



Global Diaspora Summit Background Note

Session I – Diaspora Networks: From Data to Engagement

Overview

The most fundamental questions about diasporas, for either countries of origin or residence to shape strategic and segmented diaspora engagement, are the following – who are the members of the diaspora, where are they and what are they doing? Only by being able to answer these questions can engagement strategies have any hope of engaging the right audiences across your diaspora. The starting point for success in diaspora engagement is therefore data.

Generating data for diaspora engagement has traditionally been based on standard methodological tools such as mapping, profiling, and consultative tools. However, with the onset of technological change, new capacities through areas such as big data, diaspora biometric cards, and mobile applications are beginning to supplement these traditional tools with new ways of generating data on diasporas. Finding a balance across these tools to allow the different access points of your diaspora to share their data is a key factor for success in both generating the data and understanding how to apply it on engagement strategies across all segments of your diaspora. The current reality is that often nobody has all three answers. Yet different entities, organizations, and groups each hold part of the information. In that sense, diasporas come across as patchworks – a large and diverse group of networks catering to different audiences with varied interests and needs. Considering this, the linkages of data and networking to sustainable diaspora engagement are clear.

Diaspora Networks: A Strategy to Move from Data to Engagement

When building effective diaspora engagement through data and networks, the process must be strategic and intentional. This begins with the phased steps to move through data collection, processing, and application. This phasing brings complex institutional and implementation considerations. For example, identifying the correct actors to make the data ask of the diaspora remains a central issue. Indeed, governments have often found it difficult to increase diaspora responsiveness, so it is important to reflect on the actors required for the creation, processing, and application of data for engagement. It should also never be forgotten that moving from data to engagement is essentially about listening to your diaspora.

At a minimum, government should not be expected to deliver on its own. Again, network participation becomes critically important. Indeed, through these networks, large social and economic issues can be effectively addressed in both countries of origin and countries of residence through partnership. Networks allow access to pools of resources, talent and knowledge that can influence policy, trade, and social issues. Taking a networked approach to diaspora data can align such resources, talent, and knowledge to create manageable interventions across the data needs for the design and delivery of diaspora engagement efforts.

The opportunity now exists to build stronger and more effective diaspora engagement networks for the collection, processing, and application of data. This will require capacity building of existing diaspora organizations, strategic support of the knowledge creation infrastructure, and identifying new opportunities. It will also require governments to play several roles to both implement and facilitate the journey from data to engagement.

Scope of Session

This session will focus on the key challenges faced by countries as they develop diaspora data and networks. A Diaspora Mapping Toolkit will be showcased to help set a systematic, comprehensive yet flexible and agile approach to generating diaspora data in differing contexts. This will emphasize the importance of understanding the needs, motivations, expectations as well as the limitations that diasporas face while engaging in development initiatives. The power of sustainable diaspora networks remains critical to supporting such systematic and agile tools.

The session will also explore why networks are so important for developing 'Diaspora Capital' which the IOM categorizes as including cultural, economic, political, and social capital. It will look at the role of diaspora groups – what makes them successful and what makes them fail. It will set out a four-step process for moving from data to engagement.

Here are some of the questions that will be considered

- How to collect data in a systematic manner to ensure that policies are evidence-based and further recognize diaspora as development actors? Who are the key partners for government to achieve this goal given the importance of embracing new tools such as big data?
- How to process and apply diaspora data to prioritize engagement areas?
- What is the role of government in working with the diaspora – implementer or facilitator, or both?
- With which groups is it important to work in the diaspora – the successful or the vulnerable, or both?
- How to build organizational and operation capacity in diaspora organizations to ensure they are active contributors to data collection and co-creators in diaspora engagement, e.g., peer-to-peer training across diaspora organizations?
- How can diaspora groups be encouraged to work together and embedded into strategic partnerships with key actors across the ecosystem of diaspora engagement including government and private sector?

Methodology of Session

The session will open with an input from the governmental host to share their diaspora engagement story, followed by an inspirational address from a global leader on the topic.

The session will conclude with a showcasing of a diaspora organization exemplar and an interactive discussion with participants to help develop recommendations to better develop diaspora networks. Participants will be able to engage with each other through the digital platform and share reflections to inform the final report – they will be able to network! The final outcomes generated through the panellist and participant interventions will be reflected in the summit report and provide insight for the final 'Outcome Document' of the GDS.

We look forward to welcoming you to this session to learn about your ideas and solutions on generating diaspora data and networks for successful diaspora engagement!

