

BACKGROUND PAPER  
WMR 2010  
The Future of Diaspora Policy



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# The Future of Diaspora Policy

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# FOREWORD

This paper is one of 19 background papers which have been prepared for the IOM, 2010 World Migration Report which is entitled the “Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change”. The 2010 report focuses on likely future trends in migration and the capacities that will be required by States, regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector to manage migration successfully over the coming decades.

Over the next few decades, international migration is likely to transform in scale, reach and complexity, due to growing demographic disparities, the effects of environmental change, new global political and economic dynamics, technological revolutions and social networks.

The 2010 World Migration Report focuses on capacity-building, first because it is good governance to plan for the future, especially during a period of economic downturn when the tendency is to focus on immediate impacts and the short-term period of recovery. Second, capacity-building is widely acknowledged to be an essential component of effective migration management, helping to ensure the orderly and humane management of migration.

Part A of the World Migration Report 2010 focuses on identifying core capacities in key areas of migration management. The aim is not to recommend “one size fits all” policies and practices, but to suggest objectives of migration management policies in each area, to stimulate thinking and provide examples of what States and other actors can do.

Part B of the World Migration Report 2010, provides an overview of the latest global and regional trends in migration. In recognition of the importance of the largest global economic recession since the 1930s, this section has a particular focus on the effects of this crisis on migrants, migration and remittances.

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## THE PROMISE OF DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

Diaspora engagement is high on the agenda of many policymakers today. The interest in diasporas, defined here as migrants and their descendants who have maintained strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin, is not hard to understand.<sup>1</sup> Their contributions have many facets and appeal to policymakers in both origin and destination countries.

Origin countries' interest stems unquestionably from the remittances that diasporas send back to their homelands – over USD 300 billion in 2009. Remittances are huge and, relative to other types of financial flows to developing economies, remarkably stable – a particularly critical feature in a time of global economic slowdown. Diasporas are also considered to be a major source of direct investments in key industries and are often seen as “first movers” who pave the way for other, more detached investors. They bring valuable skills, experience and networks, while acting as an influential lobby that can advance the homeland's political and economic interests in the destination country.

Likewise, countries of destination are paying much closer attention to migrants within their borders, particularly in terms of how they can harness their resources to support development efforts – seeing diasporas as complements to official development assistance. Concerns over migration and integration issues also lead some governments to initiate contacts with diasporas in order to identify meaningful ways of tackling serious and long-standing problems of migrant integration and illegal migration.

Not surprisingly, recent years have seen an increasing array of government initiatives in both origin and destination countries to harness the potential of diasporas. Some have even established institutions to specifically handle the diaspora portfolio. For instance, a 2009 review of 30 developing countries revealed the existence of 45 different types of diaspora institutions occupying different levels of government and exhibiting diverse priorities and degrees of organization (Agunias, 2009).

Although some initiatives are quite innovative and many show promise, a closer look at these efforts suggests that translating diasporas' promise into reality is more easily said than done. While many governments acknowledge the importance of diaspora engagement, many still lack the capacity to design and implement effective policies on a meaningful scale. This explains the gap between essentially 'paper schemes' and truly effective policies and programmes that actually make a difference.

This policy paper aims to explore two of the main challenges facing governments in origin and destination countries as they engage diasporas within and outside their borders: obtaining adequate funding and improving technical know-how. Specifically, it will focus on some of the innovative approaches that governments have adopted to address these two challenges in order to highlight positive, promising practices as well as failures. The paper will conclude with some caveats for policymakers, including the need to think beyond a diaspora policy.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of diaspora includes temporary and permanent migrants and is adapted from Gabriel Sheffer's classic work on modern diasporas (Sheffer, 1986).

## CONSTRAINTS

For many countries, the main challenges to effective engagement seem to revolve around obtaining adequate funding and improving technical know-how.

### Adequate funding

Analyst Michael Fullilove has noted that most diaspora institutions are underfunded (Fullilove, 2008). A closer look at the budgets of India, Mali, Mexico and the Philippines – four origin countries that have actively engaged their diasporas in recent years – seems to support this observation. Institutions in charge of the diaspora portfolio in these countries have received a relatively small allocation from the national government.

