

DIASPORA INCLUSION

Harnessing the potential of the African diaspora
in sustainable development

*A dossier by The Broker,
Partos and the
International
Organization for
Migration*



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Editors

Kiza Magendane (*The Broker*)
Yannicke Goris (*The Broker*)

Graphic design

Kim van Wijk (*The Broker*)

Authors and contributors

Antonio Polosa (IOM the Netherlands)
Arjen Berkvens (*Foundation Max van der Stoel*)
Bart Romijn (*Partos*)
Charlotte Mueller (*UNU-MERIT / Maastricht University*)
Dorien Deketele (*IOM the Netherlands*)
Fridah Ntarangwi (*Zidicircle*)
Georgina Kwakye (*Pimp My Village*)
Gery Nijenhuis (*Utrecht University*)
Jan Rinzema (*Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs*)
Katie Kuschminder (*UNU-MERIT / Maastricht University*)
Kemo Camara (*Omek*)
Marina Diboma (*Netherlands-African Business Council*)
Nina Staal (*IOM the Netherlands*)
Saskia Kloezeman (*North South Consulting*)

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The Broker, Partos and IOM present this magazine in partnership, driven by our shared goal of contributing to effective diaspora inclusion, in the Netherlands and beyond.

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PREFACE

IOM the Netherlands is very proud to contribute to this dossier on diaspora inclusion in collaboration with Partos and the Broker. This dossier fits very well into IOM's work of maximizing the positive relationship between migration and development (cf. IOM's Strategy) – an aspect of our work that is very important but not well known by the larger public. I hope this series will actively help shed an inspiring light on the powerful actors that diaspora can be. Indeed, they contribute to their new country in multiple ways but can also be powerful development actors in their old ones. Their expertise, cultural affinity, and strong commitment can make them very effective humanitarian actors in crisis situations, entrepreneurs in business, international experts, as well as excellent agents for human and economic development.

Diaspora engagement has generated increasing political interest in recent years. It has been explicitly included in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in objective 19: "Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries", as well as in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which recognizes that migration is a powerful driver of sustainable development, for migrants and their communities.

Diaspora communities, who are familiar with the situation in their countries of origin and have this strong urge of 'giving back', are uniquely placed to contribute to the sustainable development of what was once their home country. Managing migration, therefore, is not only about combating irregular migration. It is about finding a win-win situation for all parties involved, including the migrant, the home and host countries.

Antonio Polosa

Chief of Mission of IOM the Netherlands

Diaspora engagement and inclusion are at the heart of this new collaboration between IOM, The Broker and Partos. Through this collaboration we aim to raise more awareness about the impact that diaspora organisations, professionals and entrepreneurs, can have on inclusive and sustainable development in their countries of origin.

At Partos, we recognise that the diaspora enrich their home countries in various ways; through remittances, knowledge transfers, trade and networks. Additionally, we believe that the diaspora are a great added value to their new societies, culturally, socially and economically. While migration has often caused tensions and is understood as a threat, diaspora communities actually form the glue between different worlds: their countries of origin, the host country (the Netherlands) and all kinds of subcommunities.

Currently there is a lot of unused potential within the African diaspora in the Netherlands. It is a challenging task for both the diaspora and other actors (such as development organisations) to shape new narratives and directions for cooperation. By creating more opportunities for these groups to engage in meaningful interactions, close collaboration can be stimulated.

Movements of people, or rather migration, is as old as humanity itself. Considering this, we can look at migration as an integral part of how society functions. In fact, the word society stems from the Latin word *societas*, which stands for comradeship, or 'bond between parties that are friendly'. Inspired by this perspective, Partos believes that the engagement of diaspora contributes to a healthy society. Let us celebrate diversity, inclusion and strengthen civil society!

Bart Romijn

Director Partos



DIASPORA INCLUSION IN THE DUTCH DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

[View online](#)



Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris
The Broker

With more than 22 percent of its residents coming from [over 220 foreign countries](#), the Netherlands is one of the most diverse nations in the world. As a result, the country is home to a variety of diaspora communities and organisations that represent them. It has been argued that these diaspora organisations could play a crucial role in making [Dutch development policies and programmes more effective](#). At present, however, both the Dutch development sector and the Dutch government seem to struggle with the question of how the diaspora can best be included in their efforts. Therefore, The Broker launched an online knowledge dossier in order to shed light and stimulate constructive dialogue on diaspora inclusion. Funded by [Partos](#) and [IOM the Netherlands](#), this online knowledge dossier on ‘[Diaspora Inclusion](#)’ features articles in which multiple actors provide their perspective on how the various diaspora communities in the Netherlands can contribute to the sustainable development of their countries of origin. The articles that were first published online are now bundled in this colourful magazine, in this way showcasing the wonderful stories and important lessons that we have gathered on the inclusion of diaspora in the Netherlands.

Academic literature of the past two decades has shown that members of the diaspora remit both their social and economic capital to their home countries. Despite their physical detachment, migrants continue to be emotionally, culturally, politically and economically [connected with their home country](#). They do so by taking up [various roles](#), including entrepreneurship, investing in capital markets, philanthropy, voluntarism and political engagement, to name just a few. Confirming these academic findings in practice, migrant organisations in the Netherlands indeed focus not only on the integration of their members within Dutch society, they are also actively contributing to [human development in their country of origin](#). These insights and empirical examples have informed a common perception that members of the diaspora in the Netherlands possess [knowledge and networks](#) that can help build effective linkages between their home and host country – i.e. the Netherlands. These linkages, if used effectively, have the potential to enhance the efficiency of Dutch development projects and policies. ▶



Policy Background

In the early 2000s, recognition of the importance of including the diaspora in development efforts was present Dutch policy dialogue. It was assumed that, in addition to having vital knowledge and networks, many migrants residing in the Netherlands are also willing to contribute to the development of their home countries. All things considered, the diaspora could logically play a valuable role in advancing the Dutch international development agenda. This line of reasoning was made explicit, for instance, in the 2008 policy brief ‘[international migration and development](#)’ by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice and Security. The policy brief not only envisioned to *consult* members of the diaspora but also to support diaspora organisations in implementing development projects in their home country. And six years later, [in a letter to parliament](#), Lilianne Ploumen, then Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, confirmed this logic when she wrote that involvement of diaspora communities in the development of their home countries was still considered an important policy priority. Since then, Dutch policy regarding diaspora inclusion changed, as was also reported in a [2019 Ecorys evaluation](#) of migrant entrepreneurship projects. Against the backdrop of the European ‘migration crisis’, Dutch migration policy became more focused on prevention and repatriation of migrants, leaving less room for actively seeking collaboration with diaspora. Confirming this shift, Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Sigrid Kaag, wrote in a [2019 letter](#) to parliament that within her new policy framework “the diaspora is no longer regarded as a distinct target group, neither for the collaboration on migration nor for private sector development.” Based on the same Ecorys evaluation, the minister had concluded that diaspora organisations – and diaspora entrepreneurs in particular – should be integrated in and link up to already existing policy frameworks (like the Dutch Good Growth Fund – DGGF). ▶

“Could the corona crisis present an opportunity to improve the collaboration with and inclusion of the diaspora in development efforts?”

A first step towards inclusion and collaboration

The above described policy development of the past sixteen years suggests that, while there is agreement that the diaspora can play a crucial role in advancing the Dutch development agenda, it is unclear how this potential can be unleashed and if efforts to do so are on the minds and agendas of policy makers at all. Similarly, within the Dutch development sector, it appears difficult to integrate or work with the diaspora to promote inclusive development.

The current Covid-19 crisis, however, is raising awareness within the international development community about the need to rethink its goals, innovate its practices and work together more efficiently. Could this crisis present an opportunity to improve the collaboration with and inclusion of the diaspora in development efforts? In [a recent letter](#) to the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation about the need for a global approach to the pandemic, the Development Studies Community of Scholars in the Netherlands seems to suggest something similar. In their letter, the scholars argue that during a crisis, we need to ‘reflect on our development model and our focus on increasing growth at the cost of the environment and human health.’ In addition, they call for intensive cooperation and mutual learning that goes beyond simple transfers of ideas from the North to the South. In other words: never waste a good crisis and make use of this opportunity to take a critical look at our current approaches and establish collaborative linkages with new groups and organisations. In order to put diaspora inclusion on the agendas of both policy makers and NGOs and to stimulate a constructive dialogue about the role of the diaspora in Dutch development efforts –now in time of crisis *and* in the future– The Broker has joined forces with Partos and IOM the Netherlands. A first step in our shared endeavour was the realisation of an online knowledge dossier, where experts and practitioners from different fields shed light on the issue of diaspora inclusion for sustainable development.

A collaboration in two parts

In May 2020 The Broker, in collaboration with Partos, launched this online multi-disciplinary knowledge dossier featuring authors from various backgrounds. In this way, the dossier brings together perspectives and insights that often remain fragmented; from the Dutch government, the Dutch development sector, diaspora entrepreneurs, diaspora civil society organisations, the Dutch private sector and academia. In addition to the online articles, The Broker and Partos hosted an online workshop during which diaspora experts and entrepreneurs reflected on the lessons gathered so far and discussed how the relationship between the various diaspora communities and the Dutch development sector could be strengthened. Based on the featured articles and this online workshop, The Broker published a synthesis piece, bringing together the main insights from the first phase of the knowledge dossier (see page 29). ▶

Impressed by the first part of the knowledge dossier and convinced of the necessity to continue the conversation on effective diaspora inclusion, the Dutch branch of the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM the Netherlands) supported The Broker to reopen the dossier in late 2020. For this second part of our journey, The Broker and IOM the Netherlands aimed to generate a more in-depth understanding of how diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs can (and already do) contribute to the sustainable development of their countries of origin. By speaking to senior IOM officials and various diaspora entrepreneurs and experts, as well featuring an extra article from an academic perspective, the second phase of the online dossier brought an overview of relevant challenges and opportunities related to diaspora inclusion in the entrepreneurial sphere.

The magazine you have before you is the result of the collaboration between The Broker, Partos and IOM the Netherlands. It brings together all 10 contributions as well as 2 synthesis pieces that were first published in our [online dossier](#). What this collection of articles shows us, is that the various diaspora communities living in the Netherlands have a great potential to contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin. What is needed however, is for multiple actors to play their part: That is, effective diaspora inclusion in international development and in business endeavours depends on the joint efforts of the members of the diaspora, the Dutch private sector, the development community as well as the Dutch government. Such efforts are by no means a matter of charity; rather, they are investments that generate benefit for all parties involved. Collaboration with and support for the diaspora results in more effective development cooperation, better policies, and more successful business endeavours on the African continent. With these and other insights explained in the following chapters, we hope that this magazine contributes to a better and more comprehensive understanding of the (potential) role of the diaspora in the Dutch development agenda. It is our hope that the expertise and experience of the many contributors will provide guidance for the direction development policy and programming should take to move towards more efficient inclusion of and collaboration with the diaspora in the Netherlands. ■

INCLUDING DIASPORA IN THE GAME

Arjan Berkvens

Foundation Max van der Stoel

[View online](#)

For many years a debate has been going on about the role of diaspora in development cooperation. In general, however, diaspora organisations and representatives do not seem to play a major role in the Dutch development sector. How strange it must be to observe that there is a whole community of practitioners, scientists and civil servants are forming opinions, designing policies and making field trips to the country where you originate from. And even stranger to realise that you, as a member of the diaspora, are often regarded as a problem. For a sector that so often uses the word ‘inclusion’, it is pretty painful that the African diaspora is, in practice, so often excluded. In my view, this is a missed opportunity. Therefore, in this article, I will share my observations and conclude by presenting three advantages of diaspora inclusion for the Dutch development agenda.

An effective and fun collaboration

In my work at Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) I meet many diaspora representatives. Together we have been organizing political debates as well as the annual [Afrikadag](#), the biggest political event about Africa in the Netherlands. I am not from Africa, so it always felt slightly uncomfortable to organize such an event. What gives me the right to talk about this continent and to decide on the programming? Although programming might seem to be a rather neutral thing, in fact it is not. The choice of experts, topics and even music is value-laden and culturally driven – an important lesson I learned from intense discussions with various diaspora representatives. As a response, we chose to intensify our collaboration and work more closely with members of the diaspora from the cultural sector, politics, science, student organisations and the business community. They taught me an extremely important lesson: do not simply rely on your own frame of mind, knowledge and experiences, but hand over control and give responsibility to those who you are talking about. That is what we did. And we are very satisfied about the results. Our activities have become more credible and more effective, because suddenly we had access to a new world of artists, experts, writers and so on. Besides that it made our work more satisfying and fun. ▶

“Do not simply rely on your own frame of mind, knowledge and experiences, but hand over control and give responsibility to those who you are talking about.”



Arjan Berkvens

Beyond weak criticism on diaspora organizations

The African diaspora in the Netherlands is a very diverse group with people from almost all African countries from Western-Sahara to South-Africa. While this is common knowledge in the development sector, there is still a tendency to expect the diaspora to speak as one group, with one voice. And, following the same line of reasoning, the lack of participation of this group in development cooperation is often attributed to the diaspora itself for four reasons: 1) diaspora organisations lack a professional attitude; 2) they lack unity and cooperation; 3) they are unable to wage a professional lobby towards the government the NGO sector and; 4) the added value of working with diaspora is doubtful because Dutch development organizations have a direct connection with organisations operating in aid receiving countries.

These four arguments warrant a critical reply. The first point about the lack of professional attitude is based on prejudice. While diaspora organizations are small, that does not mean their contributions lack quality. In my experience, the opposite is often true. Second, the point about the lack of unity is based on a typical Western/Dutch perception. Africa is not one country, but instead a continent of 54 very different countries. Dutch NGOs and policymakers want people from very different backgrounds to form one association with a clear lobby. What if we would ask this from people coming from different countries on the European continent? Asking Greeks and Germans to come up with one position is just as unfair as asking Somali and Nigerians to do so. The Dutch so-called ‘polder model’ forces very different organizations to work together and come up with one position. Is this reasonable to ask of people from 54 different countries? Or would it make more sense for policymakers and NGOs to listen to specific country-based diaspora groups? I would argue for the latter. This leads to the third point about the lack of a clear lobby. This point does actually hold some truth. Despite all their differences, diaspora organizations could find common grounds: attention for their causes, funding for their activities and a seat at the table. The question is whether these points give a strong foundation for the formation of a sustainable association? It has been tried before with some success but my impression is that diaspora organizations are just too different to make it work. Finally, the ▶

“While diaspora organizations are small, that does not mean their contributions lack quality”

fourth criticism on diaspora inclusion is a serious one. The fact that Dutch NGOs work with local NGOs in aid receiving countries and policymakers tend to collaborate with their overseas counterparts has led to the neglect of diaspora groups. They are seen as superfluous. I believe that this is a mistake and a waste of talent and human resources. In my professional life, I found that including the diaspora has much added value. In the final section of this piece, I will share three important advantages of diaspora inclusion.

Advantages of diaspora inclusion

First of all, the diaspora can help you bridge the cultural and language gap between your organization and your partners abroad. Besides this, the power gap between donor and receiver is less wide when you have these ‘bridge-builders’ on your team. The FMS operates in various countries around the EU. Our project managers and trainers often originated from these countries and their cultural understanding and language skills were essential in developing effective relations and projects. The seemingly simple act of having one of our trainers in a Muslim country joining our local partners for Friday prayers proved a huge advantage in bridging the gap between donor and receiver of aid.

Secondly, my experience taught me that we are much better informed when we include the diaspora in our organization. Organisations that work in other countries are very much dependent on understanding the local context. To be effective in your work, knowledge of the local context, networks and (news) sources is essential. Therefore, having people in your team that are able to read the local news and understand the local codes is a great asset. With a diverse team, you will be able to hear rumors, gossip and communicate directly with your local partners in their mother tongue. Diaspora inclusion, in short, allows for a better understanding of not only factual, but also cultural and emotional circumstances.

Finally, having people on your team originating from the countries in which you operate also has a positive effect on the credibility of your organization at home. I remember clearly the days when the activities that we organized only had experts from the Netherlands on the panel. And yes, there was always one person that was actually born there. Almost as an excuse. Like the one female panelist you sometimes still see on all-male panels. A couple of years ago, I was approached by a man who told me that he was sick and tired of listening to Dutch experts talking about the country he was born in. Although we certainly do not exclude these experts nowadays, we make sure that as a rule, we also include a majority of people that are from the country we are discussing.

