme is one such example of an NGO providing funding accompanied by capacity building to diaspora organisations in order to implement

29 Sinatti G et al.,(2010), 'Diasporas as Partners in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding', The Hague: African Diaspora Policy Centre,p. 40

30 See Horst et al. (2010), p. 27

their own projects.³¹ More and more diaspora groups mobilise as core actors to implement small scale development projects, particularly in the areas of health, education or provision of basic services in their country of origin.

Partnerships enhancing advocacy and consultation: NGOs are increasingly turning to diaspora groups for advice on their policy and project developments, through processes such as the establishment of steering committees, boards etc. They may also support them in their advocacy and campaigning for human rights or migration issues both in countries of origin and settlement.

Example: implementing a development project

The Katib Cultural Association is an Afghan diaspora organisation based in Denmark. The organisation was funded by DRC to implement a project to construct a library and culture center for the Salihi Zeerak high school that has 1200 students, both girls and boys, and for the local community of about 500 households. The building will consist of a library, a conference room, two study rooms – one for girls and one for boys, computer lab, small reception and two latrines. The local community and partner have been working on the project for the past five years and 1200 books have been provided by a diaspora organisation in Sweden and are stored in a room at the school. The project aims to improve the level of education by giving students and teachers access to benefit from the books and study rooms, and the library provides the opportunity to hold conferences on social issues that create awareness in the community.

Partnerships for capacity building: partnerships with NGOs commonly aim to enhance the capacities and functioning of diaspora organisations, especially in order to help them develop the skills and procedures to make use of funding and support available in the development industry.³² Capacity building is often seen as an essential component of diaspora engagement and practice. These partnerships may involve organisational management (project cycle management, administrative procedures, monitoring of project cycles, reporting, and leadership); fundraising or advocacy skills (campaigning, communication, peer-learning, drafting project proposals etc). Other forms of capacity building support include network building, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. They can be informally communicated, through means of mentoring, teamwork, group dialogues and platforms; or can be more formally structured. In Europe networking events are seen as a valuable tool for opening up networking opportunities for diasporas to access broader networks. However, a challenge is to follow up such events with substantive activities or practice-oriented engagements, so as to maintain motivation for knowledge sharing and to continue to produce concrete outputs.

Finally, some organisations have designed comprehensive programmes that combine many of the types of partnerships described above, as for example GIZ, a German state-led organisation with a growing migration and development portfolio that supports migrant and refugee organisations based in Germany. Donors and organisations, such as GIZ tend to see this support as an instrument facilitating partnerships between the country of origin and its diaspora, but also between the countries of origin and settlement.

Example: Partnership to Foster Knowledge Transfer and Policy Access

Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA) is an organisation established by a Somali diaspora group in the Netherlands. HIRDA partners with both Oxfam Novib and the Impact Alliance for the empowerment of women in Somalia, the latter cooperating on projects with Oxfam with the Impact Alliance providing structural funding. They have established four empowerment centres in South and Central Somalia, with over 1000 women registered in each. The centres focus on increasing the self-reliance of women, enhancing their participation in decision-making processes and raising awareness of the dangers of female genital cutting. The centres additionally offer training in the fields of entrepreneurship, finance and literacy along with workshops on women empowerment, hygiene and sanitation.

31 For more information on the DRC Diaspora Programme see <http://drc.dk/relief-work/diaspora-programme/about-the-programme/>

32 See e.g. Cindy Horst and Giulia Sinatti, 'Migrants as agents of development: diaspora engagement discourse and practice in Europe', *Ethnicities* (7 April 2014): 8, Accessed November 12, 2014. DOI: 10.1177/1468796814530120

Example: a state-led package of support to Diaspora organisations

GIZ ran a pilot program from 2007 to 2010 to support non-profit projects by registered migrant associations in their countries of origin. The program – besides for its local poverty-reducing effects on the target group in the partner countries – had the objective to foster the development of synergetic cooperative structures between the governmental development cooperation agency GIZ and migrant associations in Germany that engages in their respective countries of origin.

