



Report on Wilton Park Conference 883
UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING WITH DIASPORAS
Monday 3 – Thursday 6 December 2007

Introduction

1. Individuals have concurrent and layered identities, from the individual to the ethnic and national level. In addition, groups that arrive in a host country at different times may not communicate with each other. A diasporic identity often intersects with transnational relationships and other cross-border activities such as travel, business or communication. Therefore the criteria for defining diasporas are necessarily variable. Major events such as sports, disasters, elections and conflict can also serve to stimulate diasporic identification and solidarity. In recognition of this, governments are now seeking ways in which to engage positively with diasporic communities.

2. Diasporic activity today is characterised by: 'real time' linkages via modern communications technology; the unprecedented scale and modes of remittances; a new culture of migration that includes normative expectations; intensified homeland politics; home government outreach to diasporas, and the public display of people's homeland attachments.

3. In the socio-cultural sphere, people are adapting to their new environment whilst maintaining existing ties. This negotiation of hybrid identities can often be seen through the individual's participation in diasporic values, practices and institutions, particularly in terms of creative expression. Economically, businesses are becoming more oriented to diaspora populations, recognising the potential of 'brain circulation' and diaspora philanthropy. Governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also alert to the positive advantages for migration and development, including the emergence of home town associations, specialist NGOs and joint government programmes. Remittances are a particularly important feature of diaspora activity: in 2006 the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) estimated global remittance transfers at US\$301billion, with Asia as the main recipient followed by Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and the Near East.

4. Political engagement of diasporas often includes: lobbying and voting (often with dual citizenship) and homeland political campaigns; long-distance nationalism, whether progressive or reactionary; and consultation on intervention, (e.g. Iraq). In some instances, governments use diasporas to authenticate their policy choices.

5. The current growth and influence of diasporas raises a number of questions for both sending and receiving countries: how best to tackle the concerns of receiving governments and their populations? How can Western European countries, such as the UK, be most effective in promoting integration? How influential are diasporas on their home governments and vice versa? Should diasporas be able to define themselves and how can this identity be quantified? How far can diasporas influence religious belief and practice? Are diasporas the vanguard of a growing cosmopolitanism?

Is there an identity crisis?

6. There are inherent difficulties in defining diasporas, not least in that there are frequently multiple diasporas from a single country. For example, the Chinese diaspora in the UK consists of at least 5 separate 'waves', including recent economic migrants, a previous, more affluent, group from Hong Kong, and refugees arising from the war with Japan. These groups do not necessarily communicate with each other and may have little in common other than their country of origin. In addition, they will have been influenced over time by their relationships with other communities and by other aspects of their identity which may define, or even exclude them. For example, a gay Chinese person in the UK will have a distinct identity which may set them apart from more 'mainstream' groups. Another difficulty for the Chinese diaspora arises from the complexity of the Chinese language, in particular its incompatibility with the languages of many of the countries hosting significant Chinese communities. The Chinese government has recognised this and is considering some simplification of the grammar.

7. Zimbabwe provides another distinct example of complex identity. The political situation in Zimbabwe has, to some extent, had a uniting effect on the displaced population, bringing them together to support their compatriots at home through remittances, human rights activity and lobbying. Their core identity is bound up with politics both in Zimbabwe and the UK: they are politically active because they are outside their country, and outside their country because they are politically active.

8. British identity is currently conveyed to the diaspora through citizenship guidance and tests that can be seen to offer a highly artificial version of 'Britishness'. Paradoxically, the definition and testing of cultural or national identity may sometimes exclude diasporas and make it harder for them to integrate.

9. Contemporary European Islam raises particular issues. Some members of the new generation of British Muslims are unable to read the Quran in the original, and cannot therefore perceive the complex choices around the meanings of 'suras', that may be quoted as advocating cultural exclusion or inclusion. The scholar, Tariq Ramadan, proposes a dynamic modern form of Islam and suggests that, in an increasingly globalised world, it is necessary for all contemporary cultures to engage with the construction of identity. The concept of a 'European Islam' may not mean making Islam more European, but making Europe more Islamic. Islam involves an identity, the 'Umma', that is supposed to supersede national loyalties by constituting a family in God's name. This concept can conflict with national power structures, particularly in more restrictive states. It is also important not to treat Islam as an ethnicity although radical Islamic groups may visualise themselves as part of a diaspora, outside their 'homeland' of the Caliphate. It is argued that in order to advance reciprocal understanding, each 'side' has to be prepared to lose something.