Becoming more diverse as development organisations will require a concerted effort of the sector as a whole. Yet, this effort should not be seen as a burden. Diversification, inclusion, working closely with the wide variety of diaspora groups – it is not a burden, it is a huge opportunity. It will provide joy, creativity and much needed credibility. ■



Paul Villinski via Flickr

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

DIASPORA CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE DUTCH DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

[View online](#)

Georgina Kwakye
Pimp my Village



Rachel Strohm via Flickr

To the wider public, Georgina Kwakye is best known for her acting and presenting career on Dutch television. What most are unaware of, however, is that she is also a development agent and trainer of diaspora organisations. When she was making a documentary about her father who wanted to build a hospital in his native village in Ghana and witnessed the effectiveness of his initiatives, Georgina had an epiphany: being a member of the diaspora has an added value in development projects. This realisation inspired her to create *Pimp my Village*, a crowdfunding platform for the African diaspora in the Netherlands. This article is based on an interview that The Broker's Kiza Magendane held with Georgina, in which she shared her experience and insights about diaspora civil society organisations, and their added value in the Dutch development sector.

What is the role of diaspora civil society organisations in the realisation of inclusive development? I will answer this question by sharing the story of my father, Dr. Kwakye. Born in a small Ghanaian village, he was raised by his father and other family, after losing his mother when he was 10 years old. My father was an excellent student. He got a scholarship, was able to study in Hungary and, upon invitation by a professor, ended up writing his thesis in the Netherlands. Eventually, he became a cardiothoracic surgeon, working in Belgium and Germany. After a successful career, my father decided to give back to his rural community in Ghana through different initiatives, including water and electricity projects. He also renovated a school. His biggest dream was to build a hospital in his native village. I decided to support his projects and make a documentary of his journey. While filming in Ghana, I was amazed by how my father managed to translate his 'Western' knowledge to the local context. He managed to build the hospital, introduce an ambulance centre and other advanced medical equipment from the Netherlands but always made sure they matched with the needs of the people in Ghana. It is through my father that I realised for the first time the added value of the diaspora in the realisation of inclusive development: They have the knowledge of both worlds. ►

How diaspora organisation can make a difference

After a successful completion of my father's project, I realised that I wanted to support more people beyond my own family, across countries and cultures. That is why I created Pimp my Village, a crowdfunding platform for the African diaspora in the Netherlands to support them in carrying out development projects in their country of origin. On this platform, members of the diaspora can post which part of their village they want to 'pimp', and the donor can give directly to that development project. Pimp my Village was founded with the idea that diaspora actors, just like Dr. Kwakye, have the 'best of both worlds'. They are aware of the developments in their home country and can effectively use their knowledge and network for development projects. Based on my work with Pimp My Village, also as a trainer for diaspora organisations and entrepreneurs, I would like to share three interlinked lessons about how diaspora organisations can have an added value in the Dutch development agenda.

1. Innovate your acquisition strategy

First of all, diaspora civil society organisations could be innovative in generating funding. Both the Dutch government and European institutions have limited financial means to support small-scale projects, but diaspora organisations can be very creative in finding alternative sources of income. For instance, before I started Pimp my Village, together with a team of volunteers I often organised events to generate funding for my father's development projects, including fashion shows and art auctions. Partnerships with the Dutch private sector were also crucial. All these activities generated the needed funding to support our initiatives, without the support of government actors. From my experience I learned that diaspora organisations that manage to initiate more fundraising events and create partnerships with the Dutch private sector could be less dependent on government support. ►

2. Be a true bridge and have the best of both worlds

Related to the previous point, in order to have an added value in development cooperation, diaspora organisations should act as bridge builders. In my case, I would never have managed to be effective with Pimp my Village without the support of the Dutch society. I had a good network in the Dutch TV and entertainment sector as well as with some Dutch companies. This helped me generate sufficient funding for Pimp my Village. Similarly, my father also used his skills and network from the Global North to implement successful development projects in his native village. In order to be effective, diaspora organisations could seek to become more embedded in Dutch society, understand how it functions and build a strong network. At the same time, they should also keep a strong connection with their country of origin. In my case, growing up in the Netherlands, being brought up by a Hungarian mother and getting to know the Ghanaian context through my father, I became a bridge-figure who understood both Ghana and the Netherlands. I see the same with diaspora organisations and entrepreneurs that I train with Pimp my village. Those who have strong ties in both their home countries and the Netherlands seem to be more effective in their projects. They have the best of both worlds. They know the right people, they understand the stories and the language, and manage to share these stories with Dutch society.

3. Collaborate with other diaspora organisations

If I look at diaspora organisations I get the impression that they are operating on two islands. On one hand, there are organisations that are heavily institutionalised. They have contact with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and participate in consultation meetings. These organisations lobby for diaspora inclusion, and sometimes even get funding from the government to conduct development projects. This is only a small group of organisations, who are visible not only at the Dutch Ministry, but also at the European level. On the other hand, or 'island', there are organisations that independently operate both in the Netherlands and in their home country. These organisations think outside the box and use networks within Dutch society other than the government and institutionalised development actors. A good example is [Omek](#), created by Kemo Camara, a digital and physical platform that connects and inspires African diaspora professionals. Organisations on this second island also tend to have a more sustainable business model. If the two groups on these separate islands could find each other and collaborate, I think great opportunities would open up. Not only would it strengthen their force, it would also allow them to share knowledge and networks and change the image about the African diaspora. I still see that the image about Africa and African migrants remains quite negative in the Netherlands. Sometimes government actors still believe that the diaspora is only interested in funding. That is why, with Pimp my village, I bring different innovative diaspora organisations together to inspire both the Dutch society and other development actors about the potential of the African diaspora. It is only by coming together, with the support of Dutch society, that the negative image about the African diaspora can be shifted. ►

Collaboration with Dutch NGOs

While it is crucial that diaspora organisations join forces, renewing and fortifying their relationship with Dutch development NGOs is equally important for more effective and sustainable development efforts and impacts. Because diaspora can easily navigate between their home country and the Netherlands, and because they understand the codes of both worlds, they can help both big and small Dutch development NGOs that are operating in different African countries. Diaspora organisations could improve the connectedness with local communities as well as share their knowledge and experience in intercultural communication. In the end, a strong relationship between diaspora organisations and the Dutch development NGOs would make both parties more effective and knowledgeable. A more inclusive development sector would be a real win-win situation. ■



Georgina Kwakye



UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Kemo Camara
Omek

[View online](#)

Partnering with the African diaspora as a bridge between the Netherlands and Africa could be a major advantage in building an effective African policy strategy for both the public and private sectors. The key to harnessing the potential of the more than 700,000 people with African roots living in the Netherlands is two-fold: First, to understand and recognise the diversity and complexity of the diaspora community; and second, to design an entrepreneurial engagement approach that emphasizes the shared needs and values within this diverse community. At Omek, a new digital platform dedicated to the social and professional advancement of the African diaspora community, these two lessons are at the very heart of the organisation.

Introducing Omek

Omek is a community-centric platform designed to make connection and collaboration simple for African diaspora professionals, their allies, and to promote their social and professional advancement. Our vision is to create a strong network of empowered professionals who are meaningful contributors to the economies and cultures of their country of origin as well as the country where they live. Omek is the result of my personal and academic experience. As an African diaspora professional who's lived, studied and worked in Africa, the U.S. and Europe, I have had the unique privilege to not only experience what it is to be a member of the diaspora in these continents, but also to study the dynamics through surveys, interviews, and countless discussions with other diaspora professionals across the United States and Europe. The result of these studies could be summarized into two main takeaways: The first is the growing desire in the African diaspora community to connect with other like-minded professionals and to be a part of something bigger than oneself. The second is promoting inclusion, equality, representation and participation of the diaspora in business and society. ►

Emi Koussi via Flickr

Learning from the U.S.-India Relationship

What we sought to realise with Omek is to provide an entrepreneurial bridge for the African diaspora. To that end, much can be learned from the relationship between the U.S. and India relationship. An integrated network of cross-cultural diaspora-lead community organisations, angel investors and educational strategies currently underpins the intimate ties between the start-up worlds of these two nations. In 2018, India invested \$9.62 billion into the U.S.; 25% of start-ups in Silicon Valley are run by the Indian diaspora; and at the same time, Bangalore is the third largest start-up city globally. The successful bridge-building between India and the Indian diaspora in the U.S. can largely be attributed to a specific Indian policy. In 2000 the Indian government mandated a High-Level Committee to make a comprehensive study of the global Indian diaspora and to recommend measures for a constructive relationship with them. The commission produced a 300- page document with recommendations for an effective 'engagement policy'. For developing an effective engagement approach at Omek, however, the U.S.-Indian example was insufficient. What distinguishes the African diaspora is its great diversity and complexity. In order to harness the potential of this community, therefore, recognising and understanding these dynamics is key.

Complexity within the African Diaspora

Africa is home to 54 different countries and some of the most ethnically diverse communities in the world. Many of these communities speak different dialects and have various cultures, traditions, and religious beliefs. Nigeria alone is home to more than 200 different ethnic groups. This diversity is also reflected in the African diaspora communities. Very often you will find these communities either organized along geographical boundaries like countries, state, town, and village, or by their ethical, political, educational, or religious affiliation. Additionally, there are strong divisions within the African diaspora communities along generational lines. The first-generation diaspora -those who migrated from Africa- and the second generation -those born or brought at a young age-, represent two totally different sets of diaspora groups in terms of mindset, experience, and values. The second-generation diaspora are bicultural, highly educated, and more integrated into their host society while their parents (the first generation) are more culturally and emotionally connected with their country of origin.

I believe the biggest mistake and reason why so many African diaspora organisations or engagement policies fail is that they try to group the diaspora communities based on their geographical origin. This approach alone is problematic for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the differences already existing within the diaspora community; and second, it leads to overly simplistic policy approaches that fail to do justice to the realities of a complex and dynamic community. ►

The Omek strategy

Contrary to the geographical segmentation, at Omek we use a so-called psychographic segmentation of the African diaspora community to inform our entrepreneurial approach. We have grouped the community into four categories, based on common passion, shared values, vision, and beliefs. This segmentation was inspired by a Harvard Business Review article on [diaspora marketing](#). In the article, the authors make the case for how companies from the developing world can overcome the obstacles to entering Western markets by using a smart strategy of leveraging their diasporas as their springboards for gaining brand recognition before breaking out into the mainstream. While resulting in separate categories, in practice the psychographic approach highlights what the African diaspora communities have in common, not what divides them. It inspires possibilities and a new way of thinking. It helps cut across physical, ethnic, political, and religious boundaries as well as alleviates the noise associated with these characteristics. The four different categories (summarized for the purpose of this article) we have identified at Omek are as follows:

The Cultural Advocates — First generation, low income with a low degree of formal education. They are usually members of the religious and local community associations and are very keen on creating a social support system for members within the community. They are still very connected and versed in the African culture and traditions.

The Ethnic Affirmers — First generation, come from low to medium income backgrounds. They are well educated professionals or business owners. They are very conscious about preserving their African cultural identity through their kids and activities. They are leaders in their local community associations - professional or social.

The Biculturals — Second generation, highly educated, maintain a sense of belonging to both home and host cultures without compromising their identity. They are tech-savvy, entrepreneurs, and social media influencers. Cultural identity, social justice, equality, success, climate change, and changing the African narrative are amongst their key priorities.

The Assimilators — First and second generation. Medium to high income, well educated, and career-focused. They are successful professionals and business owners. They are well integrated in their host societies and usually don't associate with their African culture or community in general. Although they are not much involved in the community, the assimilators are still keen on giving back and providing opportunities to younger generation Africans. It's important to also point out that the assimilators are a very small segment of the African diaspora community. ▶



Kemo Camara

“We believe biculturals represent the future of the new global workforce. They have good social awareness with the ability to navigate complex and uncharted social and professional situations.”

After identifying these categories, at Omek we decided to focus on the bicultural people of all African descent including Surinamese, Caribbeans, and African Americans. Due to their unique cultural and hyphenated identity, we believe biculturals represent the future of the new global workforce. They have good social awareness with the ability to navigate complex and uncharted social and professional situations. They have the ability to bridge cultural, societal, and generational gaps. We believe by empowering and harnessing the potential of these biculturals, we not only create a strong network of empowered professionals who are meaningful contributors to the economy and culture; we also create a more equal and inclusive society where everyone is given the opportunity to participate in value creation.

A way forward

Much like the Indian diaspora in the U.S., African diaspora professionals in the Netherlands can be an important partner in shaping the African policy strategy for both the public and private sector. The key to realising such success will be through a concerted effort of various stakeholders, including the Dutch government, to understand the dynamic and complexity within the diaspora community, and then design a new and entrepreneurial engagement approach. The Omek team is happy to share our expertise and collaborate with new partners to support any innovative diaspora engagement effort. By working together and looking beyond geographical divisions and long-standing assumptions, the Netherlands can harness the social, human, financial, cultural, and philanthropic capital of the African diasporas for more effective and inclusive development programming. ■

INTERPERSONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES

A CONVERSATION ON DIASPORA INCLUSION WITH BART ROMIJN

Bart Romijn
Partos

[View online](#)

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

As the Dutch membership body for development organisations, Partos is always looking for ways to facilitate and support the work of its members. Its interest in fostering collaboration with the African diaspora in the Netherlands should therefore not come as a surprise. In this interview, Partos' director, Bart Romijn, explains why his organisation is looking to put diaspora inclusion on the agenda and how the current corona crisis provides an opportunity for both development organisations and the African diaspora in the Netherlands to foster new ties. In order to create a sustainable collaboration, Romijn argues, diaspora organisations and the development sector should develop interpersonal relationships and come up with shared bottom-up initiatives.

Most of Partos' members run projects in one or more African countries. Does that also mean that Partos is aware of the dynamics within the African diaspora in the Netherlands?

There are many members of the diaspora in the Netherlands who are connected with countries where our member organisations operate. Yet, overall, there is limited interaction between our members and the diaspora. Last year, Partos did organise an event on migration and development but this was one of the few occasions where many of our members as well as diaspora organisations were active and present. In general, however, this interaction is very limited, which means that neither our members nor Partos are sufficiently aware of the dynamics within the diaspora. I think we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

Why does Partos want to put the subject of diaspora inclusion on the Dutch development agenda?

This is based on a few fundamental assumptions. First of all, I think that there is a lot of untapped potential in the collaboration between diaspora organisations and the development sector. The diaspora has relevant knowledge of and networks in countries where our member organisations operate. This knowledge and networks can help our members overcome their blind spots. Even though our member organisations have already established networks in their target countries, I believe that much can be gained from consulting and collaborating with the diaspora. ▶



Tim Mossholder via Unsplash

Further, I believe that development organisations should not only look at countries far away but also at what happens in their own environment. Therefore, understanding the complexity and position of the diaspora in Dutch society is important. For one thing, members of the diaspora are rooted in three worlds: in their home country, in Dutch society and in their own community within Dutch society. Sustainable development efforts should not, and do not, focus only on the most marginalised groups in poor countries. Additionally, they should also be aimed at marginalisation and exclusion in our own country and especially at those who have the highest ecological footprint. From that perspective, understanding the dynamics of diaspora groups –their movements, experiences, knowledge and connections– should be one of the key tasks for the development sector.

To what extent does the current corona crisis provide an opportunity to reflect on diaspora inclusion in the Dutch development sector?

Current data suggest that the direct impact of COVID-19 (infection rates and deaths) in Africa is relatively limited. The indirect impact of the virus however, is huge. Lock-downs and other policies have put existing basic systems like food, business and clean drinking water under pressure. In addition, many of our member organisations and their local partners cannot carry out their activities, or only to a very limited extent. It is in these very challenges that we find the opportunity, *and* the necessity, for diaspora inclusion. Although many members of the diaspora are not necessarily connected to formal institutions, they do have fine-meshed, local networks of friends and family. I believe that, at the moment, these connections are invaluable. Governments have the tendency to operate through big international networks, especially in times of crisis. The recent AIV-policy brief on extra funding for Africa, for instance, focuses on multilateral institutions as a main provider of help. But I believe that to effectively assist the poorest people who are now facing crisis upon crisis, local embeddedness and more personal networks and support systems are even more important. That is why we promote a much stronger engagement of locally embedded NGOs which can be achieved more effectively –especially given the current constraints– by collaborating with the diaspora and using their channels. ▶

This is not the first time that the subject diaspora inclusion is on the agenda. Are you not afraid that some form of ‘diaspora fatigue’ will arise in the sector?

To be honest, I think that this fatigue has been around for some time. When I joined Partos in 2014, I noticed a growing distance between diaspora organisations and development organisations. This was partly due to financing. In the preceding period, different development organisations had funding available for diaspora organisations and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also paying attention to the diaspora. A few meetings with the diaspora were organised, but after some time both the funding and attention to the diaspora dried up. I think that it is now time for a new approach.

In a recent FMS-meeting with members of the African diaspora, one member of the diaspora said: “If we want to be connected with organisations then we should not come with our problems, but provide solutions. We have a lot to offer instead of asking for help.” This was an eye-opener for me and this notion of ‘having a lot to offer’ should be at the heart of our relationship. I do not believe in unilateral help; I believe that when two parties collaborate, both have something to bring to the table. So yes, I have seen the so-called diaspora fatigue within the sector, but I do not think that it is getting worse nor that it cannot be overcome. On the contrary. I believe that, if both the Dutch development sector and the diaspora itself recognise the enormous value and assets of diaspora organisations, a very fruitful collaboration can be realised.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently decided that it will not consider the diaspora as a special target group for migration and development policies. According to Minister Kaag, diaspora organisations can connect to established policy instruments. Is this a missed opportunity or does it also provide the sector with the opportunity to cooperate with the diaspora?