GIZ provides a platform for a partnership-based dialogue with migrant organizations involved in development policy to develop common objectives and mutual expectations. That also includes workshops, round-tables and events that foster the exchange of know-how and information among migrant associations. GIZ introduces migrant organisations as partners to the broader context of development-policy.³³ GIZ also conducts studies to assess the potential of diaspora communities in the development of their countries of origin.³⁴

II. CHALLENGES IN PARTNERSHIPS

Diaspora organisations and NGOs face a number of challenges in partnership, some of which are listed below as seen from the viewpoint of each side.

NGOs and funding bodies often find it difficult to identify the most suitable partner group or organisation within a diaspora. Furthermore, despite the growing interest in diaspora cooperation over the last decade, state actors often remain hesitant about the added value of diasporas. At the same time, diaspora organisations are sometimes seen as appendage to give legitimacy to state-led development projects.

According to the stakeholders consulted in the DomAid project, development actors are often concerned with the impact that diaspora fragmentation and politicisation can have on their engagement, especially when that can impact on the use and direction of funding.³⁵ Development assistance targeted to specific regions or communities in countries of origin can, for instance, be perceived as biased if implemented by a politicised group. Diaspora organisations and NGOs have found various ways to deal with this fragmentation, such as shifting their focus to themes that bring different groups together, like human rights, democracy, environment or health – ‘creating a depoliticized space’ in a way.³⁶ Donors and development organisations are often looking for a diaspora partner that presents a single vision for the community at large in the country of origin and speaks in one united voice.

As a consequence, NGOs can have difficulties identifying and approaching diaspora actors as partners for development projects. As a result, there is a growing trend to create diaspora umbrella organisations to overcome the difficulties arising from the lack of a unified or representative diaspora group. The umbrella group, or platform, also serves to foster coordination and support between groups of different sizes. Umbrella organisations operate on a cooperative rather than representative basis. They are often more popular with institutional donors than individual, small scale organisations, partly because they are also more effective in advocacy, lobbying and fundraising. A good example of this is the Somali Relief and Development Forum (SRDF) established in 2011, that brings together numerous small-scale and diverse Somali organisations who would have previously struggled individually and competed against one another for institutional funding. Now, they have joined forces to cooperative, collectively, to support areas most at risk, and have gradually grown from a joint fundraising and knowledge-transfer forum, to undertaking joint advocacy and lobbying at the UK and international levels. An example of this was their participation in a joint fundraising appeal and campaign, entitled ‘Fundraise for Somalia’.³⁷

Challenges can also arise as a result of structural differences between diaspora organisations and donors or NGO partners. Diaspora organisations are often unstructured grassroots entities, largely supported by volunteer contributions. But in order to enter into a partnership agreements certain procedures and standards apply. Both diaspora groups and NGOs say that there are often difficulties on the ground, either in country of origin or in country of settlement, to meet the level of planning, implementation and reporting expected. Donors and NGOs have difficulties monitoring and assessing the impact of engaging with diasporas, particularly regarding the qualitative impact of capacity building projects. As a result, donors are often faced with a contradiction; the choice between supporting capacity building aimed at enhancing the diaspora groups’ organisational profile (‘making it look like an NGO’) or of demonstrating the added value of the diaspora groups’ ‘special expertise’. In fact, capacity building needs to be understood more broadly, given the necessary changes to facilitate the diaspora making a more meaningful contribution to its home and host country; including not only strengthening organisational capacity but also granting visas and dual citizenship to allow for a truly transnational activity to take place.

33 For more information on GIZ see <http://www.giz.de/migrationdevelopment>

34 For studies conducted by GIZ on Diaspora based in Germany see here <http://www.giz.de/expertise/html/9702.html>

35 Horst et al., (2010), p. 47

36 Horst et al., (2010), p.23

37 See <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-54/working-with-somali-diaspora-organisations-in-the-uk>

It is often a challenge for partners to find a workable mode of mutual and balanced input that will ensure ownership. Both diaspora groups and NGOs agree that this is a delicate but critical balance. There is general agreement that while equality between partners is not a pre-requisite for success, each side needs to feel empowered and ensured that certain standards are in place; that the partnership is transparent.

