

Building trust, mobilizing resources and ensuring sustainability

INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS PAPER

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Context

In 2020, iDIASPORA in close collaboration with [ADEPT](#), [ADN](#), [DEMAC](#), [Coalición for Venezuela](#), and [UnidosUS](#) held the 1st Global Diaspora Virtual Exchanges bringing together, different actors involved in the development of diasporic initiatives in America, Europe, Africa and Asia. With a participation of nearly 300 stakeholders including diaspora leaders, policymakers, academics, and social workers, an opportunity was provided for the exchange of diverse experiences on how diasporas responded to the COVID-19¹ and best practices on inclusion of diaspora members when responding to the global health crisis.

Some of the key outcomes of these exchanges included:

- [sharing of best practices](#) in diaspora engagement based on connections, partnerships, and self-empowerment.
- identifying synergies and concrete collaboration opportunities with a result being the establishment of the [Global Diaspora Confederation](#), the world's largest diaspora-led civic society organization which brings together diaspora organizations from across the world.

As a follow-up, the 2021 Global Diaspora Exchanges were organized in the context of the common challenges highlighted by stakeholders during the 2020 exchanges such as the lack of trust, difficulties regarding fundraising and the sustainability of initiatives in the long term. For this 2nd series of Global Diaspora Virtual Exchanges, organized in three thematic sessions between April and June 2021, the organizing partners expanded to include other diaspora organizations: [iDiaspora](#), [GRFDT](#), [CISAN](#) and [ADEPT](#).

Bringing together, 255 participants facilitated by diaspora members and panel experts from private sector, NGOs, donor community, diaspora groups as well as academia, the 2021 Global Diaspora Exchanges focused on the themes: Building Trust, Mobilizing Resources and Ensuring Sustainability. The exchanges explored the best practices across the regions and unpacked concerns and opportunities in supporting diaspora to reach their full potential.

[iDIASPORA](#), [GRFDT](#), [CISAN](#) and [ADEPT](#) recognize the growing importance of the discourse on empowering the diverse range of diaspora actors in their endeavours to participate in homeland development. This reflection paper outlines the insights and recommendations, as well as key highlights from the global exchanges.

¹ IOM (2020) [Global Diasporas reacting to the COVID-19 crisis: Best Practices from the Field](#).

Theme 1: Building trust

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Given the diversity in actors, formations and strategic orientations, the presence or extent of trust between diaspora and other stakeholders remains a key challenge. It is also an important pillar in terms of relations among diaspora groups as a collective, with both home and host governments as well as with other non-State actor and stakeholders (local, national, regional and international) in both host and homelands. The “trust issues” can be explored in a variety of ways presented as both challenges and opportunities:

1. Cultivating reciprocal and long-lasting relations

- There is a clear recognition of the varied interests and aspirations among the different actors navigating their diaspora environment, which presents an opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned among different stakeholders. Information dissemination and exchange is key to ensure an open communication and cross-learning among diaspora groups, within transnational communities and with relevant stakeholders (e.g., government, partners and other actors).
- Linked to the existence of varied interests, an enabling platform for stakeholders with diverse political views to come together remains crucial as well as the establishment of institutionalized working relationships. The setting-up and maintaining of autonomous institutions and organizations is key to ensure that programmes are consistent and sustainable irrespective of political changes and environments.
- To ensure diaspora voices remain valid and active, it is inevitable that mutual respect, transparency and accountability underpin cooperation and the development of transnational initiatives.
- With the ambition to sustain diaspora engagement through improved communication, it is imperative to identify, use, and adapt digital tools and platforms that creatively support diverse diaspora groups.

2. Empowerment of diasporas and the recognition of their potential

- There is increased interest by homelands of diaspora experiences, knowledge, skills, and networks as relevant social and human capital for host and home countries. More can be done in recognizing their contributions, as actors with specific capacities and skills, as well as exploring the potential of diasporas for support in development of their societies of origin and residence.
- Sustaining empowerment requires acknowledging that diasporas are heterogenous groups and understanding their differences, motivations, and aspirations to ensure their appropriate representation.