It is difficult to say whether it is a missed opportunity because, in previous years, some efforts were made to collaborate with the diaspora, but they appeared ineffective. What we need is a new operational framework, one that is formulated by the diaspora and the development sector together, not by the government. I do not think that policy should be leading in this collaboration; rather, it should be facilitating. We should organise ourselves first, come up with joint propositions, and then policy will follow. A good example of this way of thinking is the ►

different pilots on circular migration, where migrants wanted to start a business in their home country and found support with Dutch companies. These bottom-up initiatives however, were unfortunately complicated by policy: When members of the diaspora go back to their home country, they lose their rights in the Netherlands. The task for policymakers, as this example shows, is to create an enabling environment that allows for collaborative initiatives like this to come to fruition.

Finally, I think we should look beyond institutional frameworks and catch-all concepts such as *the* diaspora and *the* development sector. The danger of focusing on these institutional frames and catch-all concepts is that we lose sight of the enormous diversity of the people behind them. Real change starts with direct interpersonal contact; when people, from the diaspora and development organisations, sit at a table and connect. At present, there are very few occasions where such connections can grow, although the annual Afrikadag is a good exception. At Partos we have limited means to organise such events, but the government could play a facilitating role there. Regular opportunities for the diaspora and the development sector to meet and connect will foster creativity and lead to new opportunities. Once interpersonal connections are formed, valuable collaborations are just around the corner. ■

COOPERATING WITH THE DIASPORA THE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE



Jan Rinzema

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[View online](#)

Realising effective inclusion of and collaboration with the African diaspora living in the Netherlands in the Dutch development efforts relies, to a large extent, on the willingness of policymakers to facilitate this partnership. Jan Rinzema, Senior policy officer at the Migration and Development Division at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs sheds light on the governmental perspective and explains ways in which collaboration is facilitated.

The diaspora can certainly play an important role in inclusive development in the Global South and already does in many ways. That said, Dutch development cooperation policy does not single out diaspora as a target group or priority. Specific engagement with the diaspora has nevertheless been part of Dutch policy on migration and development for quite some years. It included regular consultation meetings between government and diaspora, for example to collect the diaspora's input in the Dutch position for the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). Diaspora organisations were also eligible for subsidies from the migration and development budget but since about 2015, that specific engagement has not been continued (apart from targeted and assisted knowledge transfer by diaspora through [support to IOM the Netherlands](#)). This is mainly because the – otherwise interesting – dialogue remained limited to networking and did not evolve into diaspora organising itself and taking ownership to become an effective partner for policy-making. At the same time, government-funded activities generally remained fragmented and lacked effectiveness. On this latter aspect, and focusing in particular on activities relating to entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned an evaluative study by Ecorys. That [study](#) was published last year and is worth reading for those interested in the subject.

The [policy response to the Ecorys study](#) by the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation gives a clear message. While diaspora can certainly have an added value contributing to sustainable and inclusive development, the very fact of being a diaspora member is not sufficient to have development impact or to make business in developing or fragile countries a success. Other factors are just as – or even more – important, such as entrepreneurial skills, professionalism and knowledge of local networks and context. In the diaspora projects examined, those elements were mostly lacking. Therefore, from the Dutch government's point of view, making diaspora a specific target group for engagement and support is not the best way to leverage its specific knowledge and ►

position. Diaspora itself bears primary responsibility to organise its contribution to inclusive development of countries of origin. This does not mean that there is no support available for diaspora (entrepreneurs). The Ministry welcomes business proposals by small and medium-sized enterprises including involving diaspora, in accordance with the terms of its private sector support instruments. Information on those terms can be found on the [website of Netherlands Enterprise Agency \(RvO\)](#).

Similarly, diaspora members or organisations can use opportunities to be involved in policy consultations or applications for funding under the Ministry's existing instruments for civil society. The recent '[Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society](#)' provides an opportunity to apply for grants relating to partnerships with the Dutch government to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The regular interaction with diaspora in the framework of the Dutch NAP1325 community (National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security) constitutes a good example of active diaspora involvement, as does funding through the [Pilot Fund Peace and Security for All \(PS4A\)](#). It may be noted that although the PS4A fund does not target diaspora organisations *per se*, the majority of the PS4A-partners do identify as such.

In sum, the government looks forward to the continued involvement of and contribution by the diaspora community to realize the SDGs, within the framework and possibilities offered by the current development cooperation policy '[Investing in Global Prospects](#)'. Its contribution to inclusive development is of great importance, all the more so given the potential consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the Global South. ■



Molly Dilworth via FLICKR



FROM ‘UNHAPPY MARRIAGE’ TO ‘LIVING-APART-TOGETHER’?

Gery Nijenhuis
Utrecht University

[View online](#)

Worldwide, diaspora organisations are engaged in a wide range of transnational activities, in order to enhance human, social and economic development in their region of origin – and far beyond. The scholarly opinion on the potential of diaspora organisations to stimulate development is generally positive. More critical is the literature about Migration & Development policies. Efforts to engage the diaspora undertaken within this framework fail to harness ‘the potential of the diaspora’, and some scholars even refer to the migration and development combination as an ‘unhappy marriage’. In this article I will highlight three issues that are at stake: the huge diversity among diaspora organisations; the existing myth regarding funding of transnational activities of diaspora organisations; and the limitations of the institutional framework for engaging diaspora organisations in development.

Engaging ‘the’ diaspora

In the academic debate on Migration & Development the use of ‘the diaspora’¹ is not uncontested. A first observation is that, even when we talk about a relatively ‘narrow’ field as diaspora in development, ‘the’ diaspora organisation does not exist. A quick look at the register of the Chamber of Commerce shows that only in the Netherlands, over 3,000 diaspora organisations exist. These represent a highly **diverse** range of organisations. Some have a religious function (e.g. Ghanaian migrant churches) while others focus merely on sports, or employment. Additionally, organisations target different groups, such as youth, women and ethnic groups. Diaspora organisations often perform multiple roles at the same time, and at different levels – ‘here’, ‘there’ and ‘beyond’. These roles range from facilitating the integration of their members in the host country, to full-fledged development interventions in the country of origin, and everything in between. ▶

1 Sinatti, G., & Horst, C. (2015). Migrants as agents of development: Diaspora engagement discourse and practice in Europe. *Ethnicities*, 15(1), 134–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796814530120>

Though most, if not all, diaspora organisations are in touch with the country of origin, the intensity of this contact also varies; from a few incidental emails to structural transnational activities. In terms of roles, many diaspora organisations act as brokers in the practical arrangement of marriages and funerals, between the migrant and the country of origin. They also engage in political activism, in order to influence political processes in the country of origin. Moreover, they are involved in charities; for example by raising funds to co-fund the construction of a community centre and shipping containers with laptops, toys and walkers. A last category of activities can be classified as professional development oriented. These are activities that explicitly aim to enhance development beyond the individual level in the country (or village) of origin.

Taking into account these different roles, levels of operation, transnational orientation and the characteristics thereof, we can only conclude that there is no such thing as ‘the’ diaspora organisation. As such, using a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to engage diaspora in development will probably not be successful.

(In)visible actors in development

This brings us to a second, related observation. The debate on diaspora as development actors, rooted in the overarching debate on Migration & Development, might give the impression that they do so in an institutionalised way, with support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or indirectly funded through matching funds of development NGOs. That is a misconception: by far the majority of organisations implements transnational activities without any financial support from the public sector, far away from the Dutch government or development NGOs. They raise their own funds, often by engaging civil society and the private sector. Think, for example, of the Ghanaian home town association in Amsterdam South-East that each year around Christmas collects money from its members – 70 households originating from the Volta region – to finance the construction of a water pump in Ghana. Or take the hospital equipment that was shipped to Ghana, after a merger of two hospitals in the Zaanstad area. The chair of the organisation read about the merger, and contacted the hospital to inquire about the possibility to use it for their community.

Often diaspora organisations do not even seek to attract funding from the Dutch government or NGOs and, as a consequence, become institutionalised actors in development. These ‘low-profile diaspora in development’ attach great importance to their independent position, and legitimize their existence by highlighting their role between civil society and the state. Rather than becoming an integral part of the development sector, organisations represent the interests of their constituent migrant community, lobby for migrant rights, strengthen social cohesion, and offer practical support as local ‘help desk’. They consider serving their members ‘here’ as their main priority. This does not mean they do not also want to contribute to development; but on their own terms. ▶

Next to these ‘low-profile diaspora in development’ –and, let it be clear, this qualification certainly does not refer to the value of their activities– there are a couple of diaspora organisations that do receive funding for development interventions, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through alliances with development NGOs and private sector companies. Over the last 15 years, they actively sought collaboration with actors in the development industry, such as donors and development NGOs. This leads us to a third observation: the mainstreaming, or institutionalization, of diaspora organisations as development actors.

Mainstreaming diaspora

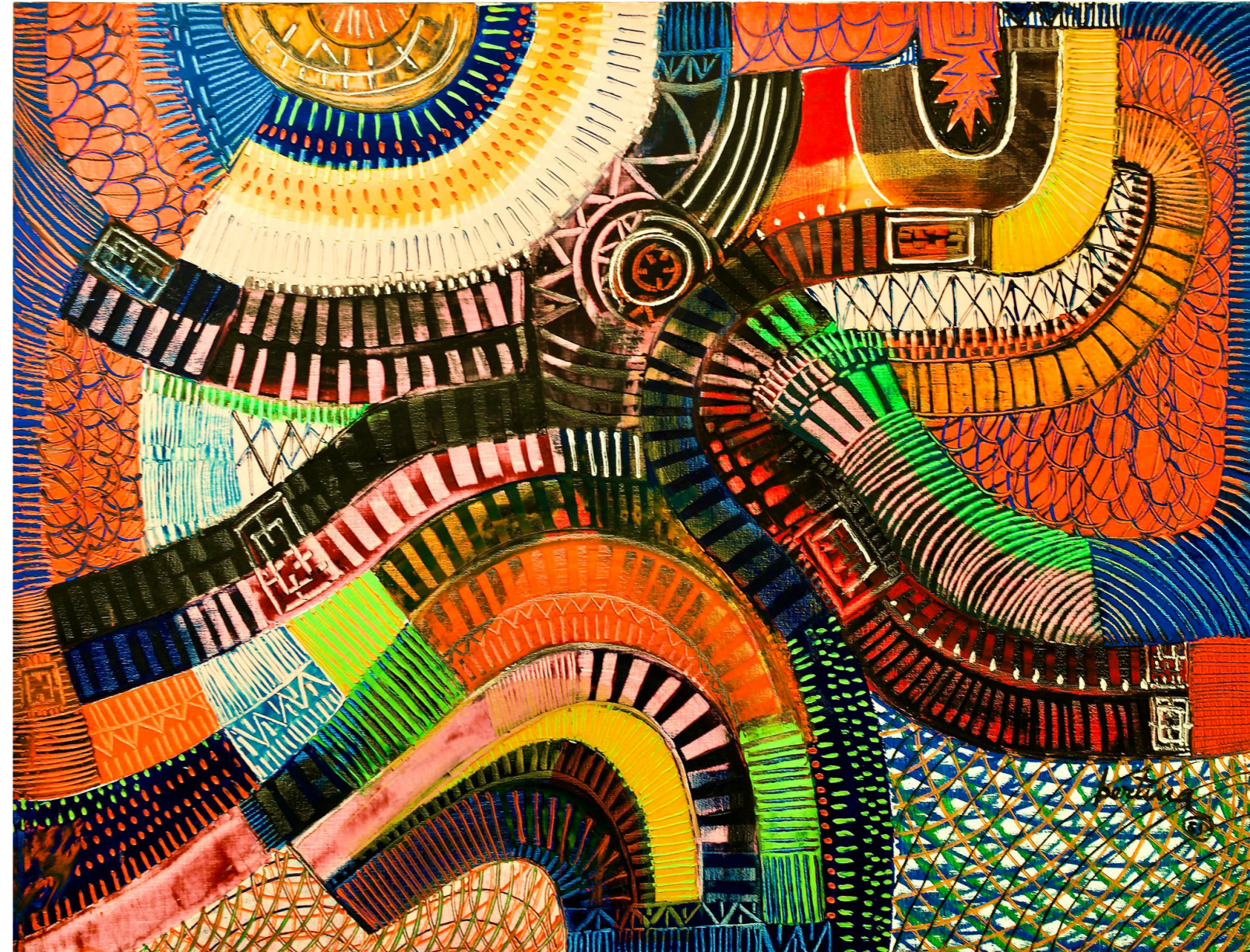
From 2004 onwards, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated several activities to involve diaspora organisations. They did so by implementing Migration & Development policies, also known as co-development policies. The idea was that mainstreaming diaspora organisations into development cooperation would result in additional and country-specific knowledge. Many authors have voiced critical remarks on this approach to institutionalize the role of diaspora organisations in development cooperation, for several reasons. A first remark relates to the incompatible character of Migration & Development policies – by some even qualified as an ‘unhappy marriage’– because of the highly divergent interests and agenda of both policy fields involved. According to some, this marriage often results in a marginalized position of diaspora organisations as development actors, and a budget in which migration management, and not development, dominates the agenda. A second comment refers to the difficulties diaspora organisations experience on the bumpy road towards professionalization. This partly relates to capacity building in project planning, financial management and accounting; in other words, transforming diaspora organisations into full-fledged development NGOs. It has been observed that this format was too rigid for diaspora organisations, considering the fact that most staff is made up of volunteers. A more fundamental criticism relates to the implications of institutionalization for their ‘raison d’être’. Often, legitimacy of diaspora organisations is based on the relationship with the community in the Netherlands, and the translocal linkages with the community of origin. This is also the strength of these organisations: they know local conditions and demand, speak the language, and are able to bridge the gap, in both geographical and sectoral terms. Becoming recognized as ‘official’ development actor often requires alignment with the policy objectives of donors and scaling up, which might result in a gradual deterioration of relationships with the local community in the country of origin. In similar vein, institutionalization might imply a more sedentary interpretation of development, leaving limited space for the transnational focus specific to diaspora organisations.

Harnessing the ‘full potential’ of diaspora organisations is possible by creating an enabling environment that does justice to their diversity, specific identity and the value derived from this identity. In order to avoid another ‘unhappy marriage’, options for ‘living-apart-together’ could be explored: an equal relationship that recognizes and provides room for the specific attributes of all partners involved. ■



Gery Nijenhuis

Pedro Ribeiro Simões via FLICKR





Alexander Sarlay via Wikipedia

TOWARDS CONSTRUCTIVE COLLABORATION WITH THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris
The Broker

[View online](#)

In the spring of 2020, The Broker and Partos initiated an online knowledge dossier on diaspora inclusion in the Netherlands. This dossier featured authors with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives and was concluded by an online debate on diaspora inclusion. The initiative for this dossier was informed by two key assumptions: 1) the diaspora has an important role to play in development efforts; and 2) much work remains to be done to promote diaspora inclusion in the Dutch development sector. While these assumptions were not debunked or fundamentally questioned, the contributions to the dossier as well as the online debate did provide some challenging insights and nuances to the initial assumptions. First, there is no such thing as the diaspora. And second, better collaboration with diaspora organisations requires actions, both from the development sector and the diaspora community.

Over the years much has been said about including diaspora in Dutch development efforts and a widespread assumption has taken root that diaspora organisations have knowledge and networks that could help make Dutch development programmes more effective. And yet, despite this assumption and after all those years, neither policy makers nor Dutch development NGOs have succeeded in including or collaborating with diaspora organisations in structural or meaningful ways. To spark a new and constructive dialogue on diaspora inclusion, The Broker, in collaboration with Partos, launched an online multi-disciplinary knowledge dossier. By featuring authors from various backgrounds, the dossier brings together perspectives and insights that often remain fragmented. In the end, the contributions serve to inform relevant Dutch development actors on how they can effectively harness the social, human, financial, cultural and philanthropic capital of the African diaspora in the Netherlands. ►

The value of diaspora inclusion

All featured articles confirmed the assumption that the diaspora can play a positive role in making Dutch development interventions more effective. Different authors argued convincingly that diaspora inclusion is not simply a moral imperative; it comes with huge benefits. To start with a more practical note, Arjen Berkvens, director of Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS), argued in [his contribution](#) that diaspora inclusion will help boost the credibility of Dutch development organisations. Additionally, Berkvens continued, when it comes to organisations' impact, "diaspora inclusion allows for a better understanding of not only factual, but also cultural and emotional circumstances". This is the case because, as Georgina Kwakye [explained](#), members of the diaspora have "knowledge of both worlds". They understand the traditions and developments in their country of origin and at the same time know how to operate in, and translate this information to, the Dutch context. Further underlining the value of diaspora inclusion, Bart Romijn [noted](#) that, while governments and big NGOs often operate through big international networks, the fine-meshed, local networks of the diaspora in their countries of origin are indispensable. Especially when it comes to assisting the poorest and most difficult to reach people, the local embeddedness and support systems facilitated by the diaspora are key. Finally, although in the Dutch development cooperation policy the diaspora is not regarded as a target group or priority, Jan Rinzema of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) nonetheless [agreed](#) that diaspora organisations can have great added value in realising sustainable and inclusive development in their countries of origin.