The responsibility for protecting and engaging the Philippines' huge diaspora largely rests on three government agencies: the departments of Labor and Employment and Foreign Affairs and the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO). In 2009, the three bodies spent a total of 19.7 billion pesos (USD 437 million) or 1.7 per cent of total government expenses in 2009. CFO, which is the key agency in charge of engaging permanent emigrants, received the smallest allocation among the three, at only 45 million pesos (USD 1 million) or 0.004 per cent of the national budget (Republic of the Philippines, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

Mexico's spending on its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a proportion of the total executive branch budget, is also quite low, at only 1 per cent or 5.3 billion pesos (USD 397 million) in 2009 (Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, 2009).<sup>3</sup> From this amount, approximately 6 per cent (USD 24 million) was spent on services provided to Mexicans abroad. This money funded the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) – the key agency driving Mexico's diaspora agenda, consular activities and other related programmes. At approximately USD 2.8 million, IME's budget for 2009 is the smallest portion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' total budget for services to Mexicans abroad (Laglagaron, 2010).

India and Mali both created separate ministries whose explicit purpose is to address the needs of diaspora populations. India's Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) received 80 crores (USD 17 million) for the 2009–2010 budget or 0.02 per cent of the overall central government budget (416,000 crores or USD 90 billion) during the same period. The Ministry of External Affairs, which is responsible for, among other things, maintaining consular presence abroad, received an appropriation that is six times more than MOIA (579 crores or USD 125 million) but still a very small proportion, relative to other government departments. Combined, the two ministries accounted for 0.16 per cent of total central plan outlay.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in 2009, the Ministry for Malians Abroad and African Integration had a total budget of about 1.8 billion CFA francs (USD 3.9 million.) Government funding for services provided to

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<sup>2</sup> Exchange rate used is USD 1 = 45 Philippine pesos; Republic of the Philippines, Republic Act No. 9524, General Appropriations Act Fiscal Year 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Exchange rate used is USD 1 = 13.52 Mexican pesos; total budget of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores) compared to the sum of all executive branch agency budgets.

<sup>4</sup> Exchange rate used is USD 1 million = 4.6 crores. For details of Central Plan Outlay by Ministries/Departments, see [http://indiabudget.nic.in/ub2009-10\(I\)/bag/bag4-2.htm](http://indiabudget.nic.in/ub2009-10(I)/bag/bag4-2.htm) (accessed July 2010)



Maliens abroad (via consulates) is budgeted through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which received 22.7 billion CFA francs (USD 49.3 million). Both ministries made up 7 per cent of the central government budget of 723.9 billion francs CFA (USD 1.6 billion) (Ministry of Economy and Finance (Mali), 2009).

The amount of money governments should allocate for diaspora institutions is highly debatable. In general, analysts use overall budget allocations to assess a country's spending priorities and values – examining, for example, how much is spent on defence versus health care or education. Determining the appropriate level of spending is difficult when the target audience and main beneficiaries have higher incomes than their compatriots at home and, in some cases, are not even citizens.

In the absence of reliable data or standards, one reasonable way of measuring spending might be to compare the budget allocation with the percentage of a country's population that lives abroad. With that in mind, Mali, Mexico and the Philippines, which have nearly 10 per cent of their respective populations abroad, could arguably increase their budget allocation to their diaspora-related efforts (World Bank, 2008; Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2007). Another suggested yardstick pertains to remittances sent as a percentage of GDP. Using this measure, the Philippines, where remittances make up 13 per cent of GDP, should be spending a significantly higher proportion of its budget than Mexico, Mali and India, where remittances are around 3 per cent of GDP (World Bank, 2008).<sup>5</sup>

However, developing countries with very limited or dwindling financial resources face real spending and allocation constraints. As the case of the Philippines shows, the Public Works and the Highways and Education departments respectively claimed 11 and 5 per cent of the 2009 budget. The largest budget allocation, about 252 billion pesos (USD 6 billion), or 22 per cent, went to paying interest on the national debt – a problem that plagues many heavily indebted countries (Republic of the Philippines, 2009).

Indeed, for many governments, one of the most pressing challenges in diaspora engagement is that of initiating programmes that do not drain the already limited public coffers, while bringing in critical financial resources.

## Technical know-how

Budgets alone are imperfect measures of State capacity. Spending more money does not necessarily mean a higher-quality outcome. For many countries, technical know-how – the operational knowledge and skills needed to pursue goals effectively – presents a larger hurdle than money.

Successful diaspora engagement requires designing smart ways of delivering services and programmes to a dispersed and heterogeneous population. A good case in point is the world's largest migrant-welfare fund operated by a sending-country government. Faced with increasing problems brought about by a rapidly expanding temporary-worker population abroad, the Philippine Government established the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) in 1981 to protect Filipino migrant workers and to provide them with various services – from

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<sup>5</sup> Both remittance and GDP figures are from 2006.

repatriation to new-business loans. In 2005, despite amassing huge reserves, OWWA spent only 0.03 per cent of its fund balance on services, in most cases meeting only the minimum requirements mandated by law. OWWA's limited experience in administering programmes partially explains its conservative spending. For instance, it has tried to provide livelihood loans for many years but has always had poor repayment rates. Aware of its service-delivery problems, OWWA opted to safeguard its funds by placing them in development banks (Agunias and Ruiz, 2007).