- Including diasporas in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of diaspora engagement projects is practical empowerment. Partners who systematically engage diasporas throughout the project cycle benefit from this inclusion with diaspora voices reflected.
- More broadly, efforts to build inclusive, diverse and therefore more cohesive societies support the recognition of the social capital diasporas bring. It is key that, in both homelands and host countries, they are provided with access to the social and political environment to unlock their full potential and participation.

3. Collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders

- Encouraging the dialogue between diasporas and government officials in both the countries of residence and origin is paramount for sustained connection to national development priorities. The goal should be to recognize the interests and potential of all actors in working together to achieve common goals.
- Embracing and fostering horizontal spaces for collaboration and dialogue among various actors is important to enable an open communication and should have an organic space where diasporas can advocate for their agendas and interests.
- Aligning common interest to co-create transnational initiatives promotes efficiency and effectiveness. Diaspora partners and diaspora groups can create joint strategies that reflect an inclusive and holistic approach in diaspora engagement, with smart considerations of the opportunities and benefits of creating synergies with actors and authorities at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- Developing short-, medium-, and long-term programmes and projects should be tailored to the needs and expectations of the different stakeholders.
- Facilitate regular meetings and dialogues among the different stakeholders to create systematic and open channels of communication where actors can share their challenges, opportunities and best practices.

Trust is built over time and can be lost very easily thus requires open, reciprocal, cooperative and continuous relationships – its intangible but critical characteristics make it essential on embarking, maintaining and sustaining diaspora engagement. Various factors can limit the trust and hamper engagement and empowerment of diaspora in homelands, such as the political environment, lack of an enabling environment and limited systematic integration of diaspora. With other non-State actors contributing to development in homelands, trust also determines the extent of cooperation of diaspora with the different stakeholders involved in initiatives.

Theme 2: Mobilizing resources

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

From research-based evidence over the recent years, there is a growing recognition of the importance of diaspora contributions, beyond remittances, in supporting development efforts in their homelands. Whether developing initiatives individually or collectively, diaspora actors have the potential to contribute to private sector investment and development in their countries of origin. Diaspora can also act as a catalytic bridge for financial and non-financial resources from host countries to support homeland activities. Diasporas have the interest, willingness and passion to create transnational initiatives for development, which are influenced by the enabling environment in their host and homelands and the opportunities presented to participate as partners in driving growth for development. However, while the potential remains great, access to funding for activities is not always a simple task for diaspora groups as evidenced by the need for:

1. Institutional cooperation mechanisms between governments and diaspora

- Through renewed and improved efforts to promote dialogue among countries of origin and their diaspora, emphasis is key on governments creating and sustaining diaspora offices and focal points as well as to seek creative avenues to integrate diasporas' views in migration and diaspora policies.
- With the development of a comprehensive approach for gathering data on diaspora support to humanitarian and development efforts, the diaspora in-kind capital and financial resources will be recognized and documented showing diasporas role in societies.
- Support to dialogue among diasporas, between diasporas and other local and international stakeholder groups, is critical in promoting opportunities, to further scale-up the sharing of best practices and knowledge on fundraising.

2. Fundraising partnerships: diasporas with private and public sectors' stakeholders

- Through exploring a diversity of opportunities, the exchanges emphasized on elaborating a better understanding of the diverse fundraising strategies and modalities of the multiple stakeholders involved in diaspora engagement. The diaspora engagement landscape has a broad range of actors with diverse strategic objectives and organizations of different sizes, coupled with varied formality. Having a clearer perspective of their strategic objectives, including their financing strategies would support the identification of best transnational practices (e.g. grant seeking).
- Through setting out areas of interests and joint programmes, diaspora groups could attract new donors or investors for their activities, which can support their engagement in opportunities with the private sector.

- From the providers side, the exchanges highlighted the urgency and inevitability in enhancing coordination efforts among donors to avoid duplication of efforts and to support in sustaining the impact of diaspora activities.
- From the provider's side, it was clear that public information on the available public and private resources (e.g. grants) to sponsor and support projects and activities by diaspora remains limited and a mapping of this type of information would be very useful for diaspora groups.