Trust is a pre-requisite for good collaboration, and trust is built on commitment. Diaspora groups rely substantially on the continuity of support and funding for their initiatives. Partners may not necessarily depend on continuity in the same way, but collaboration should, from the outset, build on clear terms that are fair and that respect the roles and responsibilities of each party. Partnering with diasporas requires a clear understanding of the specific contribution of each actor involved, their potential, their limits and knowledge of the tools they use, for example, the extensive use by diaspora groups to use social media and the internet for fundraising.

One of diaspora groups' pressing concerns is how to obtain funding. Seeking mainstream development funding is more common than tailor-made programs, but new diaspora groups sometimes struggle to meet co-financing requirements and hence face pressure to scale up their operations in order to be eligible for partnerships. While set within a framework and set of standards, it should also be possible to take into consideration local needs and capacities and match the right actors to the right funding programmes. On the other hand, creating tailor-made programmes could potentially be damaging and exclude refugee diasporas in a separate strand of practice.

Stakeholders observed that partnerships tend to work better when development actors link up with existing initiatives where diaspora organisations are already involved. Co-funded projects that have been selected through an open tendering system have been far more successful than targeted projects set up for this purpose.³⁸

Funding is not just about project implementation. Alongside providing the resources, funding can have a symbolic value in the diaspora community; as funding lends legitimacy and enhances credibility. Project funds for capacity building may, therefore, have a significant impact on building confidence. This applies in the country of origin as well as in the country of settlement. When local communities witness diaspora organisations, or individuals, supporting the development of their homelands its effect is empowering for both sides; although its impact is perhaps hard to measure in quantitative terms. At the same time, participants in the DomAid consultations observed another dimension, that of how beneficiaries in the country of origin can interpret diasporas doing development work. In fact, they may not necessarily see diasporas, positively, as development actors. People in countries of origin can sometimes be unenthusiastic about the sudden return or involvement of diaspora members. Given this possible response, it is key that local beneficiaries are consulted in advance of a project plan being planned and implemented on their behalf.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has presented the key conclusions from consultations between NGOs, donor organisations and diaspora groups on the practices of cooperation and partnership in development work for their countries of origin.

It appears that a natural link exists between diasporas and development, and that refugee diaspora groups are often the first people to offer their assistance when a crisis strikes. Diaspora groups will continue their long-standing tradition of contributing to the development of their country of origin, regardless of whether or not development institutions involve them. Their drive to take action is generated by long-term and personal commitments. But after a decade of growing relationships between traditional development actors and diaspora groups, the former now plays a stronger role in shaping diaspora contributions. There are different ways in which the two sides can collaborate. NGOs often say that there is little methodology to guide their engagement with diasporas. Diaspora groups and development contexts are highly variable, and context is critical. NGOs tend to agree that the most effective way is to focus on a topic or development sector, rather than the type of actors involved, and start by identifying the objectives and who could best support them.

Understanding the transnational character of diaspora groups is critical in this regard. Diasporas are actors whose networks and activities span across countries and continents. Horst 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.³⁹ Seeing refugees, individuals and groups in this light, there is great potential for enhancing development outcomes locally and internationally, whilst opening up new angles on integration in Europe. Refugee groups and individuals can support long-term development in the countries of origin, as well as immediate support for other displaced populations. Diaspora mobilisation in Germany to help persons fleeing Syria through humanitarian admission and private sponsorship programmes is an example of such practice.

Refugee diasporas face certain particularities that make their involvement and participation in partnerships more complicated. Nevertheless, they contribute to development and change in their country of origin as much as other migrant diasporas do. Supporting refugee groups and individuals for the development of their country of origin is empowering, and enhances their profile as active citizens and agents of change, rather than passive aid beneficiaries.

38 De Haas H., (2006), 'Engaging diasporas: how governments and development agencies can support diaspora involvement in origin countries' (Oxford: International Migration Institute), pp. 98-99

39 Horst 2013, p. 14.

The contribution of diasporas to development should be understood more broadly as including not only socioeconomic development, infrastructure, investments, skills and knowledge transfer back home, but also advocacy and activities to enhance democratic practices, human rights institutions and the upholding of human rights principles in the countries of origin and across borders. NGOs should also strengthen partnerships with refugee diaspora groups in the areas of monitoring human rights abuses across borders and bringing forward the voice of refugees and migrants in exile.

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