The experience of communities

10. The experience of communities can differ widely. Members of the Bangladeshi community, for example, are increasingly defining themselves as Muslim and since the 1990s, in the UK, there is a tendency for newer migrants to perceive themselves as less 'British'. The political influence of constituent communities is illustrated, for example, by George Galloway continuing his campaign for an East London parliamentary seat during a visit to Bangladesh. In the 2006 local elections in the UK, some candidates in East London campaigned successfully on

the basis of their Bangladeshi village identity. In London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, where 60% of children have a first language other than English, some tensions are now emerging amongst migrant groups between the more established communities and newer arrivals from e.g. Eastern Europe. In this context, it is important that local authorities respond promptly and appropriately to demographic changes and recognise that the effects of displacement and deprivation, such as poverty and segregation, can create problems for the communities. There are instances whereby people from the same town or village in the home country end up fighting in rival gangs in the housing estates of east London. This can be seen as an articulation of disaffection with their relatively low status in the receiving country.

11. These changes in contemporary identity pose significant challenges for governments in developing both domestic and foreign policy. Many governments are keen to promote diversity and inclusive policy development whilst ensuring a coherent national identity and allegiance. The Canadian model is based first and foremost on the notion of a Canadian constitutional identity. The Turkish government maintains the position that treating groups as diasporas can inhibit integration, however it refrains from policies which impose Turkish identity on its migrant population.

12. It is argued that there is a strong affinity with India among the Caribbean diaspora, but that there is no comparable attachment to Africa. By contrast, African identity in the Americas has frequently been defined through the history of slavery: many Afro-Americans tend to identify themselves with the African continent rather than a specific country. The Rastafarian community presents a particular case, whereby their attempts to gain cultural and religious recognition in Ethiopia have been largely unsuccessful.

13. The concept of 'stacked' identities is worth exploring. For example, it is said that Guyanese opt to communicate within ethnic or political groups before they will converse as a diaspora; equally Mexicans have more productive links as Zacatecanos or Oaxaqueños, than they do as Mexicans. Research findings show that young Muslims in the UK have strong attachments both to Islam and to their immediate location, but not necessarily to the nation state.

The risks of getting it wrong

14. The recent public debate on integration in the Netherlands has tended to focus on Moroccan and Turkish guest workers who arrived from the 1970s onwards. Public discourse on migration has become increasingly polarised since 9/11, in response to which the Dutch government has introduced more effective integration strategies for new migrants, and acknowledged the segregation and discrimination previously experienced by some communities. One area for attention has been the use of language including experimentation with the word for 'foreigner'. A recent government planning document referred repeatedly to the concept of 'participation', outlining ways in which new arrivals should participate and therefore integrate more effectively from the point of arrival.

15. Until recently, efforts by the Dutch government to address radicalisation among second generation Muslims have not involved them effectively in the discussion. It is difficult to ensure appropriate representation: there are many different views within the communities and it is problematic if governments expect them to speak with one voice. A movement to create a Muslim political party could provide an important steppingstone for more Muslims to engage with mainstream politics and demonstrate, through the democratic process, how far the party represents wider views.

16. In a climate where the contact between Muslims and the government is mainly on issues of security, extremism and radicalisation, it can be difficult to extend the dialogue to more mundane cultural and municipal issues and this can lead to these matters being given lesser priority, or ignored altogether. However, culture plays an important role in bridging gaps between diasporas and the host country: the artistic outputs of diasporas can often help to open minds and increase tolerance where there is otherwise resistance.

17. Diasporic communities may provide a space where non-state actors can recruit potential terrorists, but they are also a source of invaluable knowledge for intelligence-gatherers. The present debate on terrorism has raised awareness of the connections between international and domestic events and the role of diasporas is seen as influential on sending countries as well as through their lobbying potential in the UK. However, it can be problematic when governments focus on security in

relation to newer migrant communities: in the UK recent acts of terrorism appear to have been carried out by people who have been in the country for at least a generation and who were apparently well integrated.