A lack of technical know-how can be an even greater constraint for destination-country governments than a shortage of funds. In the Netherlands, for example, a 2009 study of twinning projects found that medium-sized municipalities such as Arnhem, Meppel and Haarlem, which host a relatively small number of migrant groups, have successfully involved migrant organizations. On the other hand, large municipalities, such as Amsterdam, with its huge migrant population, learned that involvement with one migrant group over the other can create tension among groups and between the State and migrants. Migrant populations abroad are often politicized, which makes involvement with them problematic. Indeed, some Dutch municipalities have chosen to disengage from diaspora groups altogether to avoid dealing with diaspora politics (van Ewijk and Baud, 2009).

The difficulty in acquiring the operational knowledge and skills to effectively engage diasporas can be attributed to many factors. Long-standing programmes, such as that of OWWA in the Philippines, seem to have suffered from very little monitoring and evaluation.

For many engagement efforts, however, the key problem stems from the lack of sustained commitment within governments. Critical technical know-how is acquired typically through years of trial and error. Yet many government initiatives on diasporas tend to be short-lived and are dependent on the level of support from the central government, which can vary from one regime to another. For instance, the main government institution in charge of Moroccans abroad has been demoted and promoted as it has lost and gained support within the government. Started as a ministry in 1993, it was downgraded to an office under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1995 (Brand, 2002).<sup>6</sup> In 2007, it was promoted to its current position – an institution headed by a minister-delegate (undersecretary) directly under the Prime Minister's office.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in Yemen, various diaspora institutions have been created and taken down since the first office – the Department of Immigration and Expatriates – was set up in 1962. Most recent incarnations include the Ministry of Expatriates Affairs in 1990, the Expatriates Affairs Council in 1996, the Ministry of Expatriates Affairs in 1997, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants in 2005. In 2007, the diaspora institution was promoted back to the Ministry of Expatriates Affairs (Agunias, 2009). This lack of continuity greatly hinders institutional learning – a critical factor in building expertise.

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<sup>6</sup> See also [http://www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=62](http://www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=62) (accessed July 2010)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

## TRANSLATING DIASPORAS' PROMISE INTO REALITY

Confronting financial and technical constraints head-on means that governments need to learn how to successfully build expertise while sharing costs – financial and otherwise. Effectively loosening resource constraints requires adopting both conventional and pioneering approaches. In order to build capacity, governments may choose to (1) create innovative institutions and programmes; (2) capitalize on existing government structures and knowledge accumulated elsewhere; and (3) initiate and sustain meaningful partnerships with external actors.

### Creating innovative institutions and programmes

Squarely addressing resource constraints requires, first and foremost, innovative thinking. Some governments, for instance, have taken an atypical route by creating innovative institutions and programmes that utilize private resources to pursue decidedly public goals.

### Innovative institutions

For various reasons, some governments do not want to be seen to be spending too much on their diaspora or intervening in the affairs of destination countries. Others are looking for efficient and feasible approaches that would maximize engagement activities with minimum investment. The solution for some governments is to create quasi-governmental institutions that deliberately blur the distinction between non-governmental and governmental bodies.

Some governments, such as Korea and Morocco, have created *foundations* to indirectly manage their diaspora activities. In 1997, the Korean Government established the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF), a non-profit organization affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The foundation had a clear development mandate from the outset. Its primary goal is to “utilize the capabilities of overseas Koreans for national development in line with its globalization policy”. According to the foundation’s website, the Korean Government recognized the need to establish a government organization for overseas Koreans; however, “this idea came into conflict with the government’s policy of keeping the government small, and there was fear that it would cause some friction with the governments of the nations where the overseas Koreans were residing.”<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, in 1990, Morocco created the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad (FHII). Established via a royal decree, FHII is officially described as a “nonprofit institution with a social vocation, endowed with a moral personality and financial autonomy”. FHII is a private organization that has an especially close relationship with the Moroccan Government. It is not a government institution, although the government sets its mandate. Interestingly, at one point in time, the minister in charge of Moroccans abroad also ran the foundation. Currently, FHII’s president is Princess Lalla Meryem (Brand, 2002).