3. Diaspora communities' strategic engagement and sustainability of their projects

- The exchange reiterated the importance of promoting access to and the use of digital tools that could boost investment opportunities and financial inclusion of diasporas. This includes exploring the potential of knowledge sharing platforms, forums and learning events on emerging approaches (e.g. crowdfunding, angel investment, twinning arrangements, etc.)
- Through cultivating meaningful partnerships among diaspora groups and cross-learning from each other's activities, diaspora groups could benefit in adopting approaches that support mitigating potential risks and avoiding pathways that do not deliver sustainable results.
- Sustainability can be achieved through building fundraising capacity and trainings for diasporas and transnational communities as well as adopting digital solutions and platforms to enable continuous diaspora engagement with origin countries.

It is evident that there are clear linkages between aspects of mobilizing resources and the lack of trust. A number of calls to action have been outlined to propose how diaspora and all stakeholders can nurture and strengthen trustful relationships which is key for mobilizing resources. More concretely on mobilizing resources, there is evidence to encourage governments and diaspora groups to: cultivate meaningful partnerships that spill over to improved diaspora and stakeholder engagements in homelands; explore options to fill the gaps in limited information provided on funding opportunities for diaspora activities; and seek strategies to address the challenges in having robust systems of monitoring and evaluation for donor support for diaspora activities.

Theme 3: Ensuring sustainability

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Given the various countries of origin or homelands and the self-mobilizing nature of diaspora groups, their organizational structures tend to generally have limited resources, both financial and human. These constraints impact programme planning, delivery and sustainability. The challenges to sustaining such initiatives include: formalizing organizational governance structures, encouraging and motivating the engagement of second and successive generations of diaspora with their ancestral home country, and access to resources. Concerted efforts on ensuring sustainability remain critical and involve a range of diaspora actors to address constraints in the following areas:

1. Diaspora and development policy planning

- Recognizing the potential of diasporas as development actors and develop opportunities and spaces to include them in international development policy planning.
- Removing barriers and creating enabling environments for the contributions of diasporas and acknowledging the capital that they represent for societies remains critical. Diaspora capital including their skills, experiences, and expertise represent valuable resources and opportunities to be considered in development initiatives and planning.
- Considering the intragroup differences among diaspora is key to better tailor the development programmes to their needs and expectations. Diasporas are heterogenous groups and as a result, their interests, skills, and personal sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender and religion vary. Integrating these differences into the development of policy planning is fundamental to ensure successful policies.

2. Effectiveness of diaspora organizational governance

- Enhancing the capacity-building of diaspora organizations goes a long way in ensuring their effective management, clear goal-setting, cementing values, and working towards good governance systems.
- Developing specific capacity-building programmes for diaspora members and diaspora organizations is essential as it strengthens their organizational capacity and structures.
- Considering the different forms of diaspora belonging and engagement across generations, it is beneficial to acknowledge these differences enable the development and implementation of better tailored initiatives.

3. Diaspora partnerships at the local level

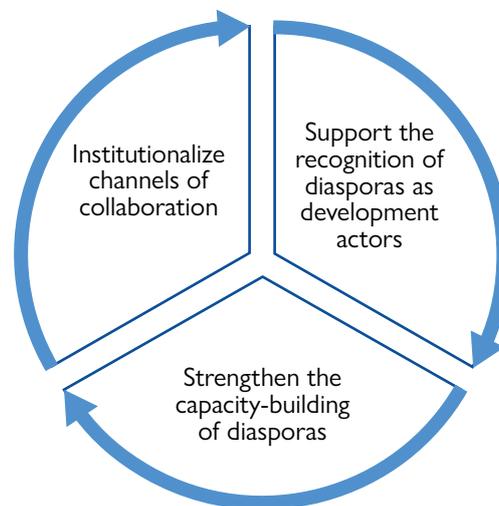
- Defining clear objectives and partnerships at the local level while recognizing that diaspora represent a heterogeneous group is crucial. The same can be said of the knowledge and networks being intrinsically linked to a particular locality.
- Aligning diaspora engagement to the conditions and situations on the ground is imperative. Opportunities and expectations of diaspora engagement should be tailored, appropriate and nuanced to support to meet the needs on the ground.
- Supporting the establishment of long-term and sustainable collaborations with local partners by facilitating access to organizational and funding capacities across diasporas and key stakeholders.
- Strengthening the potential participation of diasporas in the homelands private sector can take various forms. Diasporas can provide crucial support to private sector corporates in terms of access to homelands market, being an advocate or an interpreter for the cultural differences.
- Enhancing cooperation among diasporas and consular offices in the country of residence is a strongpoint for development. Consulates have the capacity to do consular diplomacy to engage with local partners and engage in dialogues to make connections or broaden the partnerships that diasporas have already with local actors.

