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Session VI – Good practices in engaging non-governmental actors in migration related development policies

Building a "Rich Picture™" to Fill Information Gaps
(Experience from Sierra Leone)

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Premises for engagement with non-governmental actors

- *What is the case for non-governmental actors, including migrants and diaspora organizations, to be involved in development planning and policy formulation processes? What is their relevance and legitimacy? On what basis are they being brought into the process – their expertise, the resources they bring to bear, their interest, their fundamental rights?*

CEC responses:

It is not clear there is a strong case to be made for treating migrants/diaspora as a privileged group – compared to homeland citizens' groupings – as far as their involvement in development planning and policy formulation processes is concerned. I would argue against this approach, which may in fact emerge as a default or de facto practice, rather than the outcome of a deliberate policy of engagement on the part of governments. In some cases, migrants/diasporas may be better organized, more visible and vocal, and have the means at their disposal to make their voices heard. The principle at stake here, I believe, is that of the "3Rs of migration management" – retention at the core, "retrieval" ie flexible options of tapping into diaspora knowledge networks (through circular migration), and return ("permanent"). Too many diaspora engagement policies inadvertently create imbalances and tensions by being perceived at least as favoring migrants/diasporas over homeland counterparts.

There are, however, many grounds for involving migrants/diasporas in development policy planning processes. The starting point, however, has to be recognition of the heterogeneity of migrant/diaspora *organizations*. The principle here is to knowing your migrants/diaspora. Who they are, where they are, what they potentially bring to the table, what they want from governments and counterparts, what motivates them, how, when and where to engage them, etc.

One way to think about migrants/diasporas is through the lens of the forms of "capital" they potentially might deploy in the development context. These "5Cs of diaspora capital" – intellectual, financial, political, cultural, and social (actually the glue that binds). Governments often focus exclusively on migrants'/diasporas' financial and intellectual

capital. However, in addition to potentially deploying political and cultural capital for developmental gain, migrants/diasporas also bring political and cultural capital as "baggage" to the table. For instance, they may have developed new values that somehow clash with those that remain dominant in the origin country context. Moreover, without the "right" kind of social capital, it is unlikely that migrants/diasporas can effectively or efficiently leverage their other forms of capital for developmental gain. There are steps governments (and the migrants/diasporas themselves of course) can take to help them build social capital.

Another way for governments to know their migrants/diasporas is to understand their motivations. Governments often behave as if they expect migrants/diasporas to be motivated solely by patriotism (so they should "come home and serve their country"). However, there are "4Ps to migrant/diaspora motivation", only one of which is patriotism. They may be motivated by purely pecuniary gain; they may wish the benefits of their intervention to spread no further than the private sphere of their household or community; or they may have broader philanthropic motivations.

Migrant/diaspora groups are often better understood as interest groups – and often narrow ones at that – than representative bodies that create a sound and legitimate basis for public policy engagement. Although it is hard to generalize, we cannot describe migrant/diaspora organizations as inherently democratic spaces. So, rarely can their representativeness be the basis of a claim to legitimacy for migrant/diaspora organizations as far as shaping public policy in their countries of origin are concerned.

In broad terms, there may be three bases upon which to engage migrants/diasporas in development planning processes:

1. There are clearly areas of public policy where migrants/diasporas have direct and easily identifiable interests and rights as migrants/diasporas. Examples might include consular services, social protection, citizenship in the origin country, or even the origin country's broad future direction, etc. Even where legitimate democratic organization and representation is weak or inadequate, it should still be possible to engage in some measure of consultation, even if at only the very general level, with migrants/diasporas on these areas of public policy. Indeed, it is incumbent upon governments to do so.