Other countries have chosen to create a government-managed *welfare fund* financed by migrants or their employers and/or recruiters. These funds, which can be found in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, among others, provide a range of services to migrants including pre-departure orientation seminars, loans, emergency repatriation, life and

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.okf.or.kr/eng/introduction/okfFlotation.jsp> (accessed July 2010)

medical insurance, and reintegration assistance. The set-up offers a potentially efficient and feasible solution for origin-country governments to share the cost of protecting their temporary migrants abroad.

The Philippines manages one of the largest welfare funds in the developing world, pooled from the mandatory USD 25 membership contributions of foreign employers and migrant workers. Entirely self-funded and receiving no budget allocation from the national government, the welfare fund has brought in more money than it has spent. This surplus is added to the fund's equity. As a result, the fund grew more than fourfold in 13 years – from 2.2 billion pesos (USD 47 million) in 1995 to nearly 12 billion pesos (USD 266 million) in 2008 (Overseas Workers Welfare Administration, 2009; Agunias and Ruiz, 2007). To place the magnitude of this amount in the Philippine context, the welfare fund's total assets were nearly twice the budget of its mother agency – the Department of Labor and Employment – and almost three times the budget of the Office of the President, during the same period.<sup>9</sup>

Creating *diaspora councils* (usually a mix of community leaders and government officials) can also be an excellent source of funding and technical know-how. Councils typically advise the government on diaspora-related matters, with minimal cost to the government. One of the earliest examples is Mali's High Council of Malians Abroad, which serves as the official representative of the diaspora in Mali and in the country of residence. Local councils are elected in various countries where Malian expatriates are concentrated. These national councils then elect representatives to the High Council (Agunias, 2009). Likewise, since 2003, Mexico's Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) has collaborated with an advisory and consultative body – the Consultative Council of IME (CCIME). The 2006–2008 CCIME had 100 of its members elected or appointed by the Mexican communities served by each of the consulates in Canada and the USA; 15 members were appointed based on merit and career.<sup>10</sup>

Diaspora councils are particularly significant since they bring resources to the table in terms of contacts, funding and ideas for implementing programmes. They are also an excellent source of feedback from, and relevant information about, the diaspora – information that diaspora institutions can use to justify requests for larger funding, among other things. For instance, in Mexico, largely due to the pressure exercised by CCIME members, funds collected as passport and consular ID fees now remain within the Foreign Affairs Ministry to finance the activities of the consular network (Gutiérrez, 2009).

## **Innovative programmes**

Beyond creating innovative institutions, governments can also choose to create programmes and projects that directly address financial and technical constraints in novel ways. For instance, one of the best-known programmes is a matching fund – a scheme whereby different levels of government allocate a dollar or more for every dollar invested by migrant organizations in their communities. Most frequently cited examples come from Mexico (where matching programmes were pioneered and popularized); the state of Zacatecas' Tres por Uno (3 for 1) programme is the most popular.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.dbm.gov.ph/index.php?pid=8&xid=28&id=461> (accessed July 2010)

<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.ime.gob.mx/ccime/ccime\\_06\\_08.htm](http://www.ime.gob.mx/ccime/ccime_06_08.htm) (accessed July 2010)

Considered by many observers to be a best practice, Tres por Uno has been replicated within Latin America and elsewhere. Although much has been written about this popular approach, there has been less emphasis on how ground-breaking the idea behind a matching fund was when it was first attempted. For instance, when the project started in the Mexican state of Zacatecas in the 1980s, there was an inherent lack of trust between the State and the diaspora. Thus, the government's motivation was not only to draw migrant resources for community projects at home, but also to generate a relationship of trust between the State and the migrants. The programme was designed to squarely address both goals simultaneously. Genero Borrego, the Zacatecan Governor at the initiation of the programme, was quoted as saying: "The risk that [the migrants] were running by putting a dollar into a public project, well, I was running that same risk. I wanted them to know that we were in it together" (Iskander, 2005).

Other governments who look to the Tres por Uno as a model would do well to retain the same innovative spirit that made the programme a success. The key challenge is not just a matter of taking the Tres por Uno model to scale or adapting it for another country or region. Rather, it is about cherry-picking different elements of the programme's design that might work if put together in the particular socio-economic and political contexts. For instance, in the USA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) recently awarded 14 diaspora-driven businesses in seven African countries matching grants ranging from USD 50,000 to USD 100,000. The awardees, however, were chosen through a highly competitive process – a diaspora contest aimed at identifying the most viable and sustainable start-ups and established enterprises. USAID also collaborated with Western Union (a private remittance-handling company), to jointly finance the grant (USAID, no date).