The consensus among all authors about the importance of diaspora inclusion did not come as a surprise. The problem lies not so much in the idea of diaspora inclusion, it lies in its realisation in practice. Taking a closer look at two cross-cutting issues that run throughout the seven articles will shed more light on the underlying causes of this problem and help identify ways forward to realise diaspora inclusion in the future. The cross-cutting issues are: 1) the diversity within the African diaspora in the Netherlands; and 2) the roles, relations and responsibilities of (development) actors. In addition to the knowledge dossier, The Broker also hosted an online debate session with twelve diaspora professionals. During this debate these two cross-cutting issues were discussed in more detail. The following sections each focus on one of the cross-cutting issues and synthesise the key conclusions of both the written articles as well as the online debate.

Reflection and diversity

Most of the written contributions highlighted the enormous diversity within the African diaspora in the Netherlands. This diversity, as was confirmed in the online debate as well, can be both a blessing and a curse. As Arjen Berkvens and Gery Nijenhuis note, while the diversity of the African diaspora is common knowledge in the development sector, there still seems to be a tendency to expect the diaspora to speak as one group, with one voice. Such an expectation would not only be unrealistic and unfair; it would also form an important obstacle to effective collaboration. During the debate however, it was questioned whether this expectation of 'one voice' is as widely accepted as suggested. Several participants did not recognise this notion and it was argued that the very idea of this expectation was perhaps more hampering than anything else. Rather than making assumptions about the others' views and speaking in sweeping generalizations, it was emphasised that we should listen and engage in open dialogue. Only in this way can we foster mutual understanding and become familiar with the widely diverse people that make up both the diaspora and the development sector. ►

“Without purpose, diversity is useless. With a vision, diversity becomes a force”

In her contribution, Gery Nijenhuis, geographer and diaspora expert at Utrecht University, [points out](#) that diversity is not only derived from nationality; there is also a wide variety in the roles, functions and target groups of diaspora organisation. As there is no such thing as ‘the’ diaspora or ‘the’ diaspora organisation, Nijenhuis concludes that “using a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to engage diaspora in development will probably not be successful”. Following this logic, it could be argued that the current stance of the Dutch MFA makes sense. That is, targeting the diaspora as one group with one policy would not work. This conclusion, however, might be too simplistic. Diversity in the diaspora might make policy making more difficult; but at the same time this very diversity brings vast opportunities. At least, this is the point Kemo Camara, founder and CEO of the digital platform Omek, brings across in his contribution. According to Camara, diversity and heterogeneity do not mean that the diaspora is impotent or powerless; quite the contrary. It means, Camara [passionately argues](#), that the diaspora comprises a wide range of complementary skills and knowledge that can be harnessed for the benefit of the whole community and, more generally, for inclusive development efforts. During the discussion Camara found wide support for his views: There was unanimous agreement about the idea that diversity should not be problematised but recognised as a strength.

Roles and responsibilities

The second cross-cutting issue, focusing on roles and responsibilities with regards to diaspora inclusion, was hotly debated during the online session. Some participants expressed their disappointment in government policy, arguing that, currently, policies are only marginally succeeding in involving and supporting the diaspora. It was suggested that the Dutch government could more actively support diaspora organisations by providing more funding and formulating targeted policy for the diaspora, regardless of its diversity. Others, however, argued that the diaspora should take initiative and turn the logic around: “When we engage with the government we should not ask them [for their help] but showcase the huge potential within our community”, Kemo Camara stated during one of the breakout sessions. “We will figure out our diversity challenges and tap into our own vast potential”, he continued. “Then the government will come to us and will want to work with us because our value is clear.” This sentiment was supported by various participants in the debate: It is the responsibility of the diaspora to understand its own value and develop its talents and capacities.

At the same time however, there was wide agreement that the government and Dutch development organisations also have an important role to fulfil. They can support talent and promising initiatives within the diaspora community and should collaborate with diaspora organisations as equal partners. Such collaborations are, as Bart Romijn emphasizes, to the benefit of all parties involved. And yet, thus far, many development actors in the Netherlands are not succeeding in establishing sustainable partnerships with diaspora organisations, nor in effectively harnessing and supporting the potential of the African diaspora. Berkvens agrees and further points out that, while Dutch development organisations often describe themselves and their programmes as inclusive, in practice, the African diaspora is often left out. ▶

The way forward

If diaspora inclusion is seen by all parties as a desirable goal, how then can this be realised? What should members of the diaspora, diaspora organisations, Dutch development organisations and the Dutch government do to overcome the obstacles that have stood in the way for so long?

Despite the observed complexity within the diaspora communities and the lack of sustainable collaboration between diaspora organisations and relevant Dutch development actors, both the featured articles and the online discussion proposed ideas on how the potential of the African diaspora can be harnessed for the Dutch development agenda. The central message is that relevant development actors should recognise and leverage the diversity within the African diaspora. This means that efforts to include the African diaspora should have a targeted engagement approach, and not consider the diaspora as a single group. “Without purpose, diversity is useless. With a vision, diversity becomes a force”, as one participant noted during the online discussion.

Gery Nijenhuis further argued that harnessing the full potential of diaspora organisations is possible by creating “an enabling environment that does justice to their diversity, specific identity and the value derived from this identity.” This abstract notion of ‘creating an enabling environment’ could find translation in Camara’s psychographic segmentation approach. In this approach the diaspora community is grouped according to common passion, shared values, vision, and beliefs. “While resulting in separate categories, the psychographic approach highlights what the African diaspora communities have in common, not what divides them.” During the online debate, different participants argued that it makes sense for policy makers to have a country based segmentation of the African diaspora. While there might be differences within countries, one can always find one or two common goals that bind diaspora organisations. The Dutch government and development NGO could engage with these country-based diaspora groups based on their common goals. Diaspora organisations, in turn, should also find common ground within their own ranks and organise themselves, which would facilitate more effective engagement with both the government and development NGOs. An idea was formulated to establish some sort of ‘diaspora council’ which could operate as an advisory body for policy makers and development actors in the Netherlands.

In the end, what appears most important to realise collaboration is building relationships and trust between people. For diaspora organisations and the Dutch development sector to work together efficiently, they should get to know each other better; learn about their common goals and aspirations; recognise their shared interests; and understand how they can support each other – not despite but because of their different expertise, skills and networks. Building such trust and mutual understanding will only happen by regular and interpersonal contact. And although the diaspora organisations and development actors will have to take the initiative to arrange these meetings, the government can play a facilitating role by providing (funding for) the spaces where they can all get together. “Regular opportunities for the diaspora and the development sector to meet and connect will foster creativity and lead to new opportunities,” Bart Romijn believes. “Real change starts with direct interpersonal contact; when people, from the diaspora and development organisations, sit at a table and connect.” ■

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DIASPORA PROFESSIONALS UNLOCKED

Dorien Deketele & Nina Staal
IOM the Netherlands

[View online](#)

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

The Netherlands is home to thousands of diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs making a living and contributing to the Dutch economy. Earlier articles that have been published in *The Broker's dossier on diaspora inclusion* showed that these professionals have the potential to make great contributions to the sustainable development of their countries of origins as well – a potential, it was found, that often remains largely untapped. Recognising the diaspora as developmental actors, IOM the Netherlands is currently running two programmes that seek to match the needs of countries of origin to the diaspora expertise in the Netherlands and help diaspora entrepreneurs set up sustainable businesses in these countries. To learn more about these initiatives and the vision of IOM the Netherlands regarding diaspora inclusion and the role of multilateral organisations, *The Broker* interviewed two of their senior officials: Nina Staal and Dorien Deketele.

The rationale behind diaspora involvement

To encourage diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs to contribute to the economies of not only their new home countries, but also to the sustainable development of their countries of origin, policies and programmes are needed that create conditions for diaspora to do so more effectively – for example by enabling easier overseas business development, investments and knowledge exchange. Apart from governments and non-governmental organisations, however, multilateral organisations also have a role to play in promoting the inclusion of diaspora in development efforts. Recognising that role, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) hosted its first [Annual Diaspora Forum](#) in 2018 under the motto: 'Diasporas as partners for development in a globalized world'. Currently, the Dutch branch of IOM is putting that motto into practice, with two programmes specifically designed to stimulate diaspora inclusion in development.

To the broader Dutch public, IOM the Netherlands is mostly known for its activities in support of migrants who voluntarily wish to return to their home country or migrate to a third country where permanent residence is guaranteed. However, the organisation also focuses on a broader range of support programmes such as, family reunification and the integration of newcomers in the Netherlands. Additionally, diaspora inclusion is an essential part of IOM's Migration and Development programme. The Migration and Development programme is based on two key assumptions: 1) the understanding that members of the diaspora are 'individuals and members of networks, associations and communities, who have left their countries of origin, but maintain links with their homelands'; and 2) that diaspora groups have indispensable knowledge and skills that they can 'give back' to their countries of origin. These assumptions form the rationale behind the design and objectives of the two most recent projects under IOM's Migration and Development Programme: [Connecting Diaspora for Development 2 \(CD4D2\)](#) and [Entrepreneurship by Diaspora for Development \(ED4D\)](#). ▶



Barth Bailey via Unsplash

The Keihan Foundation: a success story

Among the many stories shared by Nina Staal and Dorien Deketele, the story of Niloufar Rahim stood out. Niloufar is a trained doctor and currently Chair of the [Keihan Foundation](#). This Afghan-Dutch foundation was set up by Afghan students residing in The Netherlands, to build bridges between these two countries. Recognising their shared interest, IOM the Netherlands and Keihan joined forces to encourage Afghani diaspora professionals living in The Netherlands to contribute to the development of their country of origin. With the support and training of the two organisations various professionals travelled to Afghanistan, enhancing the capacities of local hospitals and universities. Among these professionals was Niloufar Rahim. Niloufar has trained medical students and doctors in Kabul in clinical skills and also helped set up [skills lab](#) where medical students could practice their surgical skills.

Learn more about Niloufar [here](#) or find other inspiring stories like those of Niloufar in this [short video](#).

CD4D: Knowledge transfers by diaspora professionals

After an [overall successful evaluation](#) of the first phase of the programme in 2019, Connecting Diaspora for Development has now entered Phase 2 (CD4D2). Through the transfer of knowledge and expertise, CD4D2 engages diaspora to support the development of their countries of origin. It does so by [matching the priority needs](#) of these countries with the expertise of members of the diaspora residing in the Netherlands and the EU. The combination of their professional expertise, cultural affinity with their country of origin, as well as their commitment to contribute to development of that country places these diaspora professionals in a unique position. Encouraged and facilitated by the CD4D2 project, they operate as excellent agents for development. After special training by IOM the Netherlands the selected diaspora professionals are linked to institutions in four [focus countries](#): Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia. Through short physical and online assignments by means of which vital knowledge is effectively transferred, the diaspora experts actively contribute to the reinforcement of the public sector in their country of origin. ▶

With a track record of 15 years of initiatives linking diaspora to their countries of origin, the CD4D2 project is by no means new territory for IOM the Netherlands. “Over the years, we have learned how to be more demand driven through continuous monitoring efforts. We prepare our diaspora experts in line with the needs of the host institutions. In this way, when they leave on assignment, there is actual, demonstrable impact,” Nina Staal (Manager CD4D2) notes. “The whole idea is that diaspora experts are sent to their country of origin to transfer their knowledge and ensure that this knowledge will ‘stick’ after their short term assignment comes to an end. Throughout, we monitor the programme and after assignments we evaluate whether the identified needs of host institutions are met.” Based on this experience, IOM was able to improve the programme over time and identified a number of elements that are key in facilitating a successful knowledge transfer programme:

- Aligning the needs of host institutions with the expertise of diaspora professionals.
- Prepare both diaspora professionals and host institutions prior to the assignment and manage their expectations. To manage expectations of both parties, develop goals that are feasible within the time and scope of the assignment, thus avoiding disappointments.
- A flexible design of the programme helps to accommodate the busy schedules of diaspora professionals who often have other professional engagements in the Netherlands. Such flexibility allows, for instance, for virtual and short-duration engagements for the diaspora professionals.
- The Covid-19 pandemic greatly limited the ability of diaspora professionals to conduct physical assignments. Faced with that challenge, IOM has greatly accelerated the use of digital technology for virtual knowledge transfers.

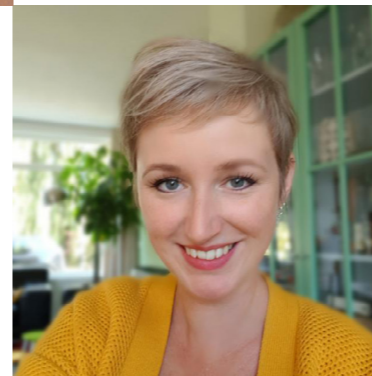
At times cultural differences between diaspora professionals and host institutions resulted in difficult communication. This was particularly the case with second and third generation members of the diaspora community. In dealing with this challenge, sensitivity is key.

Success is not only defined by the direct impact of the project. The CD4D programme is also positively affecting the diaspora community at large. The engagement of selected diaspora professionals enhances agency of the community at large. IOM the Netherlands found, for instance, that diaspora organisations built new linkages and more members of their communities became involved.

Lessons like these are highly valuable for organisations – governmental and non-governmental alike – that also seek to tap into the potential of diaspora professionals and engage them in development efforts. Nina Staal also emphasises that diaspora inclusion is a profitable investment for both the Netherlands and countries of origin. ▶



Dorien Deketele



Nina Staal

“Over the past 15 years, we have conducted more than 1500 assignments and we currently see an increase in the requests for diaspora experts in their countries of origin, because their contributions are very effective and relatively cheap and cost-effective because of their voluntary nature. IOM will keep facilitating this process, so that members of the diaspora can continue to contribute to the development of their countries in a way that fits within their lives and expertise.”

Improving the ecosystem for diaspora entrepreneurship

With the second project under IOM’s Migration and Development Programme, [Entrepreneurship by Diaspora for Development \(ED4D\)](#) IOM seeks to reinforce the capacities of Ghanaian and Ethiopian diaspora entrepreneurs in the Netherlands to set-up businesses in their countries of origin and enable a trusting environment for their investment. According to Dorien Deketele (manager ED4D), the added value of diaspora entrepreneurs is that they have innovative ideas and are per definition prepared to take more risks than an ordinary foreign entrepreneur. “They also find their way faster [in their countries of origin] thanks to their cultural and linguistic background and local contacts,” Deketele continues. The ED4D is designed based on the belief that, despite this advantage, diaspora entrepreneurs still face significant obstacles in their efforts to start a business in their country of origin. Compared to their native counterparts, diaspora entrepreneurs usually lack the necessary information and network within the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Additionally, some diaspora entrepreneurs might have the *technical expertise* but lack the necessary *business experience* to successfully start a business in often challenging circumstances.

In collaboration with [PUM](#) – a Dutch non-profit network of senior experts providing business advice for SMEs and coaching for entrepreneurs in developing countries – IOM developed a tailor-made training programme for the selected diaspora entrepreneurs, providing them with the necessary tools and skills to overcome the key challenges in their attempts to set-up their business. ED4D does not, however, provide funding to the participating entrepreneurs to start their business. That said, the project operates from the assumption that by assisting the participating diaspora entrepreneurs with developing solid business ideas, networks and skills, they will be able to acquire the necessary finance themselves.

Compared to the long track record with knowledge transfers as discussed in the foregoing, IOM’s experience with promoting and facilitating diaspora entrepreneurship is a more recent development. According to Deketele, however, this does not mean IOM is not well-positioned to run this project. “[We] do not operate in a vacuum but try to connect as much as possible with governmental actors and [existing] policy frameworks”, Deketele notes. ▶

“IOM is uniquely placed, as an intergovernmental organization, to leverage the many connections required to build a successful business.” Indeed, since its start in late 2018, the ED4D project has successfully assisted [20 Ghanaian and 20 Ethiopian diaspora entrepreneurs](#) in setting up a business; even in the face of the challenges COVID-19 posed for much of the duration of the project.

