

Roundtable 1.2: Empowering Migrants and Diaspora to contribute to Development

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Chair: Kathleen Newland

Rapporteur: Sarah Osman

There were approximately 70 delegates present at the workshop. Participants included representatives from migrant organizations across Europe and the US, civil society representatives from Africa, researchers and representatives from NGO's based in Europe and the US.

Migration and development has indeed become a terrain where diaspora groups and organizations have shown leadership, and where they have largely contributed as development actors. However, much of their engagement still takes place in an informal manner. The session was geared towards addressing the key barriers that migrant organisations face in their efforts to contribute to the development of their countries of origin. Participants were eager to share their experiences and lessons learned, and were intent on the formulation of concrete recommendations that would build on their capacity. Kathleen Newland presented some elements that would empower migrant organizations to become recognized development actors:

- Migrant's political and legal rights, both in the country of origin and the country of destination
- The enhancement of migrants' skills and expertise through training in, for instance, financial literacy
- Migrants' access to funding

Participants contributed examples of best practices that have greatly enabled their contribution to the development of their country of origin. They also identified their key concerns regarding barriers that hinder their contribution, and they identified a set of key recommendations to be addressed both in the country of origin and the country of destination.

Key concerns:

1. Partnership between mainstream development organizations and migrant organizations is an idea that was welcomed from both camps. It was recognized that closer cooperation and well-defined partnerships would annihilate repetition and replication, and would in fact help to reach development objectives far more effectively, and would increase the impact of implemented projects. Western NGOs showed their concern at the existing lack of partnership, and shared their willingness to forge alliances with migrant organizations, and called for a move to foster closer alliances with migrant organizations.
2. Migrant organizations demonstrated their long-standing commitment to contribute to the development of their countries of origin. However, they remained concerned at the pace through which recognition for their work was being

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 1, Session 1.2, Report 01

- awarded. They questioned when they will be recognized as equals in development cooperation.
3. There was a general concern among the participants on the status of undocumented migrants. Participants questioned whether their efforts were in fact focusing on these marginalized groups. This was generally considered as a point of reflection.
 4. Migrant organizations remained concerned on how they could continue to contribute their knowledge, expertise, unique insights and ideas to catalyse the development of their homelands when no real commitment has been shown to provide them access to funding. This reality creates high barriers for migrant organizations' access to funding, and in particular core-funding that would increase their capacity.
 5. Migrants form organizations and act from their heart. Nevertheless, some issues limit the degree of impact that they have. One of the main limitations lies in knowledge about the impact that migrant organizations are having on the development of their homelands. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to enhancing knowledge about migrants' activities. A step towards this would be to:
 - a) gain more understanding on the projects that are carried out by migrants
 - b) increasing knowledge on the link between the projects set up by migrants and their policy implications.
 6. The best practices cited (see below) demonstrated the impact of the formation of alliances among migrants. It was pointed out that individually, migrants have less impact than when they act collectively, a practice that is not encouraged enough.
 7. The homogenization of migrants and migrant groups remains an issue. There was a call to recognize the diversity in the activities of migrant organisations by mainstream development actors. Migrants range widely in their wealth of knowledge and expertise.
 8. An understanding of the effects of migration (e.g. remittances) is still limited. The resource persons and the participants recognized that, indeed, skilled migrants stay at home, and low-skilled migrants leave. This means that poorer households are more dependent on remittances. Participants urged that more focus be paid to how this dependency can be decreased.

Best practices

Kathleen Newland invited participants to share examples of initiatives that have had concrete effects on the empowerment of migrants diasporas to contribute to development. The examples are listed below:

- a. FORIM, in France is made up of more than 30 federations and networks of about 700 migrant associations from Africa, the Caribbean Sea, the Indian Ocean, Mahgreb and Southeast Asia. It has worked with government on an advisory capacity and has been consulted on migration and development issues by various institutions. It has a two-fold mission: the integration of immigrant populations in France and the development of the countries of

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 1, Session 1.2, Report 01

origin. This has contributed immensely to legitimizing the work of migrant organizations. FORIM promotes the merits of dual citizenship.