## Capitalizing on existing government structures and accumulated knowledge

Another way to augment capacity is for governments to work with existing structures and apply lessons learned in other countries. Reinventing the wheel, although feasible in some situations, may be a waste of resources in others. This may be especially true for governments with very limited resources at the outset. Governments may choose to capitalize on existing consular networks and link with other government offices, at both the national and the local level.

### **Consular networks**

Consulates remain the most important interlocutors for diaspora populations. A 2004 survey of International Organization for Migration (IOM) member governments revealed that 76 per cent had consular services interacting with citizens abroad (IOM, 2005). Consulates are in a unique position to gauge diaspora needs and partner with other actors in the private and public realm. They can play a key role for countries with well-established diaspora policies, where consulates are given special recognition and resources, as well as for those with frail policies, where consulates often appear to be the sole link to diaspora populations.

More than ever, governments are instructing their consulates to interact with migrants more systematically. A review of embassy and consulate websites of 30 origin countries with active diaspora policies suggests an extensive consular presence in the top destinations of their respective diasporas. The services offered at consulates varied, ranging from language instruction and the provision of notary services, to issuing identity cards and organizing discounted tour packages to the homeland – for business and leisure. Many consulates provide

information on developments at home – particularly those relating to business and other opportunities – as well as implementing programmes on culture, education and economic development (Agunias, 2009).

Many have expanded their diplomatic presence to places with large diaspora populations. For instance, although Mexico has maintained an extensive consular network in the USA since the 1800s, the government has established new consulates since 2000 in various US cities (Archibold, 2007; *Idaho Statesman*, 2009) and, as of mid-2009, has 50 consulates throughout the USA.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the Philippines has opened four diplomatic posts since 2008 to reflect the increasing presence of Filipinos in China, Ireland and the Syrian Arab Republic (GMA News TV, 2008; Borje, 2009). Currently, it maintains 88 offices in 65 countries.<sup>12</sup>

The composition of diplomatic staff has also evolved to accommodate diaspora needs and interests. Each Ethiopian Embassy has assigned a diplomat to handle expatriate issues (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia). Some 70–75 IME representatives in Mexican consulates in the USA are in charge of implementing IME programmes and projects (Cano and Délano, 2004). Likewise, given their focus on protecting its workers abroad, many consular offices of the Philippines have welfare and labour attachés to attend to distressed and abused workers.

### **Other government structures**

Governments may also augment capacity by capitalizing on the resources already existing in various government agencies. Diaspora engagement covers many traditional areas – from finance and trade, to arts and culture. Government expertise already exists in these areas and, instead of creating new institutions to launch the diaspora effort, governments may, for instance, choose to adopt a more decentralized approach. They may create intergovernmental committees or choose to support diaspora initiatives at the local government level in order to create synergy among different parts of the government.

For instance, Chile created the Interministerial Committee for Chilean Communities Abroad to formulate public policies on the diaspora. The committee is composed of 12 public institutions that, in one way or another, are responsible for addressing the needs and demands of the nearly 1 million Chileans residing abroad, including, for instance, the Directorate for Civil Registration and Identity, which issues ID cards and passports and registers marriages and births, and the National Health Fund, which provides publicly funded national health-care coverage (Mora, 2009).

Local-government units are also perfectly positioned to design diaspora programmes in tune with home-country community needs and opportunities. With proper coordination, they can complement the activities of the central government and share the cost of engagement. China, for instance, exhibits one of the most expansive networks of local diaspora offices. The competition for talent among local governments is so stiff that cities reportedly send delegations overseas to seek diaspora talent without notifying officials at Chinese consulates (Agunias, 2006). The Chinese Central Government has chosen to provide the overall policy direction on diaspora engagement, while giving relative independence to local offices so that

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.sre.gob.mx/acerca/directorio/consulados/dirconsulados.htm>

<sup>12</sup> See [http://dfa.gov.ph/?page\\_id=74](http://dfa.gov.ph/?page_id=74) and [http://dfa.gov.ph/?page\\_id=2492](http://dfa.gov.ph/?page_id=2492) (accessed July 2010)

they can adopt innovative methods suiting local needs (Agunias, 2009). Aggressive engagement at the local level can be also be found in some states in India, particularly Kerala and Gujarat, and in 29 of the 32 Mexican states.<sup>13</sup>

## Learning from others

Building upon the experiences of others is another route to building technical know-how. In the thinking and designing of a diaspora policy, governments need not start from scratch. Although many diaspora initiatives are new, others have a long record. A number of countries, such as Greece, Israel, Italy and Taiwan Province of China, have experience that offers critical lessons for today's policymakers.