Diaspora organizations with a well-functioning structure, resources and capacities are more likely to stay the course with regard to their projects and activities. It is also clear that there are benefits in working in partnership with multiple stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and international levels including community-based organizations, NGOs, IGOs, and the private sector. The existence of diverse cooperation mechanisms can go a long way in sustaining diaspora initiatives over the long haul.

Call to Action: Moving forward in diaspora engagement

The 2021 Global Diaspora Exchanges presented a conducive platform for diaspora, governments, non-State actors as well as academia to highlight some renewed thinking that will lead to further dialogue among diaspora stakeholders support sustainable development.

When engaging in humanitarian and development activities, diasporas face multiple challenges in terms of building trust with key actors, seeking funding to sustain their initiatives and ensuring the existence and impact of their projects in the medium and long term. To ensure that diasporas overcome these challenges, it is necessary to create the adequate conditions for their successful engagement. Firstly, stakeholders should work together first towards a systematic recognition of diaspora contributions, capital, and potential. Second, stakeholders need to strengthen the capacity-building of diaspora organizations, in particular in terms of financial and organizational management. Finally, actors engaging transnationally should further institutionalize their communication channels and expand their areas of collaboration targeting specific populations and locations. The authors emphasize that the actions should not be implemented in a linear way but rather efforts should be done continuously in these three priority areas to ensure the maximization of diaspora engagement.



On Building Trust: There is growing attention among actors of the significance of building and developing reciprocal, institutionalized and long-lasting relationships in diaspora engagement. The proposed policy recommendations are formulated with the view of targeting the aspirations and interests of the following three main stakeholder groups: 1) diasporas, to recognize their potential and [contributions to sustainable development](#) and beyond; 2) governments, to enable diasporic institutional and inclusive environments; 3) members of the civil society, to keep collaborating towards the empowerment of transnational communities; 4) building key partnerships between diasporas and embassies and consulates can be a powerful tool for diaspora engagement in home country development. These recommendations shed light on the fact that transparency, collaboration and mutual

understanding of the aspirations and interests of the multiple stakeholders involved in diaspora engagement are key to develop long-term and trustworthy relationships.

On Mobilizing resources: It is imperative to explore efforts to scale up current activities for diasporas to improve their fundraising strategies through: 1) improving financial management and enhancing capacity-building on fundraising approaches, 2) better recognition of [diaspora expertise](#), their financial and non-financial contributions in their host and home societies and 3) building on stronger coordination among diaspora organizations and with external stakeholders including donors (e.g. public and non-State) as well as seeking partnerships in private sector; 4) exploring specific programmes and initiatives to recognize diaspora initiatives to attract financing and resources for private sector and national development.

On Ensuring sustainability: Some of the key lessons highlighted include 1) exploring partnerships and collaborations with local, regional, national and international actors and ecosystems to ensure the continuity of projects and access to funding; 2) Networking among dispersed and loosely organized diaspora groups through the use of technology to build and strengthen capacity for project design, execution, implementation and impact; 3) Cultivating a clear vision and long-term commitment as well as including mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and innovative communication with the [use of technologies to support efforts](#); 4) Appreciating the different interests of [the diaspora younger generations](#) while seeking opportunities for them to participate in development activities in homelands through mentoring and providing technical support (i.e. local partnerships).