- b. The Netherlands-based Diaspora Forum for Development (DFD) is composed of 39 registered member organizations and networks originating from Africa, Asia and Latin America. DFD strives to empower migrants to concretely contribute to the development of their countries of origin, by enhancing their skills, facilitating dialogue with policy makers and building their capacity.
- c. In the United Kingdom, DFID has joined forces with diaspora organizations, which has greatly enhanced their capacities. For instance, the Burmese diaspora were among the first to respond to the tsunami. It was suggested that the north must recognize the contributions of Diaspora organizations, provide them with resources and mainstream their activities
- d. The Nigerian government realized early on the potential of its diaspora to the development of its country. They set up NIDO to enable diaspora groups to organize in all continents. This facilitates constructive exchange of knowledge and information between Nigerian diaspora and the Nigerian government, enabling the government to profit from the diaspora's valuable expertise.
- e. The Moroccan diaspora organizations have helped civil society and have made it easy for Moroccan and European NGOs to link up with each other and to exert pressure on the Moroccan government for the rights of migrant workers. It was pointed out that development also means solidarity.
- f. The AU has also shown significant leadership in mobilizing the diaspora through the construction of its Western Hemisphere African Diaspora Network. It recognises people of African descent living in diaspora to be recognized as Africans. This helps to pool the skills of these groups to the benefit Africa.
- g. In the Netherlands, Bangladeshi diaspora organizations have played an important role in motivating other migrant groups in creating public awareness of the situation of migrants from Bangladesh. Diaspora organizations need to be taken seriously; however, they face many obstacles such as the lack of access to fund that could help in capacity building.
- h. The Mexican hometown association program in the USA implemented the '1 for 1' programs years ago. Its aim was to assist the Mexican government to development local infrastructures, due to its lack of capacity, which has proved to be a fruitful process that continues to go on today.
- i. FEMAFRICA, together with IOM, have set up a database that would allow countries of origin to identify skilled African women that would contribute to the development of the continent.
- j. The government of Hong Kong has made an important step towards empowering migrants by allowing migrant workers to freely create labour unions. This allows them to exercise their right as citizens both in the country of origin and in Hong Kong.

Key recommendations

Participants cited some key recommendations to be taken up by migrants, countries of origin, countries of destination and mainstream development institutions in order to effectively empower migrants in their development efforts:

- Migrants are urged to organize. The creation of platforms such as FORIM and DFD would greatly facilitate the effective contribution of migrants to development
- Mainstreaming the activities of the diaspora and migrant organisation in development cooperation. This ultimately requires a policy shift in order to constructively include the diaspora as agents of development. Migrants can be instrumental in the construction of modern development paradigms, which would require a shift from classical models of development cooperation. This further entails the recognition of the added-value of the diaspora and migrant organizations to development cooperation. This would require that, for instance, part of the GDP that is put towards development aid by EU countries is allocated towards funding migrant organizations.
- Developing coherent policies that foster the inclusion of migrant organizations in development cooperation must be implemented both in countries of origin and countries of destination.
- Countries should recognize and incorporate the voice of the diaspora in their development of policies as they are greatly contributing to the development of their homelands
- The efforts of migrants and their organizations should be taken seriously, and recognition should be given to the activities of the diaspora. They must be allocated with appropriate funds to contribute more effectively. Migrant organizations remain marginalized in terms of access to funding.
- Recognizing that by fulfilling the political and human rights of migrants, important steps will be made towards fulfilling the ultimate goals of development.
- Identifying mechanisms that would provide compensation for countries of origin that continue to suffer from the effects of brain drain. Countries of destination can invest in strengthening the sectors that suffer the most from brain drain (e.g. the healthcare sector) by training new health-workers, or by up-scaling the educational facilities available in order to train future health-workers.
- Facilitating the transfer of remittances of undocumented migrants through formal channels (as in the case of the US and Mexico).
- Increasing the understanding of what the impact of migration is, and more specifically, the impact remittances on the country of origin. If the effect of remittances is found to be positive, African governments should create mechanisms to invest in their home countries. This will ultimately create better

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 1, Session 1.2, Report 01

conditions for both returnee migrants and families of migrants in the country of origin.