18. Policy makers are faced with a complex dilemma: to what extent can policy solutions impact on the integration of diasporas and reduce short term dissidence and how much should be left to individuals to work out over the long term?

Is the contribution of diasporas valued?

19. There are a number of examples of effective government engagement on both the sending and receiving side. The Nigerian government has a unit devoted to managing relations with the diaspora, and has set aside land to attract potential returnees; Canada engages with diaspora members on conflict resolution in their home countries. Some diasporas have more governmental contact than others, for example, the Caribbean and Iraqi diasporas in Canada have strong links. The Canadian government is considering a number of areas where the involvement of diaspora communities could further support policy. These include: greater involvement of communities in human rights monitoring (specifically being considered with regard to Latin America); strengthening the input of the Afghan communities to policy decisions about Afghanistan; and harnessing links with Chinese diaspora to inform trade policy on China.

20. Host countries can do much to encourage the development of business and commerce among diasporas, to support economic growth in the sending country. However, maximizing diasporic contributions is most effective where there is active political engagement and not merely remittance transfers: diasporas can and should lobby for voting rights and political office, as a further demonstration of allegiance to the government of the sending country.

21. Some governments value diasporas as a source of information or to support policy decisions and there have been numerous occasions when advice from the diaspora has assisted during times of political turmoil. For example, when diplomatic staff of the British Embassy in Addis Ababa were kidnapped, the UK government sought information from the Ethiopian community in the UK, resulting in quick and effective action. Consultations with senior Nigerians in the UK led to policy

improvements addressing the problem of child trafficking in the Nigerian diaspora. However, there is a tendency for governments to engage with the diaspora only at times when they need help, rather than on a long-term, sustainable basis.

22. Difficulties can arise when different diaspora groups from the same country lobby for different policies. There is also a view that the influence of diasporas on foreign policy will always be partial and should be treated with caution. Furthermore, some people in receiving countries are concerned about the economic influence of diasporas and object to the perceived flow of money out of the country to developing regions.

23. A 'middle tier' of diasporas, such as Indian professionals, contributes to both sending and receiving countries. However, less skilled migrants can suffer abuses in both the labour and social spheres and there are instances where they are clearly exploited from the point of departure. There are upwards of 3,000 recruiting agencies in Sri Lanka alone, which have been set up to meet the labour demands of countries such as Qatar. These agencies do not always work in the best interests of the migrants' rights, often winning contracts by forcing their bids down to the lowest possible level resulting in low pay and sometimes compelling migrants to pay their own travel costs. In such cases, the migrant population can be caught in a policy trap where the sending country cannot enforce rights, and the receiving countries is unwilling to sign conventions on treatment of migrants, leaving employers free to abuse their labour force. Remittances to the home country often have the effect of subduing protest against such discriminatory practices.

24. In general, mobile populations retain an affinity to the sending country for many generations, but more effective policy can assist in maximising the potential of these attachments.

The role of diasporas in development

25. In the absence of comprehensive figures that demonstrate the costs and benefits of migration, many assumptions are made about the links between diasporic communities and development. However, there are strong indications that remittances and the investment of skills of returning migrants play an important role in promoting the economies of sending countries. An example of a successful model

is the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) project which links Sudanese health professionals in Europe with the health ministry in Sudan, facilitating skill sharing and contributing to training in hospitals back home.

26. There is a tendency for diasporas to be excluded from the development community, in spite of their contribution in terms of remittances and ideas. However, the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, has worked actively to develop policy on diaspora engagement, with particular regard to their impact on development in countries of origin. In recognition of the heterogeneity within diasporas, DFID has supported the formation of an umbrella body 'Connections for Development', which is designed to provide an interface with government for the diverse voices of the communities and to try to overcome the difficulties of identifying who is representative of which communities. DFID has also supported an independent website, 'SendMoneyHome.org', that facilitates 'comparison-shopping' among remitters and has apparently led to a 5.6% decrease in remittance transfer charges.

27. There are a number of dilemmas regarding the role of diaspora communities in delivering development objectives. For example, smaller and under-funded NGOs may not have the infra-structure in place to satisfy donors that the allocation of funding is being carried out within their accountability frameworks. In some cases, it can be argued that multi-lateral organisations are better placed to respond to large scale problems such as famines and natural disasters. However, it is important that development policy is not monolithic and that the in depth knowledge, cultural links and flexibility of diaspora groups are employed to best effect and in a way that is sensitive to local conditions. It is necessary to understand the motives of states who are engaging with diasporas: do they want to replace official aid by providing skills and talent, or to create ongoing relationships that promote investment and return?