The end of 2020 also marked [the end of the ED4D project](#), so evaluations are now on their way. One positive and unexpected outcome that is already clear, is the lasting bonds that formed between participating entrepreneurs beyond the scope of the project. The entrepreneurs continue to inspire and help each other out – a result that is of great importance, particularly for diaspora professionals, Dorien Deketele underlined. “Dutch policy [is currently built on the] belief that it is not necessary to have a specific programme for diaspora entrepreneurship. But I think that the situation and businesses of diaspora entrepreneurs are very different from ‘regular’ Dutch entrepreneurs. They benefit hugely from a programme that helps them learn from each other and assists them in building the bridges between the two worlds they are part of.” With targeted assistance, as was given with the ED4D project, diaspora entrepreneurs can not only become more productive and successful professionals, they can also make a huge difference in the development of their countries of origins – a difference that is difficult to realise for Dutch organisations and businesses without roots in these countries.

The journey continues

For IOM the Netherlands, diaspora engagement is an indispensable part of migration policies. While members of the diaspora are not necessarily eager to move back to their countries of origin permanently, “a lot of talented people are willing to share their knowledge and skills. Their efforts and engagement, in addition to being a valuable contribution to the sustainable development of their countries of origin, also contribute to a more positive image of migration and a more balanced way of managing migration between countries.” Programmes like CD4D and ED4D are highly effective in building bridges and fostering mutual understanding, thus going far beyond the economic results they can generate. “Given their positive impact and relative ease of implementation, it would be a great pity if this type of programmes would vanish due to a change in policy priorities,” Dorien Deketele concludes. ■



SUPPORTING DIASPORA ENTREPRENEURS – ZIDICIRCLE

Fridah Ntarangwi
Zidicircle

[View online](#)

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

Before the Kenyan entrepreneur Fridah Ntarangwi embarked on the journey of helping diaspora professionals to scale their start-ups, she had over 10 years of working experience in the financial sector. Yet, despite her academic qualifications and professional experience, when she decided to set up a platform to help SMEs in Africa to raise financial capital internationally, she ran into a proverbial wall. “It was really difficult to navigate this entrepreneurial ecosystem and to know how things work. I had to start from scratch and did not know any other African entrepreneurs to reach out to or ask to mentor me.” Based on an interview with Fridah Ntarangwi, this article tells the story of her journey and the resulting Entrepreneurship and Financing Platform [Zidicircle](#).

From mentorship to partnership

Fridah Ntarangwi migrated to the Netherlands in 2014, where she first completed her Master’s of science in Finance before starting her own business. This proved a challenging endeavour as the support structures for a starting migrant entrepreneur like herself were not there – something Fridah had not expected in the Netherlands, as it is ranked as one of the best countries for doing business in the world. Eventually, her participation in the start-up visa programme made all the difference for Fridah. Within this programme, she was encouraged to find a facilitator in the Netherlands, which led her to visit the website of the RVO, the Netherlands Enterprise Agency. “Luckily, [on this website] I pressed the right button and met Toon Buddingh’”, Fridah shares. “He was very welcoming and not only became my facilitator but also my mentor and in recent times a business partner. He opened up his network to me, looked out for me and became my guide.”

Learning from her own challenges and the mentorship that Mr. Buddingh’ provided her to overcome them, Fridah came to an important realisation: She was trying to help entrepreneurs operating in the African markets, while there are still thousands of African migrants in the Netherlands (and Europe) who are not succeeding in exploiting their full entrepreneurial potential. Fridah realised that these (potential) diaspora entrepreneurs are facing a variety of barriers – not knowing where to find relevant resources for setting up a successful business; being limited by language barriers, and lacking the much-needed mentorship and coaching Fridah herself found in Buddingh’. Further, she discovered, the existing ecosystem of incubators consists of a rather homogeneous group of people who do not look like her and other African diaspora entrepreneurs. As Fridah points out, this lack of diversity in the group of people who are there to offer support is not stimulating for diaspora entrepreneurs – they feel misunderstood and not represented. “At that point,” Fridah recounts, ▶

Zidicircle



“I went to my mentor and told him: ‘despite all my qualifications, I still find it difficult to navigate this system’. What about those people who are facing even greater obstacles, like limited education and lack of network?” This realisation that members of the diaspora who have the ambition to set up a business need additional support, led to the conception of Zidicircle. Toon Buddingh’, her mentor, now became Fridah’s business partner and is now programme director of the platform.

Bootcamps for business

With Zidicircle, Fridah seeks to support diaspora entrepreneurs by providing them with the resources necessary to successfully launch their business either in their countries of residence, country of origin, or internationally. Through its [Diaspora Entrepreneur Bootcamp](#) (DEB Programme) – the first edition of which was realised in partnership with IOM’s ED4D programme – Zidicircle provides, among others,

1. Training for diaspora entrepreneurs on all aspects of business, including business models, product development, pricing, customer acquisition, managing teams, financial administration, revenue projection and investor readiness;
2. Coaching by individual mentors who are connected to diaspora entrepreneurs; and
3. Monthly group coaching to keep diaspora entrepreneurs involved and covering various relevant subjects for their entrepreneurial journey, including financial administration and building remote teams (as a response to the corona crisis). ▶

Stories of success

Since its establishment Zidicircle has supported many diaspora entrepreneurs and Ntarangwi is proud to share some success stories. Ghanaian **David Boeateng** (from IOM's ED4D programme), for example, is running a successful business in solar energy: **Solarboxxx**. During one of Zidicircle's pitch events, Boeateng was approached by a fellow-entrepreneur. Together, the partners approached a big institutional investor in the Netherlands and a commercial Bank in Ghana to provide funding for their business. Now, Solarboxxx is successfully providing solar energy to consumers across West Africa.

Another good example is Van de Dutchies farms, also in Ghana. After participating in the Zidicircle programme, **Richard Dickens Agbenyo** was able to launch his agribusiness. VdDutchies Farms is one of the very few mechanized farming corporations in Ghana that also trains farmers on technological templates that improves yield/harvest and quality of produce. What makes this enterprise particularly unique is the fact that Richard and his team have also been able to mobilize and train the youth and women into new farming technologies.

A final example is Bendera, an e-commerce platform for African products in Europe that Kenyan entrepreneur and former Zidicircle participant **Olivia Decker** will be launching in March 2021.



Zidicircle

In addition to this training programme, Zidicircle looks for ways through which diaspora entrepreneurs can find investment for their business ideas and start-ups. The organization fast tracks funding opportunities by organizing pitching competitions and giving various funders the possibility to become either funding partners or investors of the diaspora entrepreneurs. The organisation is currently fundraising for its **Zidi Diaspora Fund**, with the aim to invest in diaspora entrepreneurs after they complete their training programme. “We want to fund diaspora businesses, or diaspora entrepreneurs, who have participated in our programme as there is a huge funding gap in this segment. Zidicircle also offers support to diaspora entrepreneurs launching in Africa by matching them with local SMEs in African countries,” Fridah explains. “When diaspora entrepreneurs set up businesses in their countries of origin, they sometimes miss a ‘soft landing’ and have a hard time navigating the local ecosystems. This poses serious challenges for their business, despite the fact that they have brilliant ideas and make use of new technologies. That is why we support building teams, mentorship and establishing partnerships with local SMEs, ultimately contributing to the social-economic development of all involved. This way, we can fund them together and help the entrepreneurs realise their ideas.” ▶

Surprises on the way

Although from her own experience, Fridah was already familiar with the kind of challenges and barriers diaspora entrepreneurs face in their attempt to conduct their business, she still encountered two surprises on her Zidicircle journey. First, she found that there is a persistent misconception about the diaspora's financial capacity. “African governments, multinational institutions and the general population all assume that there is a lot of money within the diaspora community that is waiting to be invested in their countries of origin. But in reality, diaspora entrepreneurs struggle like everybody else and do not have extra money. That is why it is important to ensure they get the necessary skills to set up successful businesses. And once they have their business up and running, these diaspora entrepreneurs will be able to set aside some money and make small investments in others who are hoping to follow their lead.”

The second surprise that Fridah encountered is how much need there is, also internationally, for the kind of programme that Zidicircle provides. “I have people writing to me from the USA and Japan, telling me that there has never been a diaspora programme like this before and how excited they are about our initiative. I know, of course, how important our services are but hearing it from entrepreneurs themselves underlines how helpful it is. I am convinced every day that we are on the right path,” Fridah says proudly. This appetite for diaspora entrepreneurship programmes is further illustrated by the fact that Zidicircle will be conducting its Diaspora Entrepreneurship Bootcamp (DEB) not once but twice a year. Moreover, the event will even go international this year as, due to Covid-19, it will take place online (See Box ‘Covid-19 as a positive accelerator’ on p. 44).

An inclusive ecosystem

In order to make the programmes accessible for a broad range of diaspora entrepreneurs, Zidicircle offers affordable, high level training programmes. This is enabled by the fact that Zidicircle works with partners to deliver the programme. The 2019 programme was sponsored by The International Organisation for Migration (OIM the Netherlands). In addition to finding partners, Fridah also works with a like-minded team of trainers. “Our trainers are top of the range, with experience from highly estimated institutions and are entrepreneurs themselves. And they also work with us because we share the same motivation,” Fridah shares. “Our programme is of a subsidised nature because I believe, together with my team, that this is needed to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. In such an ecosystem everyone, no matter your background – whether you are a member of the diaspora, migrant or refugee – should be able to get the tools needed to run a successful business.”

This drive to create an inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem is related to another one of Fridah's main ambitions: fostering the accumulation of generational wealth in Africa. For her, supporting ▶



entrepreneurship is one of the ways to get there. “African governments keep borrowing because they do not have generational wealth that can be duplicated, multiplied or employed to create businesses and foster sustainable development.” Remittances of members of the diaspora to their families in Africa are not offering a real solution. Fridah believes that setting up businesses and making sound investments is the way forward for sustainable growth and the accumulation of generational wealth. If members of the African diaspora can access affordable training and funding programmes, this is a first important step towards becoming entrepreneurs and, thereafter, investors in their countries of origin. To that end, Zidicircle also organises workshops on investment, during which diaspora entrepreneurs learn that they too can become investors. Fridah notes that there continues to be a very one-dimensional image of *the* investor – one

that is not relatable to many members of the African diaspora. In reality, Fridah notes, everyone can become an investor – it is not defined by how you look or how full your bank account is. “Even with 50 Euros, one can already become an investor.”

Missed opportunities

Among the challenges that Zidicircle faces is the fact that there are limited mini-subsidies available to support the kind of entrepreneurship programmes that it provides. With a few exceptions such as IOM the Netherlands, relevant organisations and institutions are not too eager to invest in diaspora entrepreneurship. For Fridah, that is one of the biggest disappointments so far. “At times this means that only those diaspora entrepreneurs who are able to afford the programmes can join,” she explains. As Fridah wants to ensure Zidicircle programmes are accessible to everyone, the organisation does provide some full scholarships. “But because of operational costs I cannot make the programme free for everybody,” Fridah notes. As a consequence, despite the high demand and the willingness of Zidicircle, the organisation still has to disappoint some potential participants. For example, the spring 2021 programme has received over 300 applications, but barely a handful can afford it. “However, I am happy to report we are talking with partners,” Fridah comments hopefully. “I hope the private sector or donors will understand that sponsoring such bootcamps is a small investment for a potentially large impact.”

In addition to the lack of financial support for Zidicircle, Fridah has also noticed that African migrants and entrepreneurs are often ignored by investors. “There is a lot of talk about diversity and inclusion, but there is still no level playing ground. If you are a person of colour or you have a migrant background, you will still be treated differently. I would like to see the entrepreneurship and investment ecosystem become more inclusive,” Fridah argues. According to her, this inclusiveness should start with an attitude shift. At this point, Fridah observes a persistent assumption that if people do not look a certain way, they come with a higher risk for investors. “I believe that they [investors] should look at the product that you [diaspora entrepreneurs] are building and the service you are providing, before looking at how you look and where you come from. Investors need to change their perceptions and understand that what you look like or where you come from does not determine your capabilities and should not determine your future,” she concludes. ►

Based on both her successes and challenges, Fridah hopes that the Dutch government as well as other relevant stakeholders will up their game where it comes to investments in programmes that support diaspora entrepreneurs. It is a pity that successful diaspora programmes such as [ED4D by IOM the Netherlands](#) do not get a second edition, Fridah notes. It is often argued that initiatives by diaspora entrepreneurs do not warrant extra financial support as they do not create sufficient added value. This conclusion, based on various example cases, is, according to Fridah wrong, because the comparison between ‘regular’ and diaspora entrepreneurs is not a fair one. “If there is no level playing field to begin with, it makes sense that you end up with different results. Diaspora, migrants and refugees do not have the same starting position as local and native citizens in Europe [...]. With a limited network and support system, you cannot expect these diaspora entrepreneurs to generate the same results without creating the right incentives for them. This means that in the spirit of inclusion and diversity, it is high time to support programmes that focus on minorities and other specific target groups that have so far been left out. Diaspora entrepreneurs should be one of those target groups. At the moment, most of the existing vouchers, coaching programmes and policy frameworks are not accessible to or do not focus on these diaspora entrepreneurs. This is a missed opportunity.”

The way ahead

Fridah is optimistic about the future and sees many opportunities for diaspora entrepreneurs to build their businesses, support others and contribute to the development of their countries – the country of origin *and* the country of residence. As a closing remark, she calls upon the private sector to expand its horizon and partner with diaspora entrepreneurs. This, she is convinced, will eventually lead to a win-win situation. “The government alone cannot do everything. The private sector can play an important role in supporting diaspora entrepreneurs and start-ups. There is much untapped potential within the diaspora community, and by opening up, the Dutch private sector can develop sustainable collaborations. If the private sector provides diaspora entrepreneurs with the opportunity to work together, they can contribute to the creation of generational wealth in their own countries or in countries where it is much needed and at the same time benefit from a wealth of talent and ideas at the same time.” ■

NOTE: Fridah’s Zidicircle recently got recognized by the European Union’s Emen Project as one of the best migrant-led initiatives that promotes inclusive entrepreneurship. Read more here: <https://emen-project.eu/zidicircle-one-of-the-winners-of-the-m4m-call/>

Covid-19 as a positive accelerator

In the previous two years, Zidicircle organized its diaspora entrepreneurship programme (Diaspora Entrepreneur Bootcamp – DEB) once a year. Due to high demand, the DEB programme will be organized twice 2021 – in March and September. Initially, this training programme was targeting diaspora entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. The corona crisis, however, created a surprising opportunity: The bootcamp could be opened up to an international audience as it was moved to the digital realm. Because physical meetings were impossible in 2020 as a result of measures to fight the pandemic, the entire bootcamp was conducted virtually. This enabled diaspora entrepreneurs from other European countries to participate and it proved a great success. The first bootcamp in 2021 will also be virtual and Zidicircle is already seeing diaspora entrepreneurs from countries such as the United States and Japan registering for the programme. Even participants from various African countries have also signed up. “We have gone global”, Ntarangwi confirms. “This means we are now the only global diaspora entrepreneurship programme – There is no other global diaspora initiative of this caliber. We are very proud of this achievement,” Ntarangwi continues. “And although Covid-19 initially affected us negatively, eventually it has brought a new business opportunity and enabled us to grow and create new partnerships.”

INTERNATIONAL MINDS, LOCAL HEARTS

[View online](#)

Saskia Kloezeman
North South Consulting

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

Following two articles on how diaspora entrepreneurs living in the Netherlands can be supported to set up a business and how they are playing a role in developing knowledge and capacity in their home countries, in this piece we shift our perspective: Based on an interview with social entrepreneur Saskia Kloezeman, the following will shed light on the opportunities and challenges for diaspora entrepreneurs in their country of origin – in this case, Ethiopia.

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Saskia Kloezeman has been living and working in Ethiopia for over sixteen years and has come to regard herself as a member of the Dutch diaspora in Ethiopia. After a career in the international aid sector, Saskia decided to apply her extensive knowledge of international development and the Ethiopian context elsewhere and became a consultant for business development in East Africa. Based on the conviction that “if there is a healthy environment, business will always create jobs and contribute to sustainable development” Saskia founded [North South Consulting](#). With this initiative, Saskia helps local and international enterprises and investors to set up businesses in East Africa. “This country, Ethiopia,” Saskia notes, “is such a rich country. It doesn’t need aid, it needs jobs.” Through her consultancy work, Saskia is contributing to the creation of decent jobs in Ethiopia. Over the past ten years, she has supported over 200 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in boosting their businesses and creating jobs for local communities. She has conducted a multitude of impact assessments for international companies, focusing on community engagement and stakeholder analysis (i.e. evaluating how companies can engage more with the local community).

