

Dialogues with the Diasporas: Setting an Agenda for Development

By Mame Diene, IOM Geneva

It is now accepted that migration and development issues call upon at least two types of capital: financial capital, mainly in the form of remittances and direct investments, which remain key to

The word "diaspora" refers to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional and ethnic homelands and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture. The word originally referred in the ancient Greek world to a scattering or sowing of seeds.

This definition is particularly pertinent in the context of the brain-drain,

programme, IOM has for the past year and a half brought together via video-conference Africa's many multi-faceted professional expatriate communities to engage in a positive and constructive dialogue with home and host governments to sponsor partnerships at a grass-root level, sector by sector.

IOM's on-going dialogues between African diasporas, governments and development partners in home and host countries is based on the conviction that the pool of knowledge, skill and expertise that thrives in expatriate communities worldwide can usefully contribute to the development of their country of origin.

The dialogues have so far covered a variety of topics, including health, agriculture and private sector investment in Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Tanzania as well as education in sub-Saharan Africa.

Each dialogue has gathered representatives from diaspora associations, governmental partners and their counterparts from international organizations in home and host countries to better define the demand side for skills in the country of origin, outline the existing pool of expertise abroad and identify some of the obstacles that prevent diasporas from investing at home.

One of the most common obstacles identified in all dialogues is the scarcity of professional opportunities for African graduates, including PhD students and health workers as well as the lack of adequate research and development opportunities at home. This partly explains why so many African professionals continue to emigrate in search of new professional challenges abroad.

A strategy to mitigate the impact of this loss of skills was clearly outlined throughout the dialogues: it implies



▲ Members of the Association of Tanzanian Community and the Foundation for Democracy in Africa meet in the IOM office in Washington, DC. (Photo: © IOM, 2007)

promoting development strategies; and a human, social and cultural capital, which until now has been overlooked by many policymakers.

Both are now increasingly perceived as being important, if not more, than natural non-renewable capitals, such as oil and minerals, when it comes to successful development.

Without the catalyst of human and social capital, there can be no comprehensive development strategy. And in today's increasingly mobile world, this essential capital has a name: the diaspora.

which continues to deprive the developing world, and Africa in particular, of its most precious qualified human resources with a disastrous impact on development efforts.

With some 70 million migrants and their families working both inside and outside of the continent, the development potential of the African diaspora is considerable, providing its scattered seeds can grow in the right policy and programmatic environment.

In the broader context of its Migration and Development in Africa (MIDA)

finding ways to facilitate the mobility of professional expatriates who all recognised the importance and value of various types of circular migration.

Participants also agreed that this could successfully be achieved through a transfer of skills to bolster capacities at home, either through temporary physical returns or by bridging the digital divide so as to promote e-learning.

The dialogues revealed that these approaches had already been adopted in an ad-hoc fashion by some individuals and migrants' associations. The main challenge remains to unite all those informal initiatives into a comprehensive migration and development policy framework in home and host countries.

Information exchanged during the dialogues also outlined further steps that need to be taken to sustain diaspora involvement in development programmes and policies.

An important step to turn the brain-drain into a brain-gain would be for governments and concerned institutions to know who migrates, where and for which reasons.

For this reason, diaspora associations in partnership with governmental stakeholders agreed on the need to establish databases listing the qualified human resources and skills available among expatriate communities throughout Europe and elsewhere.

These databases, currently being developed with the assistance of IOM, will be used to successfully match specific needs outlined by ministries in home countries with skills, knowledge and expertise available in the diaspora.

Another tangible result of the dialogues has been the direct involvement of members of the Congolese and Sudanese diaspora who have already travelled to their respective capitals to meet with ministers to discuss common strategies aimed at rebuilding shattered health systems not just in the capitals but also in rural areas, where needs are often most acute.

On one occasion, the Tanzanian Minister of Planning, Economy and Empowerment, Dr Juma Alifa Ngasongwa, met the country's diaspora in Washington, DC. All participants agreed that the di-



▲ Information exchange during the Sudanese diaspora dialogue in IOM London office (Photo: © IOM, 2007)

aspora would provide the ministry with a database of Tanzanians residing in the United States in return for the Minister pushing the diaspora's agenda forward in terms of land ownership for citizens abroad and dual citizenship.

Similar follow-up meetings are also planned between the Senegalese diaspora involved in education and agriculture later this summer.

But perhaps more importantly, the dialogues bridged crucial communication gaps between diaspora associations, home and host governments and a variety of development stakeholders.