The Indian Government, for instance, tasked a high-level committee with recommending a broad but flexible policy framework and country-specific plans to engage the estimated 20 million members of the Indian diaspora. For two years, the five-person committee (composed of two current members of the Indian parliament, two retired career diplomats, and an NGO leader) was tasked with studying (among other things) other governments' diaspora-engagement efforts in order to extract relevant lessons for India. In 2004, the committee produced an impressive, publicly available 600-page report that includes 22 country and regional profiles (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2002).

Other countries have taken a roughly similar route, but on a much smaller scale. The Emigrant Support Programme of Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs, for instance, has asked Ireland Funds (an international charitable organization) to outline best practices in diaspora engagement to identify viable strategies and models for Ireland (The Ireland Funds, 2009). Likewise, the governments of El Salvador, Moldova and Serbia have invited the Center for International Migration and Integration (an organization founded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) to conduct a course on diaspora-homeland partnerships. The course drew upon practical models from Israel's and other countries' experiences. The Salvadoran Government also sent its top diplomat in charge of diaspora affairs to visit the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify relevant practices (Center for International Migration and Integration, 2004–2009).

## Creating meaningful partnerships

Problems with funding and technical know-how also highlight why governments need meaningful partnerships with external actors. They must aggressively tap into the available pool of financial and technical resources from the private sector, other governments and international organizations.

*Private-public initiatives* could augment tight government budgets by leveraging community contacts and resources – for example, Mexico has aggressively pursued partnerships with various organizations in the USA to meet its goals on diaspora engagement. One project maintains on-site education centres that teach English to adult English language students. These

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<sup>13</sup> Mexican states include Aguascalientes, Baja California, Campeche, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Colima, Distrito Federal, Durango, Estado de México, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit Chiapas, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Queretaro, San Luis Potosí, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatán and Zacatecas.

centres are hosted by sponsoring organizations that provide the classroom and teachers. The National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional Para la Educación de los Adultos, INEA) and the National Council for Workforce Education (Consejo Nacional de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo, CONEVyT) provide the core curriculum, while the Mexican Government acts in a coordinating role. The success of other Mexican programmes, including those relating to health promotion, financial education and remittances, depends largely on their partner organization's resources and technical ability (Laglagaron, 2010).

*Other governments* can also make a difference by sharing the financial costs of engagement. Although many destination countries support their own diasporas abroad (such as Australia's fellowship initiatives for its expatriates, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council), some have initiated programmes supporting diaspora communities within its borders. For example, the United Kingdom's development agency – the Department for International Development (DFID) – initiated in March 2008 a GBP 3 million (USD 4.7 million) programme with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO – a UK-based international development charity) to support and help people from diaspora communities to work as volunteers in their countries of origin (VSO, 2008).

Indeed, the 'co-development' policy that France introduced in the early 1990s is now back in vogue. The concept made its debut as a theoretical justification for leveraging the resources of African migrant organizations in France to promote development in Africa. The approach emphasizes developing local economies and promoting partnerships between enterprises, local authorities, training institutions, and associations (Agunias, 2009b). Countries such as France, Italy and Spain have seen an increase in public policy plans and funding schemes to support co-development projects (Ostergaard Nielsen, 2008). Some developing countries have explored this shared interest with destination-country governments and identified projects of mutual interest.

For instance, in December 2000, France and Mali signed a co-development agreement. From 2003 to 2005, 250 return and reintegration programmes, 22 local development projects, and 10 projects for youth of immigrant ancestry (in France) were completed. Of the EUR 3.5 million (USD 4.8 million)<sup>14</sup> raised to finance the projects, around 70 per cent (EUR 2.5 million or USD 3.4 million) came from the French Government (Macalou, 2009).

Likewise, a number of Dutch municipalities have recently established relations with local governments in countries sending migrants to the Netherlands, such as Morocco, Suriname and Turkey. Twinning with these so-called "diaspora countries" is relatively new, with most ties established since 1999. At present, there are some 39 diaspora-focused municipal twinning initiatives from the Netherlands and their number is increasing (Hoetjes, 2009).

Governments have also partnered with *international organizations* such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations (UN) to initiate permanent return of the highly-skilled and well-financed members of the diaspora. IOM, for example, has been implementing 'return of talent' programmes in Africa (Wickramasekara, 2002), Latin America (Ibid) and, more recently, Afghanistan. Between 1983 and 1999, it reportedly succeeded in relocating about 2,000 expatriates to 11 African countries (El-Khawas, 2004).