Diaspora to fill in the gap

Based on her engagement with both international companies and local SMEs, Saskia has observed a remarkable discrepancy in the mindset between the two. While international companies tend to focus on boosting profits to increase the value of shares, local entrepreneurs tend to focus on the survival of their business and the social impact it generates. While the local entrepreneur understands that behind an employee there is a whole family who is being supported by him or her, international companies are more ‘distant players’, usually more interested in numbers and revenues. This also applies to job creation; with international companies having a tendency to focus on the number of jobs they create, rather than the quality of those jobs. In Saskia’s experience, in short, local SMEs tend to conduct business in a way that takes social contexts, local wellbeing and cultural values into account – much more so than international companies. ▶



This discrepancy between the local and international entrepreneurial mindset creates a gap that, according to Saskia, could be filled by diaspora entrepreneurs (and professionals). “Yes, Ethiopia and other emerging markets need international investment, but in order to make sure that this international investment leads to decent jobs and sustainable development, we need to engage the diaspora,” she notes. Entrepreneurs of the African diaspora carry within them the right mix between the local mindset and that of international companies, Saskia believes. She describes them as people with ‘international knowledge and a local heart’. “They have experience with the international financial system and know how to access loans or grants. Usually, that is not the case for local entrepreneurs. Yet, diaspora entrepreneurs differ from international companies in the sense that they are much more sensitive to the local environment and communities. This means that they are usually much more interested in creating secure and decent jobs living up to the [ILO standards](#). Different from international companies, diaspora entrepreneurs also have an emotional connection with their home country. In my experience, their decision to go back is not primarily motivated by financial gains, but by their willingness to generate social impact [in their country of origin],” Saskia explains.

Based on their combining of both the ‘international mind and the local heart’, Saskia argues that the added value of diaspora entrepreneurs not only applies to their role as business owners. When they work as employees within international companies that operate in their country of origin, they can play an important role as well. While international companies tend to bring in expatriates when they do not find local employees with the relevant knowledge and skills, these foreign employees do not always understand the local mindset. In Ethiopia for instance, one cultural aspect to be aware of as an employer, is the fact that the motivation of Ethiopian employees is rarely based on money alone. A friendly relationship with their employer is equally important – and hence, an aspect the employer needs to consciously invest in. When such local sensitivities are not recognised or understood by foreign companies, this can lead to clashes and missed opportunities. “There is still a high rate of foreign investment in Ethiopia. Yet, investors often obtain an investment licence without turning that into a business licence, simply because they fail to understand the local context.”

Saskia started her consultancy in order to bridge the gap between the local and international reality. In this process, she has become more convinced that diaspora professionals have an important role to play in helping international companies take better account of the local context and generate more ▶

impact with their investments. Diaspora professionals are different from expatriates; not only because it is relatively easy for them to build a connection with the local population, but also because they are especially motivated to contribute to the development of their home country. This local heart is something that international companies can use to their advantage.

Misconceptions and false expectations

While diaspora professionals might be better equipped to navigate between the international environment and the local context than foreign entrepreneurs or investors, mismatches do still occur. In her work in Ethiopia, Saskia has found that members of the diaspora and local communities often have misconceptions about one another, which be particularly challenging. The diaspora professionals tend to have ideas of local entrepreneurship that are embedded in a foreign framework, while local communities tend to overestimate the financial capacity of the diaspora.

The mismatch between local realities and ideas held by members of the African diaspora is manifested in two ways. In the first place, diaspora entrepreneurs often assume that a support system – offered by the government – exists to facilitate their business activities. This is especially the case for diaspora entrepreneurs coming from a country like the Netherlands, where bureaucratic processes are clearly structured. In Ethiopia and other emerging markets, diaspora entrepreneurs should understand that they need to be resilient and inventive if they want to succeed in their business activities. “If you want to invest in Ethiopia and work with local communities, there is no government body that is going to say: ‘fill out this form and we will take care of the rest.’ It is really up to yourself,” Saskia explains. The second way in which ideas of diaspora entrepreneurs about the local context can cause a problem lies in the area of attitudes and behaviours. Having left their countries of origin many years ago – or never have lived there at all – members of the diaspora have changed significantly compared to the local communities, sometimes without realising it. “And when they come back, they are confronted with old practices that they have unlearned,” Saskia notes. “This leads to frustration, clashes and, in some cases, a decision to not invest. In those cases, the diaspora professional often expected much more from the local workers and family members that they should have.” Some diaspora entrepreneurs have been so disappointed that they decided to return to their home country and never engage themselves again in business activities in their country of origin.

On the side of the local community, there is a persistent image that members of the diaspora have a lot of financial capital and will boost investment both within their families and the local community. This is a misconception that usually comes with a high price. “Despite the relatively wealthy position in comparison to their family [living in the country of origin], not all members of the diaspora have money to invest in their local communities and families,” Saskia explains. In an attempt to meet the expectations of their families however, members of diaspora not seldom exaggerate about their wealth and success. This not only perpetuates the existing misconception about the wealthy position of the diaspora, it also puts individual diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs into a vulnerable financial position. “You have people living here [in Ethiopia] who expect to receive the newest iPhone because they have a family member living in a rich country. To live up to those expectations, you have members of the diaspora who send such expensive gifts back home. [...] In reality, these people have very normal jobs.” Saskia continues: “Some local entrepreneurs in Ethiopia make a higher earning than someone who is working in a slaughtering house in the USA or Europe. Yet because of the persisting image and high pressure, diaspora members do everything to please their local community and family members. It makes me sad. I have seen cases where members of the diaspora have taken out a loan to come visit their family in Ethiopia and hold up the illusion that they are very successful abroad.” ▶

To overcome the mismatch between the diaspora and the local community, Saskia underlines the importance of expectation management on both sides. On the side of the diaspora, it is important that they receive proper information about the institutional context and are prepared for the cultural shock after a long period of residing abroad. “[When] we have a member of the Ethiopian diaspora in front of us, what we see is an Ethiopian, but [we forget] their mind is foreign. This means that we have to support them. Not to go back to the ‘Ethiopian mind’, but to create understanding about the differences and how to deal with those effectively. If you want to successfully run your business in Ethiopia, you have to let go what you are doing in Europe and figure out what you have to do here.” Based on her engagement with diaspora entrepreneurs (such as in the [ED4D program](#)), Saskia is convinced that the success of diaspora entrepreneurs depends, to a large extent, on their ability to develop resilience against the cultural shocks and adjust themselves to the local context. Thus, preparing diaspora entrepreneurs beforehand about the local challenges is an effective strategy to overcome disappointments and manage expectations. And when they come prepared, they can instigate positive change in the local communities. “Not by forcing people to change, but through leading by example. When they show the way, people tend to follow,” Saskia argues. Similarly, local communities and family members need to understand that being a member of the diaspora does not equal access to endless financial means. By being transparent about the challenges that they face, diaspora can get rid of the high burden they are now often carrying and avoid unreasonable expectations and disappointments from their family members and local communities. ▶

The unexplored role of adoptees

While it still common practice to refer to *the* diaspora – a tendency that was also addressed in [earlier contributions to the diaspora dossier](#) – Saskia Kloezeman underlines the importance of developing an engagement strategy that takes the diversity of various diaspora groups into account. In the Ethiopian context, she has observed a distinction between three groups. The first group consists of an older generation who left the country of origin decades ago but still keeps strong linkages with Ethiopia. Generally speaking, this group always dreams of going back to Ethiopia and contribute to its development. The second group consists of people who left the country more recent, usually with the aim of getting education abroad. After building an international professional career, this group does want to come back to Ethiopia, but mostly with the aim of obtaining a better position in society. The third group, according to Saskia, is mostly overlooked in policy conversations about diaspora engagement. This group consists of young people who were adopted. According to Saskia, despite the fact that they have the strongest ties to their country of residence as they grew up there for most – if not all – their lives, these people are also part of the diaspora. “We see a new group of young Ethiopians who were adopted by Dutch or US families coming back to Ethiopia more and more often,” Saskia shares. “Mostly, they come as interns, for example for the African Union and other international organisations, or in agricultural programmes. Saskia has found that, compared to the older generations of the diaspora, these young adoptees adapt more easily to the local context. That is because they are usually curious and open-minded about the country where their roots lie and want to explore its culture. In return, they get a warm welcome by local communities and feel recognised. This newly acquired sense of belonging as well as an open mind, makes adoptees a particularly interested *and* interesting group within the diaspora. More than the other groups they want to learn and have less preconceptions, whilst still carrying the unique ties to Ethiopia. This group, Saskia has found, has the potential to become very successful – both in international organisations but also as entrepreneurs, contributing to the development of their country of origin.

Conditions for success

In addition to managing expectations about their country of origin, members of the diaspora also need to meet certain conditions in order to successfully engage themselves in business activities. In her experience, Saskia found that diaspora entrepreneurs that were successful had the following traits:

Entrepreneurial spirit.

Saskia notes that members of the diaspora should critically evaluate whether they really want to be an entrepreneur. “If you are not an entrepreneur [and do not want to be] in your country of residence, why should you go and set up a business in Ethiopia?” Saskia asks. If members of the diaspora have idealistic goals but lack the entrepreneurial spirit, it would be better to get involved in charity work or support local (business) actors, Saskia advises.

Create new value.

In addition to having the above-mentioned spirit, for diaspora professionals to become successful entrepreneurs they should also create new value and come up with innovative solutions. If they reproduce what local entrepreneurs are already doing, they will likely not succeed because the local actors are more accustomed to the local conditions. “This means that when a diaspora entrepreneur wants to start producing corn, it should not only be about the corn,” Saskia argues. “They should stand out and focus [for example] on the quality. That is the added value.”

Design a flexible plan.

This means that the business plan of diaspora entrepreneurs should be tailored to the Ethiopian context. “It is not like in the Netherlands where you go to the chamber of commerce and become recognised as an entrepreneur the same day,” Saskia explains. In the Ethiopian context, entrepreneurs have to go through a long bureaucratic journey in order to meet the legal requirements before getting a business licence. You may need to be operational already before you can get a business license, a process that can take up to four years depending on the sector. To be able to survive these bureaucratic challenges, Saskia points to the importance of having a starting capital and having a sound idea of a customer base. This will help diaspora entrepreneurs overcome the first challenges and disappointments that will inevitably arise along the way as they gradually establish credibility and expand their production.

Focus.

Saskia found that diaspora professionals tend to engage in multiple business activities at the same time. They are inspired by local entrepreneurs who run multiple businesses successfully, but also by the various opportunities that they observe. Yet, making sure that their first business is running before considering opening another one, is the path that will most likely lead to success. Saskia has seen diaspora entrepreneurs fail because they opened multiple businesses without having a clear focus. Mere opportunity is not a sufficient argument for starting a business, she stresses. “In a workshop that we provided for [IOM the Netherlands](#),” Saskia recalls, “one of the diaspora professionals phrased like this: following opportunities without a focus is like swimming in an ocean without any direction. There is opportunity everywhere, but you have to start focusing, otherwise you will not reach the finish line.” ▶

Towards an enabling environment

Over the past decade, Saskia Kloezeman has become increasingly convinced that if diaspora entrepreneurs get the right information on how to adjust their business ideas to the local context in their country of origin, they can play a pivotal role in contributing to sustainable through job creation. She and her colleagues put this conviction to practice in the aforementioned IOM workshop for members of the African diaspora in the Netherlands. “At the end of the training, diaspora entrepreneurs left with a much more realistic business plan. [We] gave them input on the local context and reflected with them on how they could adjust their plans, rethink decisions and determine what factors could impact their investment,” Saskia explains.

In addition to adequate information, Saskia also stresses the importance of support from both the public and the private sector. To harness the potential of the diaspora for development in Ethiopia and other emerging markets, the public sector could, for example, support training programmes that prepare diaspora entrepreneurs for engaging in business activities in their countries of origin. The private sector, in turn, could make more effort to tap into the pool of existing diaspora professionals who want to work in their country of origin. That is why Saskia encourages the Dutch private sector to make it attractive for diaspora entrepreneurs to work for them if they operate in emerging markets. By strategically recruiting and engaging more diaspora professionals in managerial positions in their countries of origin, the private sector can create a foundation through which their business will generate social impact. “There are a lot of people who are educated in the Netherlands who are members of various diaspora communities. I wish that multinationals such as Heineken would recruit more diaspora in the Netherlands and let them work in their countries of origin. Not only because these members of the diaspora have the necessary skills, but also because they bridge the gap of knowledge between these multinationals and local and cultural context,” Saskia shares. “At the same time, these members of the diaspora can be role models and a source of inspiration. Their presence in the high ranks of international companies can inspire local Ethiopians, showing them that they too can reach such high positions in multinationals.” ■



Saskia Kloezeman



DIASPORA IN BUSINESS:

BEYOND AID, TOWARDS PARTNERSHIPS

[View online](#)

As a member of the Cameroonian diaspora in the Netherlands, Marina Diboma is a well-known figure within the Dutch and African business community – both because of her position as Deputy Managing Director of the Netherlands–African Business Council (NABC) and her public appearances as an advocate for improved business relations between the Netherlands and African countries. Over the past 12 years, Marina has organised a wide range of trade missions and business events that facilitated exchange between the Dutch and African private sector. “My work is about making a business case for Africa within the Netherlands.” This article is a reflection of a conversation The Broker had with Marina about her work and vision regarding the role and future of African diaspora entrepreneurs in the Netherlands.

Tapping into the diaspora potential: a two-way street

“The African continent is still associated with negative images such as poverty and illness,” Marina begins. Correcting this image has been one of her key drivers over the past decade. “As leader of the NABC, I see it as my role to bring a new perspective and tell the untold stories of the African continent here in the Netherlands. A changed perception of Africa helps ensure that the Dutch private sector will see the many opportunities available on the continent.” Within her role, Marina also makes a business case for the Netherlands within Africa. This means that she works on convincing various African governments and companies to do business with the Netherlands. The NABC-leader believes that in order to realise sustainable and inclusive development, African countries need to ►

Marina Diboma
Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC)

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

improve their partnerships with international actors, including (the Dutch) private sector. “We need a strategy that combines aid and trade. Aid should facilitate trade and empower the private sector in Africa. I don’t believe in aid when it is money being given as charity. [I believe in aid] when it takes the form of a collaboration between institutions and knowledge exchange,” Marina argues. “Both African and Western partners need to know how to work with one another. That is my perception of development cooperation; it goes both ways. I believe that if you have strong partners on both sides, there is room for long-term collaboration.” To illustrate her argument, Marina refers to the cooperation within the European Union, where the Netherlands conducts business with other member states. “[In such arrangements] the Netherlands is not helping Germany, nor is Germany helping the Netherlands. These countries collaborate based on common interests. I hope that at some point, the Netherlands–Africa cooperation can move beyond aid as well,” Marina concludes.

In order to establish long-term relationships between the Dutch and African private sector, Marina sees an important role for the African diaspora in the Netherlands. “It is already known that the diaspora sends money back home, but I don’t believe that this is where change will come from. I see the diaspora as key players who bring new perspectives to Dutch organisations that are operating in their countries of origin,” Marina states. For members of the diaspora who embark on the journey of entrepreneurship, Marina argues that their understanding of both the Dutch and African context creates an opportunity – an argument similar to the one made by Saskia Kloezeman, Georgina Kwakye and other authors in this dossier. Diaspora entrepreneurs, Marina suggests, could be highly valuable for Dutch companies to help them set up daughter organisations in Africa. “There is a great number of ambitious diaspora entrepreneurs in various business sectors, including healthcare, real estate and agribusiness. While some Dutch companies have discovered the importance of engaging with the diaspora for establishing local relations in African countries, I think that the Dutch private sector can still do more to tap into this pool of African professionals in the Netherlands.” She further argues that the current Covid-19 pandemic underlines the importance of the diaspora. Thanks to their ability to speak local languages and willingness to stay in their country of origin despite the changing circumstances, diaspora professionals are enabling companies to stay connected with their local branches, despite lockdowns, travel-bans and other measures to combat the pandemic. ►

Standing out in the business crowd

Because of her work, Marina Diboma has been described as a ‘relationship therapist’ for Dutch and African businesses. As Marina is intimately familiar with the very different frameworks both actors are operating from, she manages to build bridges between the Dutch and African business communities. “When I started leading business delegations in various Africa countries, I noticed that many partners were not expecting someone like me. They were used to having a white person leading such business delegations, and mostly a white male person.”

Being a young woman, with both African and Dutch backgrounds, Marina may stand out, but she does not regard this as something negative. “Over the past years, I have noticed that my position creates a certain trust among our African partners,” she explains. This trust is generated by the fact that the African business partners get the impression that Marina can relate to both the Dutch and African perspective, which makes her a unique character in such business communities. “As an individual, I find it important that wherever partnership is discussed, it should lead to win-win outcomes. I have found myself in situations where such outcomes were hampered by mutual misunderstandings between Dutch and African business partners. In such situations, I tried to make sure that both partners did come to understand one another. That is why I like describing myself as a bridge-builder between the two worlds.”