With the intent to contribute to the ongoing discourse and the momentum in bridging gaps to maximizing diaspora engagement in the areas above, we make the following calls to action:

Governments should work together with other stakeholders in recognition and participation of the diaspora in development

Beyond recognition in diaspora support of its remittances, diasporas are development agents with capacities, skills, networks, and knowledge for both their countries of origin and destination, beneficial for both the private and public sectors. The variety in their interests and skills constitutes a great asset for development.

More concretely,

- more support is required for countries and regions to develop and improve mapping and databases of diaspora as these tools support in better understanding the disaggregation and composition as well as capacities of diaspora members. This information is critical for effective decision-making in a variety of diaspora related initiatives in host and homelands, to improve policy and practical measures that enable diaspora engagement;
- explore mechanisms to recognize diaspora as development actors in their own right which can have real spill-over effects on access to more resources and capacities as well as their institutionalization. It is worth noting that diasporas' credibility is

key for them to further capitalize and cooperate with public and private actors from local to the international levels. Working with a broad range of actors and through its various institutions, government remains pivotal in taking a leading role in steering these efforts.

- explore approaches for tracking of diaspora initiatives by promoting collaboration with private, state and non-State actors including civil society, philanthropy, social science experts and academia.

Diaspora actors and partners should enhance efforts in strengthening the capacity of the diaspora

A vibrant and active diaspora in homeland engagement has to be well equipped with knowledge, tools and resources, both financial and technical. Local, national, regional and international partners that work with diaspora initiatives have a key role to play in supporting diaspora organizations, that are largely volunteer based. Further, technology presents an opportunity that has been extensively used and also enhanced, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic with digital tools providing the avenues for diaspora to communicate, exchange knowledge and resources.

More concretely,

- explore existing and emerging approaches (i.e. joint projects, mentoring, twinning, peer-to-peer exchanges) to draw capacity-building support for diaspora organizations from local, national, regional and international partners that target diaspora initiatives. This will have a knock-on impact on maximizing diaspora's potential as development actors.
- provide more avenues for diaspora and their partners to access training and tools to support the institutionalization of their activities, their outreach, and the general management of their organizations. Capacity-building for diaspora organizations should encompass a whole range of activities and training designed to empower them as development actors – tailored to their needs, interests, goals, and expectations.
- seek sustainability as a key goal in building capacity with a focus on strategic programming, organizational institutionalization and effectiveness, donor engagement, developing funding strategies and diasporas' capacities to monitor and evaluate their projects.
- through digital platforms, diasporas can access specific tools and trainings to improve their management and fundraising skills, to expand their outreach and to further engage with key stakeholders interested in their work.

Diaspora organizations and broader partners should work towards institutionalized cooperation

Building trustworthy and long-lasting partnerships requires open, transparent, and institutionalized channels of communication among the diverse and relevant stakeholders. In order to do so, the stakeholders embedded in the diaspora engagement landscape need to understand the values, interests, and goals of all the other actors involved – in the pursuit of its diaspora priorities. Ultimately, stronger institutional relationships provide a thriving environment for sustaining results and reaching project objectives whether diaspora-government, diaspora-private sector or diaspora-partner relations.

More concretely:

- explore approaches for evidence-based planning and monitoring of diaspora initiatives by promoting collaboration with academia and as well as other thematic specialists (e.g. migration governance, economists, investment experts, social and creative sectors).
- develop concrete and targeted collaborations by recognizing the different capacities among a variety of actors participating in the diaspora engagement landscape.
- involve different institutional levels, including transnational initiatives or local partnerships to ensure long-term and continuous cooperation, governments and stakeholders. In addition, they could further approach diasporas through networking events and the recognition of their work.
- acknowledge the diverse capacities and limitations of the various actors, their areas of expertise, the scope of their work and how they could contribute (for instance through advocacy efforts, knowledge transfer, etc.) to diaspora engagement.
- monitor and assess how young members of diaspora engage and will engage with their ancestral home countries in the future.



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