28. As with any community, diasporas are complex and contradictory, and will have different points of view on development and what is best for the sending country. Diasporas should be seen as part of a set of wider relationships between migration and development, which includes the flow of people, money and relationships. It is also important to recognise that the role of diasporas in contributing to their countries can differ widely. Some countries have a large

overseas diaspora but have not developed effective mechanisms which will allow them to contribute. The Caribbean community has a strong sense of attachment to the region but there is still limited analysis of ways in which the diaspora can benefit their home country. A recent study from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) shows that 5.5 million people in the British diaspora are not perceived as an important resource by their own government.

29. The benefits of circular migration are not yet fully appreciated by policy makers, perhaps due to the assumption that future migration patterns will replicate past ones. However, the positive benefits of return could be boosted by reducing the barriers to mobility: restrictive border policies can discourage people from returning home. There is a growing body of evidence which illustrates the complexity of migration statistics, for example, 10% of immigrants who leave the UK go to a region other than their original home country and 1 in 5 British residents moving to the UK are not British nationals. The IPPR is planning a 2008 study of return patterns in Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland and New Zealand and country studies will be done by the Global Development Network over the next few years to build an evidence base on the effect of migration on development.

30. Researchers could use remittance patterns as a proxy for diaspora involvement: for example, IPPR research shows that remittances from the UK to Mexico are acyclical, whereas those from Germany to Turkey are economically cyclical. This could suggest that Mexicans are remitting directly because of close relationships, while Turks, who could be second or third generation, may be providing foreign direct investment. However, this parallel should be treated with caution and not a substitute for core research. Any exercise to measure the success of diaspora initiatives should: consider effects longitudinally, as costs or benefits may not last; study social aspects of development and not take a narrow economic view; and be critical about remittances' and the impact of other investment flows: a 20% increase in remittances year on year, does not necessarily equate to a 20% increase in economic development.

How does the experience differ for women?

31. A recent study has shown that 90% of black women in the UK over the age of 45 were born outside the country. However, the experiences of women are as

diverse as the term 'diaspora' and there is no single way in which they can be defined: age, literacy and language all impact on the ability of women to engage and contribute.

32. Diasporas use the same social mechanisms to build community in the home and in the receiving country: these include church, family and shared interest groups. According to a recent study of successful diaspora businesswomen, the high expectations of family are a chief driver of success. However women are often more active behind the scenes, usually as the result of restrictions in the country of origin that impact on their ability to engage fully in advocacy and politics. Women tend to earn less than men, and diaspora women earn less, on average, than other women. Furthermore, women overseas who develop their intellectual and personal strengths may find themselves marginalised because they are acting outside the social norms and conventions. Personal security may also impact on their ability to operate successfully in both the sending and the receiving country. In response to this, in the last 15 years, there has been a significant rise in professional networks, responding to the needs of women.

33. There is an increasing recognition of the gender specific aspects of diasporic movement and community. In the last 10-15 years there has been a rise in transnational families and global care chains, where men and women may move to different parts of the world and leave the children with grandparents. Furthermore, diasporic groups are often heavily unbalanced with regard to gender, for example, the Filipino diaspora in the UK consists of 70% women in their 20s, while the Afghan diaspora in the UK is made up of 70% men in their 40s.

34. Values can often hinder men or women from excelling, and more often these align with patriarchal traditions. Women tend to be regarded as the 'carriers of culture' within diasporas and the role of mentoring the next generation frequently falls to them: the 'mother tongue' is a key part of belonging, and can give children the option to return to the country of origin successfully. In addition, informal gatherings of diaspora groups often grow around cultural and domestic rituals overseen by women, providing a conduit for the inter-generational transfer of information and traditions.

35. Networks which empower women frequently go beyond ethnic or diasporic boundaries, for example, the 'Women on Top' group in the Netherlands, which has created a career network of women by profession. In situations where individual women are successful in gaining prominence within their own communities, the positive benefits extend to all women and do much to redress the cultural and social imbalance between the old and the new.

