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e-Discussion Report on
**Participation of Diaspora
In Peacebuilding and Development**

Stabilization & Peacebuilding Community of Practice, September 9th – October 24th 2011

March 19, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

We would like to thank everyone who contributed and followed the e-discussion on Participation of Diaspora in Peacebuilding and Development, facilitated by the [Stabilization and Peacebuilding Community of Practice](#) (SPCOP) together with the [Bonn International Center for Conversion](#) (BICC). The e-discussion was launched on September 9th and 10 responses were received from field practitioners, headquarters staff, policy experts and members of the diaspora.

The final summary of the responses received is outlined in the following report. Additionally, the summary of responses and recommendations will be posted on the BICC website and to inform future peacebuilding research and forthcoming events hosted by BICC.

Thank you for sharing your ideas, observations and experiences.

Best Regards,

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Guest Moderator

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Report

Many diaspora activists and organizations are actively engaged in economic, political, social, and cultural affairs in their countries of origin. Whether it is through providing political or material support to their compatriots or mobilizing direct actions to bring international attention to issues and policies that impact their country of origin, the role of diaspora individuals and communities is significant. In 2010, a team of researchers involved in Diasporas for Peace ([DIASPEACE](#)) published the [“Handbook for Practitioners and Policymakers on the Participation of Diasporas in Peacebuilding and Development”](#). Based on the premise that international peacebuilding efforts and diaspora contributions to peacebuilding and development coexist as two separate parallel systems, the handbook aims to expand the knowledge base about diaspora contributions to peacebuilding by exploring the central question: “Could the impact of both diaspora contributions and external assistance programs be increased if the two were to explore opportunities for better facilitation, synergy and partnership?”

To foster the exchange of ideas and experiences among various practitioners and academics in the field of stabilization and peacebuilding on the subject of diaspora, the [Stabilization and Peacebuilding Community of Practice](#) (SPCOP) and members of [DIASPEACE](#) facilitated an e-Discussion from September 9th through October 24th, 2011 to discuss the engagement of diaspora members and organizations in peacebuilding, stabilization, development efforts.

The e-Discussion took place via e-mail listserv and intended to gather specific recommendations, experiences, and insights from practitioners, academics and other diaspora experts on the engagement of diaspora members and organizations in the planning, analysis, design, and/or implementation of peacebuilding programs, activities or missions.

The e-Discussion participants shared their personal experiences and insights from other sources. The discussion was centered on the following questions:

1. Describe your experience working with diaspora-based organizations in the context of peacebuilding or development projects. How did the cooperation come about? What were the motives for establishing the cooperation? What was the value-added of a joint project between diaspora-based organizations and international agencies in the peacebuilding and development sector?
2. What are lessons learned from involving diaspora individuals and/or organizations in peacebuilding operations? What are key factors to ensure that the goals of the cooperation project are met? What best practices did you come across? What factors can lead to the failure of such cooperation?
3. One possible value-added of diaspora involvement in peacebuilding activities is that it may serve to increase the perceived level of legitimacy of the external engagement, at least from the perspective of peacebuilding practitioners in the field. This perception, however, is disputed (cf. [Handbook](#)). Members of the diaspora should not automatically be considered as representing local actors and voices. Based on

your experiences, do locals view members of the diaspora as “insiders” or “outsiders”?

4. The [Handbook](#) recommends increasing the recruitment of diaspora professionals. Individuals with extensive background in countries where development and peacebuilding agencies work are often underrepresented in those organizations. What should a recruitment policy consist of if it is to succeed in overcoming this underrepresentation? What is the best way to identify and attract qualified and matching members of the diaspora for peacebuilding missions and development projects? (What kinds of mechanisms should be used to identify appropriate candidates? What are the challenges associated with determining the selection criteria for the engagement of diaspora members?)
5. The [Handbook](#) recommends that international peacebuilding and development organizations invest in temporary return programs for diaspora professionals. What are the key challenges for recruiting individuals belonging to the diaspora for short-term employment? What is the value-added of temporary return programs?
6. The [Handbook](#) points out how fragmentation of ideas and beliefs within diaspora communities (particularly in so called conflict-induced diasporas) is among the major challenges for cooperation. How can fragmentation within the diaspora, especially when linked to the root causes of conflict, be addressed constructively? How can you ensure that issues of fragmentation and politicization do not prevail over the goals of the project?

The following offers brief insight into what was discussed, which questions still remain open and what recommendations could be drafted out of the e-Discussion:

An analysis of the role of diaspora actors in peacebuilding and stabilization processes can refer to (at least) two different types of activities and related groups of people: (1) members of the diaspora, such as former political elites, exiled dissidents and / or other interested groups, who remain involved in the political developments of their country of origin during and after a conflict will oftentimes pursue their own political goals, might consider permanent return, and have to be included as a party / parties in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. (2) Members of the diaspora, who are working in peacebuilding projects or programs initiated or supported by external actors due to their technical skills and knowledge of the local context return temporarily as experts, advisors, and bridge builders.