Marina recalls her efforts over the past years to convince Dutch partners that, despite grave security challenges in the area, the Sahel is an interesting region to invest in. Eventually, she succeeded in fostering a collaboration between Dutch embassies and the private sector in the Sahel region. “At the end of the process, the feedback I received from local partners was: ‘the way you collaborated with us is very different from what we have known in the past with other western organisations. You always recognised our values and our strengths, and despite our differences you gave us the space to have a say’. They felt respected and valued. Not only in the process, but also in the outcome,” Marina recalls. “I was not conscious of my approach back then, but I think it is a big compliment to receive from an African organisation that you work with. Even though I came from The Netherlands, they still felt that I understood them that I was working towards a partnership from which both the Dutch and local partners would benefit.”

A job cut out

To ensure the potential of the African diaspora is harnessed more effectively, Marina points to several conditions that both sides need to meet. For members of the African diaspora to become successful – as entrepreneurs or employees – it is important that they understand the business culture of the Netherlands and that of their country of origin. This includes, among others, mastering the language of their country of origin as well as the Dutch language. Marina also argues that having a long-term perspective on working in Africa is a critical precondition for the ambitious members of the African diaspora. This means that, if they are to have a real impact and create a successful business, their endeavours should go beyond a short adventure but rather be built on a vision for the future and include efforts to build an extensive network with local partners.

Dutch enterprises also have their work cut out for them if they want to successfully tap into the available pool of diaspora entrepreneurs and professionals. Marina argues that these businesses should adopt recruitment policies that take the specific position of diaspora professionals into account. “Most of the times I hear companies saying that they do not know where to find talents with a migrant background.” One option to address this, Marina suggests, is to organise in-house days aimed specifically at African talents in the Netherlands, allowing the diaspora professionals to get to know the companies. “I see that a lot of diaspora talents are very critical and want to understand the vision of the company before they consider working for it. That is why it is ▶

important that companies communicate about their vision and how they facilitate diversity within their organisations,” Marina explains. This vision on diversity, Marina emphasizes, should not be so-called ‘window dressing’. Instead, companies should develop a clear strategic plan on how to accommodate people from various backgrounds within their organisation. “Only with such a genuine and open approach will Dutch companies operating in Africa become more attractive for the rich pool of diaspora talents.”

Although Marina recognises a trend where companies increasingly employ members of the diaspora to successfully conduct their business activities in Africa, she warns that diversity is still lagging behind when it comes to higher positions. “I would like to see more diversity on the executive level within those companies. Both on the continent and here in the Netherlands. True change takes place when various perspectives are included in the decision-making process.” Marina hopes that the trend she observes will soon extend to the executive level and more companies will recruit members of the diaspora for their senior positions.

As a final key task for Dutch companies, Marina stresses the importance of investing in the individual growth of diaspora talents. “I am not saying that everyone will be a success story. But as a company, if you are lucky enough to have recruited a diaspora talent who is really ambitious and wants to grow with you, you have the responsibility to invest in the growth of this individual.” Stimulating such individual growth, Marina believes, can be part of a company’s overall growth strategy in Africa: By fostering the development of the talents in your organisation, the organisation will grow along with them. ▶

Image via Marina Diboma



Where the magic happens

Based on her experience, Marina has come to believe that circular migration is a valuable mechanism for both African communities and the Dutch private sector. In addition to working with diaspora talent living in The Netherlands, Marina argues, Dutch companies could greatly benefit from hiring African talent to fulfil specific sectoral shortages. That is why the NABC, in partnership with IOM the Netherlands, is implementing [MATCH](#), a three year pilot project that supports Dutch companies to capitalise on African professionals for job positions that are difficult to fill locally or even at the European level. Simultaneously, the project aims to promote existing legal pathways for highly skilled candidates from Nigeria and Senegal to work temporarily in Dutch companies. It is a form of circular migration that is beneficial for the hiring companies and at the same time allows African job seekers to upgrade their skills in Europe and increase their employability upon return to their home countries.

In the long run, Marina argues, this circular migration leads to win-win situations for both the migrants and the hiring company. “I am aware that taking the step to establish a local presence in an African country can be a great challenge for Dutch companies,” Marina notes. However, if a company has employed African talents to develop their skills in The Netherlands, they can thereafter operate as bridging agents. An exchange period in The Netherlands enables the African talent to learn about the company, its objectives and working culture. “If you tap into the pool of young talent in Africa and let them work in The Netherlands, [...] there is a high chance that these talents will be highly successful in representing your business interests in their home country afterwards.” This bridging function applies specifically, Marina argues, to marketing and sales. Having worked in The Netherlands, African talent has an understanding of both ‘business worlds’, and as such can help Dutch companies to market their products and services in a way that fits the specific context of the African country they are operating in. “The way that marketing and sales strategy is set up in The Netherlands is very different from the way you would do it in Ghana, Cameroon or Ivory Coast,” Marina explains. “You need to be aware of local sensitivities and tell the story of your product in a way your local clients can relate to. Who can do this better than someone who is from there and also understands the Dutch company?” Marina asks. “When you have an understanding of both the Dutch situation and of the specific market conditions in the particular African country – that is where the magic happens.”

The government’s turn

While both diaspora talents and the Dutch private sector have a role to play in strengthening Dutch business activities in Africa, Marina underlines that the responsibility of the Dutch government should not be overlooked. “For quite some time, I have been observing the Dutch government arguing that there is no added value in funds that specifically target diaspora entrepreneurs. But I do not think that the current ‘one size fits all’ solution for entrepreneurship work. In my opinion, we need to look at the background of various entrepreneurs,” Marina argues. With less social and financial capital, diaspora entrepreneurs usually have a relatively lower starting position than their Dutch counterparts. This limits their ability to conduct effective business activities in their countries of origin and in the Netherlands, despite their ambitious business plans. “When we look at crowdfunding initiatives where Dutch entrepreneurs announce their start-ups and products, you see that their friends and family often put in a lot of money. That is not always the case with the African diaspora, due to this lack of financial and social capital,” Marina notes. That is why she argues that there is a “serious need for instruments that allow the upcoming generation of diaspora entrepreneurs to do business in their home country.” More concretely, Marina suggests, this would mean the creation of a special diaspora investment fund. ▶

“There is a vast amount of creativity and innovation within the African diaspora”

To engage with and support diaspora entrepreneurs, the Dutch government and other actors do not need to reinvent the wheel, Marina points out. Activities in other countries organised to engage with entrepreneurs from minority communities can offer huge inspiration. Marina has seen some great examples in Canada. In collaboration with local financial institutions, black-led organisations and various research institutions, the Canadian government launched the Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP) last year. This 221-million-dollar investment programme aims to help black Canadian business owners to successfully conduct and grow their businesses. Within the BEP, the Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund provides loans up to \$250,000 to black business owners and entrepreneurs across Canada. Additionally, through its Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, the BEP will facilitate research on challenges that black Canadian entrepreneurs face and the opportunities that can contribute to their business successes. “The collaboration between the Canadian government, black-led organisations and local banks and knowledge institutions for this programme is a good example of how synergies can be employed to empower vulnerable groups,” Marina observes. That is why she hopes that the Dutch government will also look for collaborations with other relevant actors to develop a similar programme in which diaspora entrepreneurs and other marginalised groups are supported in their business journeys.

A matter of time

With her plea for a governmental support programme, Marina by no means suggests creating a situation of dependency. “Being dependent on the government is not the way forward,” she explains. “Rather, the government’s role is one of facilitation.” Marina is convinced, however, that African diaspora entrepreneurs will find their way to move forward within the private sector, even without the support of the Dutch government. “There is a vast amount of creativity and innovation within the African diaspora,” Marina continues. “That fire is kept blazing by the fact that every member of the African diaspora with family in their home country is aware of the challenges [they face] and feels responsible to contribute to the betterment of their lives.” This fire has also instigated the creation of various initiatives within the African diaspora to start their own investment platforms because existing (governmental) financial instruments are not accessible to them. “It is unfortunate that they [the Dutch government] do not see the potential of the African diaspora from the very beginning,” Marina states. “But I am sure that the diaspora will take the lead and succeed to provide alternative solutions.” And when such alternative solutions succeed, Marina believes, the Dutch government and business partners will be standing in line to support and join the diaspora entrepreneurs and their initiatives. The way forward is clear. “It is only a matter of time.” ■

DIASPORA AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER THE EVIDENCE

Katie Kuschminder & Charlotte Mueller
UNU-MERIT

Interview & text: Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris

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In this – at least for now – last article by external experts in our diaspora dossier, we give the word to two researchers from the [United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology \(UNU-MERIT\)](#). PhD fellow [Charlotte Mueller](#) and assistant professor [Dr Katie Kuschminder](#) – both experts in the field of migration, development and diaspora – are responsible for the [evaluation of IOM’s Connecting Diaspora for Development \(CD4D\) programme](#). A few weeks ago we published an interview article with [Nina Staal and Dorien Deketele](#), two senior officials from the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\) the Netherlands](#), who also talked about this programme. In the following, Katie and Charlotte will reflect on the successes and challenges of this endeavour and highlight some key lessons that are useful for all actors who seek to stimulate effective diaspora knowledge transfer in future.

A new step in a long history

In the 1970s, international organisations began to implement short-term diaspora return programmes to formalise and promote diaspora knowledge transfer for development. The first of these programmes was the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1977. In the early 2000s, however, this type of programmes really took flight and by 2009 close to 10 different diaspora return programmes were operating in Afghanistan alone. Well known programmes of the last decade include the [Migration for Development in Africa Programme \(MIDA\)](#) and the [Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals \(TRQN\)](#). As Katie and Charlotte explain, for these earlier programmes no in-depth research has been conducted on their effectiveness, limiting possibilities to learn from and improve upon these programmes. “This is what makes our collaboration with CD4D so unique,” Katie points out. “Often these programmes operate quietly without published evaluation results and then we do not know their contributions to sustainable development.” The [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\) the Netherlands](#), however, has made an important change in this situation. Since the very beginning of the [Connecting Diaspora for Development \(CD4D\) programme](#) – discussed in detail in the interview article with [Nina Staal and Dorien Deketele](#) –, IOM the Netherlands has given the UNU-MERIT researchers full access to its programme and freedom to design the evaluation tools. “Together with IOM and support from the MFA we are providing independent, transparent research on the CD4D programme, which greatly increases our understanding of how diaspora returnees contribute to knowledge transfer and capacity building.” ▶



In short: Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D)

The first phase of CD4D ran from 2016 to 2019 and was extended in late 2019 with a second phase that will run until 2022. In both phases, diaspora members with mostly Dutch residency are linked to institutions in their countries of origin, where they conduct in-person or virtual assignments. Assignment countries during the first phase were Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iraq, Morocco, Sierra Leone and Somalia. In the current phase, assignments are taking place in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia.

CD4D focuses on capacity development through knowledge transfer and the creation of connections. The programme follows a needs-oriented approach, which means that IOM selects target sectors for intervention in each target country based on consultation of local partners and an assessment of local needs. In Afghanistan, for instance, the sectors that were chosen for the second phase are Health, Rural Development and Water Management. The target country, supported by IOM, then chooses host institutions within the selected sectors – these are the institutions where interventions take place. Institutions are selected based on both need and capacity. That is, there must be a need for capacity development at the institution and at the same time, the institution needs to have the capacity to be able to absorb the knowledge transfer and host a diaspora returnee.

The assignments diaspora members conduct are defined based on the needs of the host institutions. To that end, the host institution is asked to write a so-called ‘Terms of Reference’ to make clear the role it envisions for the diaspora professional. Diaspora members are then selected in a two-step process. First, IOM pre-selects a number of candidates based on their qualifications and then sends the CVs of this selection to the host institution for them to select the final candidate. The final candidate is supported by IOM throughout the project.



Charlotte Mueller



Katie Kuschminder

Individual and institutional impact through knowledge transfer

The [evaluation of the first phase of CD4D](#) resulted in some interesting insights that have relevance, not only for the second phase of the programme, but also for other organisations seeking to realise knowledge transfers through diaspora engagement as well. First, with regards to individual staff, the UNU-MERIT researchers found that diaspora returnees employed a variety of methods to transfer their knowledge, depending on what best suited their skills and the demands of the employees at the host institution. These methods ranged from formal ‘class-room style’ training and more hands-on practical training to mentoring and one-on-one coaching. One diaspora returnee working in Ethiopia, for example, gave a 1-week training on R-software and basic statistics for senior researchers. Through the training, the researchers gained insights into the use of the statistical software to analyse and interpret quantitative data, which most of them applied in their work afterwards. As one trainee said: “Not only me, but most of the researchers are now analysing their data using [the new] software. There is a big change.” In a second example, a diaspora member in Somaliland worked with local staff on improving the organisational structure of their institution. They gained knowledge about the development of such structures and learned to formulate and apply necessary forms, like a new appraisal form. This allowed staff to conduct the first staff appraisals and take responsibility for Human Resources (HR)-related matters shortly after the diaspora expert’s placement had ended.

In addition to contributing to the knowledge and skills of individual staff members, the involvement of diaspora experts also led to an increase in organisational capacity of some of the host institutions. Internal structures and processes were improved, and new policies were developed and implemented that facilitated smoother running of operations. The establishment of a filing system in the HR unit of a Somaliland ministry forms a good example. “We bought about 200 files, ordered them, and started filling and organising employee files, including job description, ID card, passport photos, personal data,” the diaspora expert describes. For the ministry in Somaliland this made an enormous difference, one of the managers of the ministry confirmed: “[T]he ministry is new and so is its HR department. This means they are struggling [...] with many things. [The diaspora expert] helped organise all staff of the ministry and even the regional staff in a new filing system and establish [...] work templates. Now, he is also [...] writing down the guidelines [for HR policy].” ▶

Beyond the transfer

Although the improvement of individual and institutional capacity resulting from the CD4D programme is a great result, impact that goes beyond the direct knowledge transfer is equally important. It is an explicit objective of the programme to stimulate lasting connections between the diaspora experts and representatives at host institutions, as well as connections between institutions in the Netherlands and institutions in the target countries. The evaluation showed that, indeed, several exchange visits were organised by diaspora experts, allowing for staff members from Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone to visit the Netherlands and gain insights into new techniques and technologies within their area of work. Some diaspora experts also put staff from host institutions in touch with people from their own network, fostering learning and exchange beyond the confines of the CD4D programme.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about other positive externalities or spill over effects of the CD4D programme. “There may be many,” Katie notes, “but we have not examined these systematically.” She and fellow-researcher Charlotte assume, for instance, that the training sessions and lectures given by the diaspora experts generate more impact than that which they are able to measure. “If a diaspora returnee gives a talk to 30 people,” Katie explains, “we cannot capture the exact impact of that talk on all 30 people. Yet we know that often an inspiring speaker can lead to positive change in your work. This is most likely happening [in the host institutions] as well, but we are unable to capture it fully.” Additionally, the UNU-MERIT researchers think that the newly acquired knowledge may be helping staff in host institutions attain new, better jobs. “We see a high turnover at the host institutions. And although we do not follow the colleagues that leave, it could well be that these people are creating positive opportunities for themselves [...], using the new knowledge they gained from the diaspora returnees [...] to find a new position.”

Challenges and critical elements

Although the research on CD4D confirms diaspora members can contribute to knowledge transfer and capacity development in their country of origin, the success of assignments are determined by various enablers and barriers, which are discussed in the [final report of the CD4D1 evaluation](#) in more detail. Among the factors affecting knowledge transfer and capacity development are the availability of staff to be trained, the availability of necessary equipment, the extent to which the host institutions prioritise knowledge transfer, and the availability of time to implement new procedures and changes. While the evaluation of the second phase of the CD4D programme (CD4D2) serves to shed more light on the matter, some particularly valuable elements of the programme have already become clear: “We find in our research that language is a core added value [of a diaspora expert being the trainer],” Katie and Charlotte point out. Language is rarely an issue when a diaspora expert visits a host institution – something that can form a significant barrier when a non-diaspora professional is providing the training. “Additionally, although achieving trust can still be challenging for the diaspora returnees, there is often a base of trust there, based on the fact that the diaspora expert is from the same country and speaking the same language. [This] enables the diaspora returnees to better connect with the teams in the host institutions.” ▶

The challenge we all face: COVID-19

Like every organisation and programme, IOM the Netherlands and its CD4D programme have been affected by the impact of the coronavirus. “We have not yet been able to examine the full impact of COVID-19,” Charlotte notes. That said, in the initial evaluation report on CD4D2 (written in August 2020 and available here) the researchers point to some effects that had already become clear: While project implementation in Somalia had already successfully kicked-off before the pandemic, COVID-19 did cause delays for project implementation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria as well as restrictions to the work of host institutions due to lockdowns, prohibition of meetings, financial and movement restrictions and COVID-19 infections at host institutions.

As a response, IOM has since facilitated virtual in addition to physical assignments. The programme provided (IT) materials, as well as support on the effective use of virtual platforms. Additionally, all diaspora experts received specific training before starting their assignment on how to effectively transfer knowledge online. While some host institutions were open to online collaboration, others were less keen. They pointed to a variety of (perceived) reasons, including a lack of necessary equipment, unstable internet connections as well as the need for the diaspora expert to be present ‘on the ground’.