2. Through their actions or applied expertise or resources in service delivery, there are areas of public policy for which migrant/diaspora buy-in and support is not just desirable but essential. For instance, in particular sectors (health, education, enterprise development and employment promotion, etc), where there may be an ambition to mobilize migrant/diaspora professionals, it stands to reason that engaging these professionals, perhaps through their professional associations makes sense. However, it is important to recognize that while engaging migrants/diaspora through such professional associations might be necessary, rarely will it be sufficient. This is because migrant/diaspora organizations typically repel as many migrants/diasporas as they attract. It is also the case that the fragmented, fluid nature of the migratory experience means that often, talented individuals will strike out on their own oblivious to potentially viable existing organizations they could join. In some cases, individuals may simply be wary of joining an organization of

compatriots fearing that it is the victim of elite capture or a platform for one or two individuals' political ambitions or in reality not as inclusive as the organization's name and first appearances might suggest.

3. Migrants/diasporas may have some expertise or resource useful in the process of policy formulation without necessarily being the beneficiaries of those policies or the actors in the delivery of services or implementation of the policy. This would typically apply to individual experts rather than groups. An example might be urban planning.

- *In which development and policy planning processes should they be involved and at what point – formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation?*

CEC responses:

In principle, of course, and on the basis of the above arguments, it would be good to involve migrants/diasporas – as rights-holders; interest groups; resource/service-providers; and experts – at all stages of the lifecycle of a policy. However, there are three sets of reasons why what is ideal in theory does not happen in practice.

First, policymaking is often more ad hoc, particularly in developing country contexts and particularly in countries were government capacity is constrained, something that is often quite acute in post-conflict countries, such as Sierra Leone.

Second, even where policymaking in terms of formulation is quite well-thought-through, implementation is often a problem. Again, this is particularly apparent in Sierra Leone. Arguably, this is often because we are trying to pour "new wine" into the same old bottle. In other words, we devise policies with too many unsound assumptions about the characteristics within which they shall be implemented built in. For instance, we devise policies to reduce red tape and bureaucracy for businesses but overlook the fact that rent-seeking is well-embedded within the system and simply transforms itself to continue the same practices in different guises.

Third, even with well-formulated and implemented policies, there may be practical difficulties and resource constraints hampering involvement of migrants/diasporas in monitoring and evaluation, although this obviously depends on the precise context. The mere dispersal of migrants/diasporas across the global is one basic practical challenge for sustained interaction with them.

Relations and cooperation with government

- *How have non-governmental stakeholders, including migrants and diaspora organizations, added value to existing government strategies e.g. in the field of labour migration; social protection of migrants; or investment, trade and tourism promotion?*

CEC responses:

Apart from one independent evaluation of the "Diaspora Project" undertaken by the Office of Diaspora Affairs (ODA) in Sierra Leone, there are no systematic assessments of the ways that migrants/diasporas have added value to existing government strategies. Anecdotally,

the support the Sierra Leonean diaspora provided through their remittances to relatives and friends during the dark days of the civil war is well embedded in the popular discourse about the war and the psyche of many Sierra Leoneans.

The ODA's Diaspora Project focused on mobilizing Sierra Leonean diaspora experts to fill what were identified as "critical skills gaps" in key public sector institutions in the country. These included various ministries, such as Health, Energy and Water Resources, Agriculture; agencies, such as the Civil Aviation Authority (to where in fact two Nigerian experts under "South-South Cooperation" were recruited), and so on. The evaluation concluded that the project had made a creditable start to the process of engaging the Sierra Leonean diaspora for national development.

However, in spite of some notable successes, it was clear that several factors hampered the overall effectiveness of the project. For instance, ownership and buy-in with the host institutions was sometimes lacking. When combined with the resentment that some felt at the privileges extended to the diaspora experts (remuneration that was far in excess of local pay, for instance), some of the diaspora experts had to deploy a broad range of survival skills to achieve objectives in the face of adversity. In some cases, by devising systems that saw the fairer allocation of public resources (whether in health or agriculture), the diaspora experts made friends and enemies in equal measure. There were a few real instances of political interference in the appointment of some of the experts and this, combined with the perception of widespread political interference and favoritism, to some degree, undermined the support from key individuals inside the civil service bureaucracy who still operated along values of meritocracy and transparency. Such practices and perceptions undermined the credibility of the experts, most of whom were competent and owed their positions to merit rather than connections.