By nurturing such dialogues, IOM has crucially opened communication channels that allow for dynamic interaction and collaboration in the field of migration and development. **M**

DIALOGUES TO DATE

London, March 2006: Mobilizing the Africa Diaspora Healthcare Professionals and Resources for Capacity Building in Africa

Brussels, October 2006: Engaging the Diaspora in the Rebuilding the Health Sector in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Washington, DC, March 2007: Business and Development: the Tanzanian Dialogue

London, April 2007: Mobilizing Sudanese Healthcare Professionals in the United Kingdom

Geneva, May 2007: Engaging the Diaspora for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Sahel

Geneva, May 2007: Education in Africa: Bridging the Gap between Diasporas, Governments and Private Institutions

Geneva, May 2007: Mobilizing Beninese Healthcare Professionals in Switzerland

Rome, June 2007: Promoting Diaspora Investment in the Senegalese Private Sector



▲ Gaspard Ngarambe noting names during the election for the positions of the diaspora organization (Photo: © Silke Oppermann)

▶▶ Continued from page 13

Gaspard Ngarambe, Secretary of the RDD, is writing his dissertation at the University of Mainz about the developmental potential of the diaspora in the Great Lakes region. "Rwandans in the diaspora know best what their country needs and how to achieve those needs in the country. They are able to transfer new ideas from the industrialized world to the African reality," Ngarambe explains with certainty. The diaspora can be more effective than official development aid."

In theory, everything is very simple: Young Rwandans study in Europe or the United States and take the knowledge home. Rwandans who are well integrated in industrialized countries help through direct investment and remittances.

But the reality is not that simple, and Ngarambe knows. Many Rwandans don't study the subjects Rwanda needs because they don't want to work in those fields; for example agriculture. Others are well integrated into German society, have lost touch with Africa, and are not motivated to reach out.

Ngarambe's ambition is to bring Rwandans, scattered all over Germany, together and motivate them to use their abilities to help their home country. "If we arrange more meetings, we can exchange ideas and competences and achieve more together." He is also active in the initiative "Re-Dis-Covering

Rwanda" which aims at bringing together all who want to help Rwanda – the diaspora, non-Rwandans and cooperation partners.

The diaspora is not alone in its attempt to help. The *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ), an international cooperation agency for sustainable development funded by the German government, provided funding for a meeting of some 50 Rwandans in May in Mainz and wants to provide financial support for diaspora projects. Irina Kausch, manager of the GTZ project Migration and Development, says, "Some of the projects seem very promising and I think we will find a way to work together."

The German Federal State Rhineland-Palatinate, of which Mainz is the capital, established a grassroots partnership organization 25 years ago. The government and the University of Mainz organize exchanges and the local media keeps Rwanda alive in the minds of southwest Germans.

Ngarambe says that connections with other diaspora groups can be helpful as well. One day, Ngarambe was having lunch after a lecture on migration. Across the table sat Kim Singh, who was born and raised in India but had lived in Germany for many years. Singh told him about a card game he developed to teach adults how to read and write. "The adults prefer to learn at home because many are embarrassed to sit in a school. After two months they are able to read a newspaper." Singh says he tested the game for years in Indian communities and encouraged adults to write their own little newspapers. Ngarambe believes this project can improve adult literacy in Rwanda.

All of these ideas may be the beginning of a new future for Rwanda.

▼ Providence Tuyisabe drinking his *Yambusi* (Photo: © Silke Oppermann)



Dativa Kraus is also thinking of ways to keep the Rwandan culture alive. The mother of three realized that her children had lost touch with their parents' culture. They prefer to speak German instead of Kinyarwanda and they are not familiar with our history," Kraus says. "They don't understand what happened in Rwanda, but they need to know about the Genocide to make sure this never happens again." At the same time, Kraus sees a big advantage in the children's innocence. "They don't have the problems that we had. They don't divide our people into Hutu and Tutsi anymore."

So Kraus, who lives in Austria, wants to arrange summer camps for Rwandan kids to teach them about their culture, history and language. In Belgium, she says, the diaspora arranged similar vacation activities amongst the Belgian-Rwandan community and have offered to help her. "Our kids need to continue our efforts to develop our home country. They are our future."

Gaspard Ngarambe also has a vision for the future. "We have been labeled the 'country of the thousand problems, an allusion to Rwanda's appellation *le pays des mille collines* or the land of the thousand hills," the PhD student explains. "But after the Genocide we want a new image. We want to be the country of the thousand opportunities – and the diaspora can help us achieve this goal."

Gaspard Ngarambe invites Rwandans residing in Germany and worldwide, friends of Rwanda, and development partners to cooperate with the "Re-Dis-Covering Rwanda Initiative". **M**

Silke Oppermann is a German freelance journalist who reports for Deutsche Welle Radio, ARD Radio affiliates, and other media outlets.

▼ Rwandan Students studying together (Photo: © Silke Oppermann)