- Effectively tapping the social capital (knowledge and skills) of the diaspora and migrant organization so as to enhance contribution to the country of origin.
- Increased access of information to countries of origin with regards to the skills distribution of its migrants and diaspora so as to facilitate to enhance the current level of contribution to the country of origin.
- Revising immigration policies and laws in countries of destination in order to allow highly skilled migrants to return temporarily to their countries of origin, and thereby benefit both country of origin and country of destination.
- Drafting of an Action Plan by African governments with concrete strategies of how they are going to support African migrant women to contribute more effectively to development.
- Creating better job opportunities by countries of origin in order to increase freedom of choice of migration, and lowering the cost of migration. Governments should demonstrate a clear willingness and commitment to do this.
- Enforcing laws and conditions in the countries of destination in order to create better conditions for migrants. This should take place before we begin to speak of migrants' potential to contribute to the development of their home country.
- Developing the capacities of migrants in the countries of destination. This includes the provision of financial literacy training, among others.
- Fostering closer working relations and linkages between migrant organizations and organization in the countries of origin in order to have a higher and more effective impact.
- Voting rights of migrants in both the country of origin and country of destination should be enforced, in order to ensure their full inclusion and participation.
- Allocating appropriate resources in both country of origin and country of destination in order to create better conditions for migrant returnees.

Additional comments

The following statements were submitted by participants:

“A few recommendations:

- 1. Financial literacy for migrants and their families – not only about financial concerns but also address family and social issues that drains resources.*
- 2. compendium of migrant organization and NGO to be able to link thesis initiatives to sustainable local economic development.*
- 3. Form partnership and converge initiatives between migrant organizations and local government and NGOs based in sending countries to ensure that diaspora philanthropy are directed to sustainable development and to create program services for migrants and their families.”*

Anonymous comment

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 1, Session 1.2, Report 01

“The model of development should be human rights – based and people-oriented not neo-liberal and corporate –led development.”

Nonoi Hacbang of Transnational Migrant Platform

“Migrants and diaspora should be structured with a wide enough geographical and cultural representation so their voice can be legitimated and credible in receiving countries. There are possible examples. This is one way of their empowerment.”

FORIM

“How to use remittance – there should be training or orientation to the remittance receiver. Introduce monitoring system of the money remittance.

Sender will be encouraged. When he will find that his remittance is used in proper development work.

Introduce policy on empowering migrant and diaspora and voting rights to diaspora.

Talk to respective government to reduce taxes and fees on remittance.”

Biman Bo Chowdhury from Bangladesh

“The title is ambiguous if not philosophical. Whose development?”

Empowering migrants will come from within. No one will do it for them. Indeed, the only way of helping the process is to allow much ownership to take place. This can be done thru investments in the migrant community by offering financial support to the civil society representing the migrant communities and not offer lip service help that goes no further than that contributing to development. The migrant worker is in need of reassurance that in turn they will be assisted, supported and protected. Right to choose destination/place of retirement with absolute transferability of rights, health, rights, welfare rights, etc. In short, migrant worker has become a milking cow for both sending and receiving countries. What happens to the cow when it no longer produces milk or cannot work on the land?”

Souad Talsi

“Migration as a strategy is flawed. Development can only be the result of a carefully planned and calibrated process of enhancing people’s resources and skills. Migration is opportunity for the individual worker but it is invisibly directed by the logic of capital. One cannot plan a country’s development based on the monetary gains earned from migration.

GFMD 2008, Day 1, Concurrent Sessions, Roundtable Discussion 1, Session 1.2, Report 01

Development means providing jobs to 8 million workers who want to come home. An economy that cannot provide jobs for its own people has no right to talk of development. Only by providing full employment to its own people can a country claim the full measure of development.”

Roger Cordero of Merchant Marines Overseas Association