What can we expect to see in the next generation?

36. The younger generation experiences strong push and pull factors: unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunity cause young people to move, as do the availability of education and opportunity elsewhere. They can be highly motivated by entrepreneurial schemes including the prospect of setting up businesses that straddle national boundaries. Host governments could do more to recognise the potential of this resource and to find ways in which they could maximize the contribution young people can make. Governments could also increase investment in schemes that promote social cohesion, encourage political representation and support young people in tackling the complexities of differing cultures. It should be recognised that young can often be hampered by a sense of disempowerment, often enhanced by the traps of legal status.

37. For the young, transnational identities, which are neither specifically cultural nor religious, are emerging to take the place of the home country identity. For some there may be a significant 'identity void' in the host country, compounded by a sense of alienation from the political process. Young people can be seen as carriers of culture in both directions, as they are often quick to understand the codes and languages of both sending and receiving countries. They may thus have considerable power to shape culture at both ends of the migration journey although the ability to move rapidly between countries may work against the formation of any sense of belonging. Some countries are coming up with ways to extend diasporic identity into subsequent generations. For example, the Chinese 'roots' initiative where young people are invited back to see where their families came from; programmes to bring young Jews to Israel, and India's active manufacturing of a diasporic identity that extends into the third or fourth generation. However, there can be a serious mismatch between the perceptions of the home country and the reality on return and the resultant disillusionment can often lead to re-migration.

38. In a worst-case scenario the second generation may find themselves in 'diasporic purgatory', as can be seen among the Guyanese diaspora, where people leave with no intention of coming back, but recreate the home country in the receiving society. The overall experience of young Africans in the diaspora, however, indicates that they tend to be highly motivated and value education and skills, which are often applied to starting businesses and to political activity. There are also indications that there is greater resilience to racism than in previous generations as demonstrated by recent robust challenges to lazy media stereotypes portraying young Africans as only good at sports or entertainment.

How can states respond to transnational flows?

39. States are primarily designed to represent and govern their own citizens and are not built to respond to diasporas. However, there are now opportunities for states to alter their architecture to accommodate a greater diversity of needs and increase a sense of belonging for all citizens. At a time when people are increasingly thinking about themselves within several simultaneous, national contexts it may be possible to reconsider citizenship within a cosmopolitan agenda.

40. Governments are faced with clear choices about their engagement with diasporas: including how far they are prepared to define the roles and relationship and in what ways they are prepared to resource and support activities. Some sending country governments tend to view diasporas solely as a source of revenue, only addressing ways to facilitate the sending of remittances and ignoring the wider potential. More could be done to build the capacity of organisations in order to empower migrants abroad and in the homeland. In some cases governments may be unclear as to the objectives of engagement and at what level. Diasporas too may not be clear about what they want from their relationship from governments. Greater clarity on both sides would be a positive step forward.

41. Small states may not have sufficient capacity to mobilise their diasporas and, for them, the brain drain may have a disproportionately large impact: in some cases diasporas can be the same size, or larger, than the national population of a small state. Many countries are both sending and receiving diasporic communities and in

some cases, such as Guyana, this has led to severe ethnic tensions between its diaspora and pre-diaspora population.

42. The Mexican government has developed a clear strategy in relation to its diasporic community. Of Mexicans living outside the country, 98% are in the US, amounting to about 30 million people. Of this population, 11 million are first generation, 1 in 2 Mexicans abroad have a relative in Mexico and at least 1 in 7 Mexican workers lives in the US. In 2006, this resulted in remittances of \$23,053bn, equivalent to 3.1% of the GDP. The Mexican government originally created the programme for Mexicans abroad in 1990, at a time when the illusion of impermanent migration was receding and it was becoming clear that the exodus may be indefinite. The migration policy of many governments means that skilled workers can usually circulate freely, but the low-skilled cannot. This can lead to depopulation, as the only way the undocumented can see their families is to have them migrate too. The Mexican government has a policy of circular migration, believing that this will result in more Mexicans retaining the home country as their place of permanent residence.