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<sup>14</sup> Exchange rate used EUR 1 = USD 1.36549



In recent years, however, international organizations have focused less on the return and resettlement of migrants back in their countries of origin and more on the transfer of skills and financial resources, regardless of return. One of the best examples of this is IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA). MIDA aims to mobilize the skills and financial resources of African diasporas to support development projects at home. Described as a capacity-building programme, the project focuses on facilitating temporary movement and does not entail the systematic return of migrants (IOM, 2005).

## **SOME CAVEATS**

Governments alone cannot drive diaspora engagement, which is, by definition, a partnership between the diaspora and some actor in the country of origin or destination. In weighing their options in building capacity, governments of origin and destination countries should ensure that efforts are based on complementarity of skills, capacities and intentions, a solid understanding of respective responsibilities, agreed indicators of success, and complete transparency. Beyond that, a strong emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and frequent adjustments is also important.

### **Partnerships among equals**

Building capacity by creating innovative institutions and programmes, capitalizing on existing structures or creating partnerships with various actors, comes with risks, such as poor coordination on resource issues and misunderstandings about expectations. It is important to ensure that capacity-building efforts benefit from the solid commitment of all actors.

For instance, the Tres por Uno programme in Zacatecas, Mexico is a product of the active involvement of many stakeholders, especially the State and hometown associations (HTAs) abroad. During the programme's early phase in the 1980s, the Department of Planning's programme director went on numerous trips to the USA to contact individual migrants from the same town or village who had settled in a given city. The local official organized migrants into HTAs and supported their efforts to raise money for projects whose proposals and budgets had been prepared by the State beforehand. The State also organized and funded at least 17 visits for municipal presidents to campaign in American cities where their migrants worked and lived. The Zacatecan Governor certified and met with new federations of Zacatecan hometown associations and maintained strong channels of communication with those that were already well established (Iskander, 2005).

These proactive gestures are complemented by HTAs abroad. Apart from donating money, Zacatecan HTAs in the USA are involved in the identification, implementation and monitoring of projects. Especially during the project implementation phase, the Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California – the largest and oldest federation of Zacatecan hometown associations – works very closely with organizations based in their community of origin (EC/UN, 2009). The Federación also helps integrate new clubs into the federation by providing young organizations with the institutional support they need to become more solid and lasting than many of the temporary fly-by-night clubs.

Contrast that with the experience of MIDA Italy – a pilot project supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented between 2003 and 2004, to engage Ethiopian and

Ghanaian migrants in socio-economic development in their country of origin. An evaluation from IOM's Office of the Inspector General reveals uneven participation among partners. Despite MIDA Italy's success in meeting many of its goals, it was clear that most of the work was done by IOM and the Italian Government and, despite the strong interest shown by both countries during preliminary discussions, there was no formal institutional agreement with Ethiopia, while an inadequate agreement was signed in Ghana (IOM/OIG, 2005).

As IOM's Office of the Inspector General noted in the 2005 evaluation of the programme:

...there was no concrete commitment from the Governments or private sectors of the countries of origin to support pilot project implementation and play a pivotal role in integrating MIDA Italy into national policies for using the diasporas' skills and resources. Ownership of MIDA Italy did not rest with the African countries, as also recommended, but with the Italian Government (Ibid).

Ownership is critical because, without it, the sustainability of the programme is threatened. For instance, the website created to raise interest among the Ethiopian diaspora in investing in its country of origin was not made in collaboration with the Ethiopian Government. The website's sustainability is therefore not guaranteed (Ibid).

A lack of interest within the country of origin suggests that programmes' priorities are not arrived at cooperatively. For instance, IOM Rome initially thought that MIDA could generate interest and support from the Ghanaian Investment Promotion Centre. However, the centre's main objective is not to facilitate small-scale investments but to focus on medium- to large-scale investments. The Ministry of Agriculture did not participate either, although it could have contributed technical assistance (Ibid).

The experience of MIDA Italy and the Zacatecan Tres por Uno programme strongly suggests that meeting goals is not a complete or reliable indicator of success. The more important issue, particularly in terms of diaspora-engagement initiatives, is that of defining whose goals they are in the first place.

## **Monitoring, evaluation and frequent adjustments**

A strong emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and frequent adjustments should also be the foundation of more sustainable initiatives. It is extremely important to gather data on outcomes and evaluate whether the measures implemented produced the desired effects at a reasonable cost. Programmes meant to encourage diaspora engagement are also unlikely to work if they are too bureaucratic, too inflexible, or too slow to respond to diasporas' needs, interests and changing economic conditions. For policymakers, understanding when to make necessary adjustments is critical to effective implementation. Monitoring and evaluation can also prevent exploitation by vested interests and maintain trust among the various partners involved.