- *Can the participation of non-governmental stakeholders in development planning and implementation help overcome constraints on the government side, such as institutional weaknesses; poor leadership and management; lack of clarity around purpose; and weak capacity?*

CEC responses:

Institutional weaknesses come in various guises. Those that stem from poor leadership and management are not easily overcome by involvement of migrants/diasporas. Under those conditions, insertion of diaspora experts into the dysfunctional system often places the expert in the position of one more reactive firefighter. There is no well-honed overarching strategy by which to operate, there is often no counterpart staff whose capacity can be built. Many of the programs that seek to build institutional capacity – whether with diaspora or other resource – suffer a similar fate under these conditions: it is usually hard to sustain any gains made once the resource is withdrawn.

Capacity constraints that are genuinely of a more technical kind – *real* critical skills gaps, for instance – may be more amenable to the introduction of migrant/diaspora resource. However, there is a tendency to mislabel too many organizational problems as technical whereas the reality is that the visible manifestations of technical problems mask underlying "soft" or human problems that lie in the domain of leadership and management.

Oftentimes highly skilled – in technical fields – diaspora experts are recruited or mobilized to fill these seemingly technical gaps in the country of origin, but they are in effect thrown in at the deep end of situations that demand of them more leadership, people, and "political" skills than they have had cause or opportunity to develop or deploy while working abroad. While some talented individuals adapt "on the fly", others flounder without adequate or appropriate support.

Solutions here might include more accurate diagnosis of the problems in hand and appropriate support – including orientation, training, and coaching/mentoring – for migrant/diaspora human resources when mobilized to build organizational/institutional capacity.

In the Sierra Leone case, it appeared that there was scope for three different types of interventions as far as migrant/diaspora expertise was concerned.

First, in some instances, there were simply human capacity shortages and the need is to fill these gaps in perpetuity. For instance, in Sierra Leone at present, no facilities exist for postgraduate training of doctors so there is an absolute limit to the system's ability to fill gaps with homegrown talent alone. Of course, long-term, there needs to be a strategy to address that constraint, as a lot of evidence has pointed to pursuit of further studies abroad as one of the key migratory driving forces for health sector workers. But in the short-term, it may be viable to incentivize diaspora medical professionals to return. The challenge, as became apparent in Sierra Leone, has been the gap between the returnee's remuneration and that of the staff they return to meet. Moreover, the government planned to harmonize the pay differentials by bringing the existing conditions up to parity with that on offer to the returnees. This move was to be introduced as part of an overall public sector pay review process. However, because of budgetary pressures, the government has so far been unable to introduce the reforms.

Second, there may be a need for diaspora professionals to return on a temporary basis to build organizational/institutional capacity. For this sort of intervention to be effective, a number of conditions must be met. There must be a clear sense of purpose and direction that guides the organization. There must be counterpart staff whose capacity can be built. Seeing as doing is not the same as showing others how to do or building capacity more generally, it is important that the diaspora experts in question are not recruited purely on the basis of their technical prowess but on their ability to actually build capacity. In most cases, these conditions have not been met adequately during the implementation of the ODA's Diaspora Project in Sierra Leone.

A third type of intervention might be as a result of a need for change agents to lead/oversee a specific change management assignment. Change management is a specialized skill and in most cases, the person's technical prowess is less important than the ability to lead and drive change, influence others, etc. Many of the Diaspora Project host institutions probably do need some sort of turnaround, however, no consensus on this need exists. In some instances, the diaspora experts found themselves having to lead/manage a change process but rarely, if ever, had the requisite groundwork been done to pave the way for their intervention.

- *Why should diaspora organizations take government policies and development strategies into account when engaging in development interventions in their home country?*

CEC responses:

When well-designed and implemented, government policies provide overarching frameworks that map out how various actors' efforts and resources – including those of the migrants/diasporas – can complement each other to achieve shared objectives. In most cases, what migrants/diasporas can contribute are just a few small pieces of a much larger jigsaw. Alignment with government policies increases the likelihood that their interventions will be sustainable and achieve the desired long-term impact.