43. The Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME) was formed in 2006 to coordinate and set policy for all government departments dealing with Mexicans abroad. At that time, the US government was reluctant to engage with the Mexican administration on migration and migrant issues, so the IME provided a way to exert influence in spite of a degree of diplomatic disempowerment. The engagement strategy of the IME includes the following: an advisory council of 125 community representatives elected by the people, who meet twice a year; the 'Jornadas informativas' programme, which organises conferences in Mexico for diaspora leaders; a daily email update to 11,300 community leaders in the US; text messaging and a website; a clear 'service agenda' in education, health and community organisation, including the 3-for-one programme where local, state and federal governments provide matching funding to remitters.

44. The IME has identified 10 key lessons for governments who want to engage with their diaspora:

- i. Ensure there is a professional bureaucracy;
- ii. Accept there will be a conflicting relationship between consuls and community leaders: migrants will have a difficult relationship with the country that did not provide enough opportunity to stay;

- iii. Credibility depends on the independence of the diaspora counterpart – they cannot function if they are perceived as puppets of the sending country government;
- iv. Avoid the ‘show me your leader’ attitude, as well as trying to deal with a single diaspora relationship;
- v. Relationships and networks must be created in advance and for the long term;
- vi. The home government’s most important contribution is building skills, capacity and leadership among the diaspora;
- vii. The diaspora is the natural ally of those who want to create greater economic and social openness in the home country;
- viii. Synergies can only be created issue by issue, since the government and diaspora won’t agree on everything;
- ix. Lobbying efforts are a two-way street – diasporas cannot just be used to lobby the receiving government, but will also want to use their power to lobby the sending country;
- x. Diaspora programmes can be counterproductive if the sending government doesn’t respect the immigrants’ attachment to the host country, or if there is insensitivity in dealing with dual loyalties.

45. The main advice to diaspora networks is to focus on consular representation and lobby home governments to invest in consular infrastructure and training.

Business and Diasporas

46. A number of large employers now have diaspora networks. Factors in their success include a willingness to engage and listen on the part of the companies, and to use their feedback and contributions actively. The economy ultimately benefits from the positive contributions made by these groups to the overall success of the company.

47. The worldwide Shell Group engaged diversity specialists in the late 1990s, to recruit more minority workers into the company and to reduce career discrimination against those who already worked there. Minority groups within Shell now include a gay network and various ethnically-based groups. In 7 years, the African network has increased African recruitment in the UK; increased promotion of black staff to management level, including the appointment in 2006 of the first ever African

managing director in Nigeria; and has created career paths within the company. It has also increased supplier diversity. The network covers the UK, US, Netherlands and a number of African countries, and has a membership of 270 including both Africans and those of African heritage (including Caribbean) in Europe. It operates across countries in pursuit of specific objectives- for example, an external affairs team was formed to maintain contact with the people of the Niger Delta with regard to environmental concerns.

48. The network engages with other staff within Shell using events such as Black History day to connect with the wider community and to host seminars on black/African issues. Plans are underway to increase the engagement of middle managers who are sometimes reluctant to release their staff for events and discussions including engaging motivational speakers of African descent who will appeal to all workers. The Shell network's influence has built over time, and it is now consulted by management, particularly on local issues. There is also a collaboration with the London Mayor's office on a system for benchmarking diversity and inclusion in big companies in the UK, and monitoring statistics for attraction and retention of minority talent.

49. The corporate world, with an increased emphasis on growth and job creation in less developed countries, could do much to support the international community in achieving the millennium development goals. Diaspora and development organisations can learn from the way businesses leverage their influence to create impact. Diasporas may also have an advantage as private sector investors because they know both home and receiving country markets and practices.

50. Attracting diaspora investment can be achieved by the same policy tools as attracting any foreign investment: improving the business climate and the legal environment to increase investor security are important factors. However, Africa is lagging behind Asia in identifying imaginative and workable ways to use diaspora contributions. There is a significant shift occurring whereby remitters are increasingly moving beyond philanthropy to investment and countries need to become more business-like in the way they respond. For example, 60% of growth in Africa comes from indigenous enterprise. Diasporas may have emotional ties to a

country but nonetheless will make rational economic judgments about investments and will not commit to countries which fail to recognise these opportunities.