## THINKING BEYOND A DIASPORA POLICY

Governments have a key role to play in channelling diaspora resources to meet national goals. At the same time, many of the world's migrants seek positive involvement with their communities at home and abroad.

Effective engagement almost always requires a concerted effort towards capacity-building. Governments must commit to fully funding diaspora-engagement efforts and obtain the operational knowledge and skills needed to pursue goals effectively. To this end, they may create innovative institutions and programmes that use private resources to pursue public goals, capitalize on existing government structures, learn from the experiences of others, and tap into the financial and technical resources of the private sector, other governments and international organizations.

Diasporas are, however, a diverse lot, possessing various capacities and driven by myriad and, in some cases, divergent interests – something that also applies to the governments of origin and destination countries, as well as other actors. In weighing up the capacity-building options, it is important to ensure that efforts benefit from the solid commitment of all actors, with an emphasis on monitoring, evaluation and frequent adjustments.

In considering diaspora engagement, governments of origin and destination countries are better off if guided by modesty and pragmatism. An honest assessment of the governments' capacity and the available resources that can be used to initiate and, more importantly, maintain initiatives must be the first order of the day. Knowing one's limitations as well as one's strengths at the very outset is the key to making informed decisions about viable programmes. Obtaining information about diasporas is also a vital part of the process.

There may be cases where the current priorities of a diaspora may not coincide perfectly, or at all, with the needs of the origin or destination country. Also, government infrastructures may not always be the most appropriate mechanisms for diaspora engagement. This may be especially true for governments with severely limited capacity – financial, technical or otherwise.

In these cases, governments should strongly consider taking the *indirect route to diaspora engagement*. They may choose to remove barriers to engagement rather than actively building bridges – a more realistic approach and, perhaps, the most effective.

For instance, some countries of origin have legislated some form of dual nationality or flexible citizenship laws, granting political and special property rights to migrants while they are overseas. Ten countries in Latin America<sup>15</sup> already had such provisions in 2000 (Levitt and Sorensen, 2004). A recent estimate suggests that the number of countries allowing most of their citizens to have dual citizenship has more than doubled in the past 20 years. Afghans, Algerians, Iraqis and Tunisians are among the nationals allowed to vote in at least some national elections in destination countries. In some countries, such as the Dominican Republic, expatriates can run for office even if their primary residence is abroad. Some countries even reserve congressional seats for representatives of the diaspora.

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<sup>15</sup> Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

Governments in destination countries may also focus on ensuring that residence and visa arrangements facilitate diaspora access to their home countries. For example, application for naturalization in the USA can only begin after a five-year continuous residency requirement has been met; the clock is reset if the migrant is absent for more than six months, which essentially discourages permanent migrants from temporarily returning home.

Recently, there have been stronger calls for portable benefits, particularly relating to pensions and medical and life insurance, since the lack of portability is believed to discourage engagement by inhibiting temporary and, especially, permanent return.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that diaspora engagement does not exist in a vacuum. Indeed, despite the optimism associated with the promise of diaspora engagement, there is a pervasive notion that, somehow, the dismal political, economic and/or social conditions prevailing in a number of origin countries have been, and will continue to be, a major handicap for any diaspora-driven initiative. Initiatives from countries such as India, Mali, Mexico and the Philippines beg the question of how applicable their experiences are to other developing countries with smaller diaspora populations, less educated labour forces, weaker governments, and/or more severe social, political and economic instability. It is still debatable how unique the well-known cases are and whether they are replicable elsewhere.

Policymakers, at both ends of the migration stream, must therefore create a financial, institutional and socio-economic climate that is conducive to diaspora engagement. Particular attention should be made to ensure that a diaspora policy is also accompanied by a strong development policy in the country of origin. For example, although South Korea and Taiwan Province of China spent substantial resources in the early 1960s tracking and maintaining ties with highly-skilled nationals abroad, the scope was fairly limited, with the generous incentives being reserved for expatriates who could be useful in particular fields judged by government planners to be critical to future industrialization.

Despite these concerns, diasporas' potential to promote socio-economic development of their home country cannot and should not be readily dismissed. If the past is a good indicator of the future, then the prospect for many governments is still quite good. Diasporas have been engaged in supporting their home country long before governments took notice. Indeed, missing in this paper are examples of innovative and transforming initiatives in which the diasporas are the sole or dominant actor – the de facto initiatives that happen without the direct support or participation of governments. Even when there are few other building blocks available, creating even a single pole of attraction for diasporas can start a foundation for positive diaspora engagement.

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