However, all-too-frequently, migrants/diasporas are poorly informed or misinformed about government policies. They are often totally oblivious to the presence of any government policies at all. In my view, bridging this information gap is a critical task in ongoing efforts to maximize the gains of migration for development.

Government strategies for diaspora engagement

- *What is the purpose of a specialized government entity to deal with diaspora relations? What is your country's experience and institutional framework for diaspora matters?*

CEC responses:

In Sierra Leone, soon after he assumed office in 2007, the current president established what is now known as the Office of Diaspora Affairs (ODA) within his office to serve as a vehicle for engaging the Sierra Leonean diaspora and indeed for mobilizing their resource and effort for national development. In fact, the ODA's precise mandate was not spelled out clearly, not least because it was established by executive fiat and therefore did not need new legislation or to be scrutinized by parliament. Some Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora remain of the view that the ODA should be a vehicle to allow the diaspora to make representations to the government. Many in government view the ODA as a vehicle for selling the government's agenda to the diaspora. In practice, the ODA has not seen these two positions as mutually exclusive and has sought to facilitate a two-way dialogue between government and diaspora.

However, there are actual and potential problems with the current arrangement. In Sierra Leone, the distinctions between the government in power; the state; and the ruling party are often blurred. Thus the diaspora often perceive – rightly or wrongly – government outreach via the ODA as overt ruling party political propaganda (and the behavior of some ruling party activists only serves to reinforce this view).

The ODA has recently undertaken a transformation and strategic planning exercise, the outcome of which is a plan to transform the ODA into the Agency for Diaspora Affairs, with more autonomy from government and underpinned by a new law.

- *What is your experience with policies/measures to facilitate the political representation of the diaspora in the home country's democratic processes? Which institutional mechanisms can be used to integrate the "voice of the diaspora" in the policy making process itself? Should engagement be at the decision-making or at the consultative level?*

CEC responses:

Certain segments of the Sierra Leonean diaspora have been clamoring for the right to vote. It has been the focus of different dialogue and consultation sessions between the government and the Sierra Leonean diaspora but the modalities of implementation are unclear.

- *What is your experience with measures taken to maintain home country ties with highly qualified expatriates to facilitate know-how transfers? Can scientific diasporas*

be motivated to contribute to innovation and home-country development in a collective fashion?

CEC responses:

As mentioned above, the flagship project of the ODA to date has been the mobilization of diaspora experts to fill "critical skills gaps" in key public institutions (ministries, departments, and agencies). However, as explained above, effecting know-how transfers has proven difficult in many of the situations into which the diaspora experts found themselves inserted. Nonetheless, in most cases, the diaspora experts who were recruited were individuals seeking a route back to returning to Sierra Leone. Therefore, even as the Diaspora Project itself has come to an end, many have sought ways to stay on within their host institutions or move on to work in other sectors of the economy. Therefore, at one level, it could be said that the project has succeeded in effecting some measure of know-how transfer through the repatriation of diaspora skills.

- *What strategies can be devised to ensure that diaspora contributions to development, e.g. in the areas of health and education, contribute – and are not detrimental to – national or local development strategies in those areas?*

CEC responses:

We have as yet not deployed information and communications technology – websites, mobile phones (including smartphones and their apps), social media, cheap communications, etc – to immerse migrants/diasporas in the realities of the situations in their countries of origin in order for them to fully understand how and where they can add value to development processes underway. While individual migrant/diaspora organizations may wax and wane in strength, depending on the enthusiasm of their individual members, and so on, the general interest and engagement of migrants/diasporas at a more abstract level remains strong. At the same time, they often underestimate the pace of change in their countries and regions of origin. It is almost as if they take a snapshot of the place as they leave and it is this picture that remains with them during the intervening years of their sojourn. Over time, many acquire skills and resources that put them in excellent positions to help transform and develop their countries and regions of origin. Yet they often lack the precise insights into what is really needed and would most add value. Even trips home may not reveal the analysis and insight required.

What is required is a much more purposeful effort to bring together many of the initiatives underway in such a way that gaps and opportunities are apparent and much more easily understood by migrants/diasporas. Well-communicated and accessible insights will enable them to mobilize their resources in more strategic ways to achieve significant impact.