51. The IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) Programme focuses on physical returns, but also considers the value of 'virtual returns', which has been successful in creating a flow of talent and information from the diaspora to Africa. 'Mentori' is an online organisation offering storage, communications and social networking to help diaspora businesses connect with interests and suppliers in African countries. It also assists organisations to connect with their staff globally. It may be in the interest of states to provide incentives to formalise networking organisations. There are useful models to draw on: the 200 businesses involved in the Business Action for Africa network do so for free, with special access offered to sponsors, whilst the Skoll Foundation offers awards to social entrepreneurs, many of whom are from diasporas.

52. Wireless technology provides further opportunities. Although current costs are prohibitive, it is likely that this will change rapidly in the next 5 years. The strategy in Rwanda, a landlocked country with few natural resources, to transform the country into the Silicon Valley of Africa provides an example of a strong policy intervention that does not distort markets.

53. The challenge for government strategists is to work with businesses to foster growth abroad and to create the right environment for investment, including from diasporas.

How can diasporas exert influence?

54. There is a natural tendency amongst diasporas to seek to influence the policies of the host government, as they may affect family members in the country of origin. For example, UK interest groups on Armenia, Kosovo, Syria and many other nations, regularly organise trips and information sessions for parliamentarians to increase their understanding of the impacts and aims of foreign policy decisions. Politicians are influenced by their constituencies, all-party parliamentary groups, pressure from outside these groups and lobbyists. During the Lebanese conflict in 2007, information from Lebanese diaspora members provided new insights into the country situation which fed into foreign policy via a number of routes. Whilst

diasporas are not the major influence on policy-making, the impact of diaspora thinking has clearly grown.

55. For migrants from the former Yugoslavia, the consequences of the past and present political and ethnic divisions at home have made it especially hard for the diaspora to act as a unified advisory or lobbying force in the UK. However, the experience and lessons of building consensus as a diaspora in the host country can provide skills that help in rebuilding and reforming the home country if migrants can return. Where countries don't have the resources to establish an embassy abroad, diasporas can help to fill the gap, creating a complex dynamic that is often challenging for sending and host governments to manage.

56. The basis of engagement has changed dramatically since, for example, the perception of diasporas as political dissidents during the Cold War period. They are sometimes instrumentalised at great cost e.g. Mohammed Chalabi in the Iraq conflict. They can also often be used as political lightning rods, as was the case with the young Cuban boy, Elian Gonzalez. In other instances they can effect significant political change from abroad, as Jacob Zuma did working for the African National Congress.

57. Diversity among diasporas should not be quelled in the hope of providing a politically unified front. The type of engagement depends to some extent on status: refugees may engage differently from voluntary migrants. In addition a number of factors may militate against effective participation in the political process, from political divisions to lack of knowledge among host governments. The moments at which diasporas are most noticeable are not necessarily indicative of the strength, or otherwise, of their relationship with the host government.

Diasporic communication networks and new media

58. The BBC World Service, which has a very diverse staff group, is an example of a news medium with a strong track record of trust with its audiences, particularly in Africa where a large percentage of the population do not have access to the internet and other new technologies. A recent sociological study: 'Tuning In: Diasporic Contact Zones at BBC World Service', provides a useful insight into the interaction between audiences and new media. The study considered ways in which the media

has influenced policy on issues such as Iraq, including the influence of newer sources including Al Jazeera. The study found:

- i. Mainstream news sources are highly resilient: contrary to perceptions, those taking part in the study identified that traditional sources provided the majority of news. However, when an event such as 9/11 occurs, people use an array of media to compare and contrast information. In particular, those with a migrant background who aspire to exercise their citizenship, saw access to, and representation on, the news media as vital to democratic debate. Audiences were consistently disappointed on this issue.
- ii. There is a gap between diasporic publics, journalists and politicians. Policymakers often use the media to legitimise their policies, and see news producers as obstacles to their goals. e.g. the images of Abu Ghraib torture were slow to be released because of government pressure: the story only broke fully when the images were released. An adversarial relationship exists between policymakers and minorities, and news producers see themselves as caught in a battle between politicians and civil society groups. Diaspora groups see themselves as caught in a discourse on terrorism and securitisation, and are seen to be taking a position if they speak out or if they keep quiet.
- iii. Media discourse has become highly securitised to the point of being weaponised: people are seeing the media as a weapon of war which is used to justify and promote policy. Citizens are seeing these propaganda wars as part of a government agenda to legitimise its actions on security, whilst failing to preserve economic security and human rights.