Katie and Charlotte, for the ongoing parts of their research have adjusted their research questions and methods to the new reality. “We look forward to seeing how these new virtual assignments are working in practice,” they note. “We suspect that like with physical placements there will be a lot of variation between assignments [...]. A core challenge is really the COVID-19 restrictions in the place of assignment and the ability of the host institution colleagues to complete their work on a daily basis. This is a challenge we can all relate to with school closures, and the increased technical resources needed at home offices.”

According to the UNU-MERIT researchers trust is of such importance that it is among one of the four elements they have identified as critical for facilitating successful knowledge transfer and capacity development. For interventions like CD4D to have a meaningful and lasting impact, it is crucial that:

- There is a focus on knowledge transfer during all assignments of the diaspora expert.
- A relationship of trust is built between diaspora expert and host institution staff, to ensure meaningful collaboration.
- There is sufficient time, for staff to participate in knowledge transfer and for changes to be implemented.
- There is sufficient room for practice, for staff to apply their new knowledge.

While the evaluation of CD4D2 is still ongoing and will certainly yield new and more in-depth insights, what can be concluded from the CD4D1 evaluation is that through programmes like CD4D, diaspora experts can make meaningful contributions to knowledge transfer and capacity development in their countries of origin. This does not, however, occur automatically: Diaspora experts need to be able to rely on assistance where needed and a well-structured programme in which they are provided with targeted training and other support. When these elements are in place, including diaspora experts is an effective way to transfer knowledge to and develop the capacity of institutions in their countries of origin. ■

For more information on the UNU-MERIT evaluation, as well as the latest reports on the CD4D2 programme, please visit <http://migration.merit.unu.edu/research/projects/connecting-diaspora-for-developmentcd4d/>



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ENABLING DIASPORA TO TAKE THE LEAD – A SYNTHESIS

To generate an in-depth understanding of how diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs in the Netherlands can (and already do) contribute to the sustainable development of their home country, The Broker and IOM the Netherlands joined forces to reopen the [online knowledge dossier on Diaspora Inclusion](#) in late 2020. By speaking to senior IOM officials and various diaspora entrepreneurs and experts, as well featuring an article from an academic perspective, the second part of the knowledge dossier provided an overview of relevant challenges and opportunities related to diaspora inclusion in the entrepreneurial sphere. Overall, the featured articles suggest that various diaspora communities living in the Netherlands have a great potential to contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin. This depends, however, on the ability of the diaspora to overcome specific challenges that they face and on the creation of an enabling environment to stimulate and tap into their potential. This synthesis brings together the insights of the last five articles in this dossier, highlighting their most important and interesting elements, with a focus on challenges, opportunities and the enabling environment. In the end it is our hope that, combined with the insights of the earlier contributions to this dossier, all agents – diaspora, development actors, policy makers and private sector actors alike – find inspiration and motivation on how to move forward in working together towards more efficient, sustainable and inclusive development efforts and entrepreneurship. ►



Kiza Magendane & Yannicke Goris
The Broker

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Invaluable forces: diaspora employees, experts and entrepreneurs

“There is a vast amount of creativity and innovation within the African diaspora.” This view, expressed by Deputy Managing Director of the Netherlands–African Business Council (NABC) [Marina Diboma](#), was shared by many of the contributors to this dossier. In addition to their talents, members of the diaspora are regarded as particularly driven and ambitious. “That fire is kept blazing by the fact that every member of the African diaspora with family in their home country is aware of the challenges [they face] and feels responsible to contribute to the betterment of their lives.” The awareness of the challenges people in their country of origin are facing, the intrinsic motivation to give something back, and the talent they possess make members of the diaspora powerful actors for change. They are in the unique position to contribute to development efforts in their countries of origin, as employees within international companies, as entrepreneurs, or as experts transferring their knowledge to their peers abroad.

Diaspora professionals working as employees in international companies operating in their country of origin bring along their unique ‘double perspective’. Based on her experience working as a consultant in Ethiopia, Saskia Kloezeman refers to this as the diaspora’s ‘[international mind and local heart.](#)’ With their knowledge of and sensitivity to the culture of both the Netherlands and their countries of origin, diaspora professionals can fill the gap between international companies and local businesses. Diaspora professionals are able to play a unique bridging role, helping international companies take better account of the local context and, consequently, generate more impact with their investments. Marina Diboma confirms this idea of the diaspora employee as ‘bridge’, arguing that the African diaspora in the Netherlands can play a valuable position for Dutch companies who want to set up daughter organisations in countries in Africa.

In addition to their valuable role as employees in international companies, entrepreneurship is also described in various articles as an effective means for diaspora to contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin. Fridah Ntarangwi, when talking about the need for a rethinking of aid and the role of diaspora entrepreneurs, [voiced the opinion](#) that entrepreneurship is an effective means to foster development and accumulation of generational wealth in Africa. As she explains: “African governments keep borrowing because they do not have generational wealth that can be duplicated, multiplied or employed to create businesses and foster sustainable development.” Fridah believes that setting up businesses and making sound investments in African economies is the way forward for sustainable growth. And diaspora entrepreneurs are uniquely suited to do so, she argues. ►

As the articles on the [Connecting Diaspora for Development \(CD4D\)](#) programme and its [UNU-MERIT evaluation](#) showed, diaspora professionals can be of great added value to the development of their countries of origin by transferring their knowledge and expertise. Not only by actually starting up a business or working in a company, but by sharing what – and, in some cases, who – they know, diaspora professionals can make an enormous difference for the functioning of institutions in their countries of origin. Facilitating such knowledge transfers, as IOM the Netherlands does, is an effective way to allow for members of the African diaspora living in the Netherlands to employ their unique position and knowledge to become development agents in their own right.

In order to effectively use their bridge building position for the sustainable development of their countries of origins, diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs need to meet certain preconditions. In the first place, they must be aware of their unique position; recognising that what sets them apart from people from the Netherlands as well as from people from their home countries is their strength and by no means a weakness. Further, as Saskia Kloezeman emphasized, for those diaspora professionals who want to set up their own enterprises in their countries of origin, it is important to have an entrepreneurial mindset and the flexibility needed to adjust to the challenges of the local context. For diaspora working in international organisations or as independent entrepreneurs in their country of origin, Marina Diboma also highlighted the importance of understanding both business cultures. This also includes mastering both the Dutch language and the language of the country of origin as well as having a longer-term perspective of working in the African context; not only being interested in a cultural exchange. As further discussed in the following section, other factors affect the success of diaspora professionals, some of them (partially) outside their own control. Considering that being part of a diaspora community presents unique opportunities but also unique challenges, diaspora professionals should also be resilient and tenacious, while managing their expectations when operating in their country of origin.

Overcoming challenges

In order to effectively contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin, diaspora entrepreneurs (and professionals) need to overcome specific challenges that are related to their position as bridge builders between two worlds. Challenges are varied and will depend, among others, on the business sector, country of origin and background of the diaspora professional. They include a lack of social and financial capital, misconceptions or unrealistic expectations about diaspora, and a challenging (business) environment. This section looks at these three categories of challenges, including the obstacles that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see box p. 67). Even though these obstacles are specific to the current time, they provide relevant lessons for diaspora inclusion and point to surprising new opportunities. ►

Social and financial capital

Diaspora entrepreneurs are confronted with their limited social and financial capital in their efforts to engage in business activities in their country of origin. Compared to their Dutch peers, diaspora entrepreneurs usually do not have the necessary networks within the Dutch entrepreneurial ecosystem, lacking, for example, recognisable role models or much-needed mentorship and coaching. This limited social capital is usually related to (and often results in) limited financial capital within the various African diaspora communities in the Netherlands. As Marina Diboma explained, when diaspora entrepreneurs start a crowdfunding campaign for their start-up, they generate limited financial contribution due to their lack of a wealthy network in the Netherlands. That is not the case for their native Dutch counterparts.

Based on the insight that diaspora communities have limited social and financial capital, various articles highlighted the importance of specific entrepreneurship programmes that target the diaspora community. IOM the Netherlands initiated [Entrepreneurship by Diaspora for Development \(ED4D\)](#), a training programme that aims to reinforce the capacities of Ghanaian and Ethiopian diaspora entrepreneurs in the Netherlands to set-up businesses in their countries of origin and enable a trusting environment for their investment. The ED4D programme is based on the belief that, despite having some advantages, diaspora entrepreneurs still face significant obstacles in their efforts to start a business in their country of origin. The same conviction inspired Fridah Ntangwi to set up Zidicircle, a social enterprise that aims to support diaspora entrepreneurs by providing them with the resources necessary to successfully launch their business; either in their country of residence, country of origin, or internationally.

Image, misconceptions and expectations

Despite positive outcomes and success stories related to the role of diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs as development agents for their country of origin, the featured articles also highlight the importance of recognising the mismatch that exists between ideas about the diaspora and the reality they live in. Members of the African diaspora themselves, moreover, are not free from misconceptions either, especially with regards to their country of origin. From the contributions to this dossier, three misconceptions stand out as particularly persistent and negatively affecting diaspora's ability to effectively conduct business activities in their country of origin:

In the first place, there is a prejudice and misconception among investors about risks related to investing in African diaspora. In her contribution, [Fridah Ntarangwi explains](#) that diaspora professionals are often neglected by investors because they tend to be judged on the basis of their background and associated perceived risks and not necessarily on their business ideas. While there is a growing conversation about diversity and inclusion within the investment community, Fridah argues that there are still large steps to be made to overcome prejudice about Africans diaspora and migrants. Only when investors can look beyond their background – or even begin to see it as an asset – will there be ground for an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem where the potential of diaspora entrepreneurs can be fully recognised and harnessed. ►

Covid-19 and lessons for diaspora inclusion

For diaspora entrepreneurs as well as for initiatives aiming to support them, the global corona-crisis has posed great challenges but also provided some unexpected opportunities. The Connecting Diaspora for Development programme (CD4D) engages diaspora professionals to support the development of their countries of origin through the transfer of knowledge and expertise. One key feature of this programme are the assignments that diaspora professionals conduct at host institutions in their country of origin. Due to measures related to the prevention of Covid-19, however, initiator IOM the Netherlands was forced to cancel such travels. As the first insights of the UNU-MERIT evaluation of the CD4D programme confirm, IOM has responded to the challenge with great speed, accelerating the use of digital technology for virtual knowledge transfers, facilitating virtual in addition to physical assignments and supporting the involved diaspora professionals in their online work.

The ability to transform challenges into opportunities is also reflected in Zidicircle's response to Covid-19 related impediments. Faced with the fact that (potential) diaspora entrepreneurs could not participate in their physical training – the Diaspora Entrepreneurship Bootcamp (DEB) – the organisation decided to organise its DEB virtually. This has enabled Zidicircle to open the programme for other African diaspora outside the Netherlands. Due to high demand and positive experience with this approach, the DEB programme will be organised twice in 2021, now reaching African diaspora across all the continents.

While the challenges of Covid-19 are time specific, the way in which both Zidicircle and IOM the Netherlands have dealt with them harbour lessons for future efforts – of government, development actors and the private sector alike – to better include and collaborate with diaspora. The main lesson that this dossier provides is that, despite their physical distance with their country of origin, diaspora are highly motivated to engage as development agents, either through business interventions or as professionals within international companies. Covid-19 has made us more acutely aware of the opportunities digital technology provides to overcome the physical distance between country of residence and country of origin. Marina Diboma further argued that the current Covid-19 pandemic underlines the importance of the diaspora for Dutch companies who want to operate in various African countries. Thanks to their ability to speak local languages and willingness to stay in their country of origin – even in the face of lockdowns, travel-bans and other measures to combat the pandemic – diaspora professionals are enabling companies to stay connected with their local branches.



beautifulcataya via Flickr

In the second place, overestimation of the diaspora's resources – by both governments and local communities in the country of origin – pose serious challenges for diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs. Both Saskia Kloezeman and Fridah Ntarangwi explain that the financial capacity of the diaspora tends to be gravely overestimated. International organisations, governments and families assume that the diaspora have sufficient capital to invest in their entrepreneurial endeavours in their country of origin. In reality, however, diaspora professionals usually have normal jobs and matching, average, income in their host countries. The price of this misconception is two-fold. In the first place, the diaspora tend to be overlooked in targeted programming to support (prospective) entrepreneurs and their business activities. Second, members of the diaspora often go to great lengths to match the image their families and communities in the country of origin have about them. In some cases, Kloezeman explains, members of the diaspora have even taken out loans in their host countries to be able to afford expensive gifts for their family members, just to keep the 'fairy tale' alive. The featured articles suggest that overcoming this misconception and managing expectations about the potential of the diaspora is a determinant factor for the success of diaspora engagement. This means that for the diaspora professionals it is of great importance that they are transparent about their financial capacity and the challenges they face particular to their position.

Finally, a mismatch can be observed between expectations that the diaspora have about their country of origin and the reality they meet once they move to set up a business or engage in employment there. Despite the fact that diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs have a closer connection to their country of origin than their Dutch counterparts, the articles in the knowledge dossier suggest that the diaspora still tend to hold misconceptions about what they will encounter. Diaspora entrepreneurs and professionals often expect from local communities and institutions in their country of origin to meet certain standards – standards that are informed by (business) frameworks adopted in the Netherlands. When local partners, institutions and family members cannot meet these expectations, frustration and clashes often arise. In most extreme cases, Saskia Kloezeman has observed, diaspora entrepreneurs have been disappointed to the point that they decided to return to their host country and never engage themselves in business activities in their country of origin again. To manage expectations and prevent such disappointments, preparation is therefore key. Responsibility for this preparation lies with the diaspora entrepreneur, but government and NGOs can play an important role too. As the examples of ED4D, CD4D and Zidicircle show, successful programmes to support diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs in their attempt to contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin, include rigorous preparation – not only in terms of formulating sound business plans, but also in terms of managing 'cultural' expectations and being realistic about opportunities and challenges ahead. ▶

Enabling environment

To overcome the above-mentioned challenges, the featured articles in the knowledge dossier also provided certain tools that various actors can implement in order to create an environment that enables diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs to operate as development actors. Existing initiatives such as the [Entrepreneurship by Diaspora for Development \(ED4D\)](#) programme for example, show that targeted initiatives go a long way to contribute to creating this enabling environment. This explains why IOM the Netherlands, Zidicircle and other consulted participants in this dossier are unanimously in favour of more of such programmes. It also explains why there is wide agreement about the need for the Dutch government and other actors not to neglect diaspora entrepreneurs and, by extension, include them as a specific target group in policy making. Adjusting policy to the background of the entrepreneurs, their specific needs and talents is the way to best make use of and stimulate their potential. In other words, the government could play an important facilitating role by formulating a policy framework specifically targeting diaspora as a separate group. There is, as Marina Diboma emphasized, “serious need for instruments that allow the upcoming generation of diaspora entrepreneurs to do business in their home country.” In practical terms, such support could be translated into a special diaspora investment fund by the government. Existing funds in other countries that support entrepreneurs from marginalised communities can be a source of inspiration.

At the same time, all featured articles articulate the importance of looking beyond the government in an attempt to create an environment that enables the diaspora to contribute to the sustainable development of their country of origin. The private sector, multilateral organisations and individual diaspora initiatives can all make a difference. Various articles suggest that the private sector should make more effort to tap into the pool of diaspora professionals. Active diaspora recruitment and strategic policies that encourage diversity are stimulated, especially when it comes to making management and executive positions more inclusive to the African diaspora. Similarly, the Dutch private sector is encouraged to build partnerships with diaspora entrepreneurs, by either developing new products together or by setting up daughter organisations in various African countries. Multilateral organisations and NGOs, in turn, can also contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for diaspora engagement. As is the case for IOM the Netherlands, intergovernmental organisations have a strong network and a reputation that can be used to open doors for diaspora entrepreneurs and to facilitate knowledge exchange between diaspora and their country of origin.

Last but not least, members of the diaspora themselves have an active role to play. In fact, they should eventually take the lead. This means that, even when the public sector seems reluctant to actively support them, members of the diaspora have to come up with innovative ideas and look for alternative resources and investment opportunities. This is a challenging path that demands perseverance, innovativeness and talent. Yet, to conclude with the words of Marina Diboma, the success of the diaspora is on its way. “I am sure [they] will take the lead and succeed to provide alternative solutions...It is only a matter of time.” ■

It is important to mention that, with a few exceptions, the generated insights in our online knowledge dossier on diaspora inclusion focused on the African diaspora in the Netherlands. More than 22 percent of the residents in the Netherlands come from over 220 foreign countries. This means the presented contributions can be further complemented with new insights that focus on other diaspora communities (including: The Turkish, South East Asian, Moroccan, Surinamese and Caribbean, to name just a few).



Miranda Harple via Flickr

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