Of particular interest in this context is an emerging class of "diaspora impact investors" – these are migrants/diasporas seeking to leverage their own resources (or other resources they can mobilize) to achieve a blend of social and commercial returns. But even other categories of migrant/diaspora investor – whether purely philanthropic or purely private – would benefit from richer, more detailed information about what is happening, what the opportunities are, and what the needs are in their countries/regions of origin/interest.

This "Rich Picture™", would be an interactive virtual environment, accessed via the web, to which various actors could contribute in a fairly structured manner (it would be necessary to verify some information) information about what is happening, what is needed, etc. In the context of Sierra Leone, which is seeing increased decentralization and devolution of power and resources to local levels, the local economic development plan would be a vital organizing framework around which to plug in information.

Much of the infrastructure already exists to realize such a service. For instance, money transfer operators such as Western Union already control a vast network of agents and sub-agents in most developing countries that could form nodes and points of reference for migration and development related activity underway that could be rendered in the "Rich Picture™".

Involving such organizations and ensuring that they have a financial interest and stake in it will help sustain it over time. Otherwise it might forever be dependent upon funders for grants.

- *What is your experience with measures taken to build the capacity of non-government actors, particularly the diaspora associative sector to enable them to contribute to development processes?*

CEC responses:

A lot of the capacity building effort aimed at migrant/diaspora associations seems predicated upon a desire to encourage more of them to support philanthropic development projects targeted at their countries/regions of origin. No doubt philanthropy has its place but the cost and effort of such capacity building schemes should be weighed against the likely impact of these philanthropic initiatives. Arguably, such impact is likely to be fairly marginal in the grand scheme of things. Far more productive would be a focus on policies in both host and origin countries that enable migrants/diasporas to realize their full potential in their current locations; integrate fully into host societies; have the freedom to move between their host country and their country of origin without any risk of losing their right of abode in the host environment; have access to full (dual) citizenship rights in their countries of origin; creation of an enabling environment in which human capital can realize its full potential in the country of origin; and in which diaspora resources can be productively utilized. The information and communications infrastructure outlined above would also go a long way to enabling diaspora associations to enhance the impact of that they do.

However, this is not to argue against migrant/diaspora capacity building, but a caution that it not be done against a backdrop of assumptions that migrant/diaspora organizations need to be capacity built to behave more like existing non-governmental development organizations. It is always worth remembering that the track record of the aid industry that has been in existence for around 50 years is not stellar and the results rather disappointing.

- *How can UNCTs support governments in the above-outlined domains?*

CEC responses:

As external partners, UNCTs need to constantly remind governments that mobilization of migrants/diasporas is no panacea for their failures to address the underlying causes of underdevelopment. Mobilization of migrants/diasporas is not the silver bullet. In fact, harnessing migrants'/diasporas' resources for development demands of governments that they redouble efforts to create enabling environments for the productive utilization of these resources. In effect, this means creating enabling conditions for the productive utilization of *all* citizens' resources.

Because of capacity constraints, UNCTs might help governments to focus their policies on those "sweet spots" where there is an alignment of interests, say, between domestic, foreign, and migrant/diaspora investors to unleash the full potential of migration for development.

As outsiders who have an inside track, UNCTs can help facilitate processes to bring much more into focus the dysfunctional systems that hamper development. Too much of development seems to be about trying to pour seemingly new wine into old bottles and being surprised at the result. The maxim that "Every system is perfectly designed to get the result that it does" is relevant here. The very system that has been forcing citizens to migrate cannot be tinkered with to attract them back in the hope of achieving development outcomes. There are likely to be unintended perverse consequences. Difficult though it may be, UNCTs have to help governments transform their dysfunctional systems.

Finally, the "Rich Picture" is quintessentially a framework for cooperation and partnership – every player has at least one piece of the jigsaw. UNCTs can play pivotal roles in helping to pilot, scale up and roll out the full implementation by making the initial investments and providing vital information and analysis in a coordinated manner that UNCTs are best-placed to do.

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