59. The portrayal of groups will often change according to circumstances, as illustrated by the Israeli politician, Abner Eban's description of the way in which the diaspora defined its voice in the 1940's when Israel was formed. He referred to the initial use of the images of the holocaust and the biblical identity of exiles in order to be heard by Christian audiences. At a later stage this was replaced by a discourse of heroism and pioneership.

60. In the 21st century, media literacy has become essential to political literacy and the relationship between the public, politicians and journalist is a complex one. The public is increasingly forced to distinguish between different types of communication; states are faced with the emergence of new technologies which

diminish their ability to manage messages. Responsible media, whilst aspiring to present the facts, have inherited certain frameworks for the way in which they present information, including the portrayal of certain ethnic or national groups.

61. Diasporas and those in the home country create their own discourse about which news sources are most reliable or useful, and these may differ. The use of communication between home and host country is even more important now that migration is no longer a one-way trip. Furthermore, technology has evolved to the point where information operates in real time on a daily basis and this speed, depth and immediacy fundamentally changes the relationship between the sender and the recipient.

62. Diasporas are often quick to adopt new technologies. They were ahead of the satellite television revolution, and are at the forefront of using internet communication. The internet offers new opportunities: the content is largely user-driven and provides an opportunity to respond to the omissions or even bias of the conventional news media. By contrast, broadcast licences are expensive, difficult to obtain and often state-controlled.

63. Homeland issues are often at the core of the ethnic media. However, the longer a group has been in a host country, the more its news media will produce stories about local culture, politics and history. New technology, such as online newspapers, allows the media to link up a large number of diaspora nodes across the world, achieving economies of scale, stimulating ideas across communities and addressing relatively narrow categories of interest.

64. In this context the traditional gatekeepers of media, editors and publishers, may be finding their influence diminishing. For example, citizen reports from Iraq have gradually gained ascendancy over conventional journalism by the international news channels. However, access to the new media is limited by poverty, age, preference and literacy and it is misleading to conceive of the 'global village' with everyone taking part in one big internet dialogue. Some authorities accuse new media of offering tools to terrorist groups, e.g. Al Qaeda's effective use of the internet, and the swiftness with which the killing of a rebel Kurdish leader was

followed by attacks against Turkish embassies around the world, can both be attributed to the rise of new technology.

Collective engagement and the role of policymakers

65. In the UK, DFID has had mixed success in its engagement with diasporas in a range of contexts, from the role of remittances to political engagement. In some cases policymakers are wary of the risks of engagement with groups, arguing that they may not be fully representative. There are also weaknesses in the ways in which governments evaluate the effectiveness and added value of interventions. Contracts, communicated in clear, jargon free language could outline the added value of engagement for both government and for diaspora groups. These compacts would also identify the areas of common interest and set out shared objectives and outcomes. Diasporas can be very effective as informal diplomats and should not be seen as tools of foreign policy goals or as a financial resource to support government projects.

66. The political influence of diasporas can have a major impact on government policy. Canada's controversial decision to acknowledge the Armenian genocide, which had a negative impact on trade relations with Turkey, came about partly as the result of diaspora lobbying. A recent visit by the Dalai Lama, hosted by the Canadian government, led to threats of retribution from China. Once described as 'the world's greatest hotel', Canada continues to expect a commitment to the constitution whilst recognising that, for many of its citizens, there will also be loyalty to the source country. This balance may shift as diasporas join the dominant power structures and renegotiate their relationship with the state.

67. The relationship between diasporas, policy makers and host populations is a complex one. In the UK, recent migration from eastern Europe has led to references of 'overcrowding' and 'congestion' betraying a sense of threat and insecurity from some parts of the host population. There are also sensitivities regarding the allocation of resources with perceptions that some groups are being 'rewarded' for their differences. It is important that politicians do not react to ill informed opinion with ill informed and short-term policy.

68. The concept of diaspora is dynamic and difficult to crystallise and it may be more beneficial to retain a broad definition. However, governments need to be proactive in understanding: what it means to be part of a diasporic community; how the migration occurred; the inter-action within diasporas and between different groups; and how people can be supported to participate fully in the host community. There is much to gain from understanding and engaging with the diaspora and support for their networks will do much to assist people in reaching their full potential.

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