Both aspects were addressed in the e-discussion: the more general role of diaspora actors as parties in peace processes and their contributions to enhanced success of international peacebuilding efforts as staff members, the latter also including capacity building and skills transfer programs.

The Value-added of Diaspora Engagement

All e-Discussion participants agreed that diaspora engagement in stabilization, peacebuilding and development efforts can contribute essentially to their success. As source of urgently needed direct foreign investment, particularly in post-conflict settings, they are partners for external political actors interested in revitalizing the economy. Their remittances can enable them to negotiate with local authorities about the (lack of) success in communal development, thus helping to make the voice of the community residents heard.

The discussion emphasized that diaspora involvement can only increase the level of legitimacy of peacebuilding activities if there is a balance between local actors and diaspora members/organizations in the engagement. Transnational social spaces are characterized by highly heterogeneous and partly competing values and social norms. Therefore the goals and priorities of diaspora actors can differ widely from those of local groups. Views on the role of women in society were mentioned as one potentially contentious example.

Also, the discussion implied that successful diaspora engagements in stabilization, peacebuilding and development efforts depend on the field of work it is applied to. There is a consensus that members of the diaspora can be valuable sources of information regarding the political culture of the conflict-affected country. Beyond that, most of the participants also agreed that diaspora involvement is useful when it comes to capacity building measures, at least under certain conditions (temporary return). For external actors they can prove indispensable in helping to achieve access to affected populations in dangerous surroundings (examples included Somalia or Pakistan) and in providing realistic assessments of what can be achieved in a given situation and contributing essential information to the designing of projects.

While diaspora members may be credited with possessing skills, experience and networks that enable them to adopt key positions in their home countries, local actors often have better local networks and an understanding of the prevailing political context. However, the discussion identified one unique selling point to including diaspora members in peacebuilding and stabilization efforts: their ability to transfer ideas and discourses between international and local actors through their knowledge of both the local and international context. This is what qualifies some of the diaspora members as “Go-Betweeners”. At the same time, this fluency in “international discourse” enables them to communicate their ideas with international actors more effectively than local groups.

Associated Challenges:

- To find the right balance and include voices and experts from the diaspora as well as from the local population in ongoing peace and reconciliation processes.
- The political context in the country of origin: If relations between diaspora groups and the government are bad, particularly if many opposition members have been forced into exile and there has been no regime change, this can hamper the ability of the diaspora to contribute to peacebuilding to a degree where diaspora activities in the country become nearly impossible.
- Unrealistic expectations of diaspora members in terms of anticipating that their involvement will advance their career and attribute to the peace development process more than it is possible.
- The ability of diaspora groups to re-adjust to local norms.
- The sustainability of political support for diaspora inclusion: shifting political priorities can endanger progress.

Distinction / Diversity of Diaspora Groups

The perception of diaspora groups by local actors determines the effectiveness of their relationship/cooperation and performance of the overall engagement. Why and when diaspora members left the country and the location and duration of their displacement during the conflict are essential factors in determining the dynamic between diaspora groups and local actors. The same factors contribute to the diaspora being a very heterogeneous group.

Diaspora members who lived in stable countries during the conflict might be perceived as “elite” representatives of the diaspora community due to their access to advanced education and opportunity to be socially integrated in an economically developed nation. These individuals are more likely to be wealthy in comparison to diaspora individuals who might have lived in camps in neighboring countries during the conflict. These diaspora “elites” might have noble ambitions for their home countries, however they are oftentimes disconnected from the local context, and thus their demands do not reflect the needs of the local population. This can be an issue at times because members of the elite diaspora, especially those who speak international languages, are oftentimes chosen to represent the entire diaspora population.

During the discussion it was also mentioned that within the diaspora elites there are further distinctions. These groups are often split into sub-groups that have different beliefs and ideas when it comes to the desired political order in the country of origin or even their plan to (temporarily) return or not return. This might result in the political exclusion of some diaspora groups.

Motivation of Diaspora Contributions

During the discussion, it was often stated that diaspora individuals are motivated to engage personally in stabilization and peacebuilding programs in their home countries because of the potential personal benefits and ability to maximize possible financial investments, which is legitimate. However, this view was complemented by other e-Discussion participants by stating that diaspora members often have a very strong desire to assist people in their home countries and therefore are thankful for the opportunity to engage personally.

Moreover, increasing application numbers for jobs in peace operations of highly motivated diaspora members prove that spill-over effects of successful deployments of diaspora individuals are the best way to attract suitable candidates from diaspora communities. A lack of commitment on the side of the employers to really support the recruitment of diaspora members was criticized.

Lessons Learned (Examples)

All e-Discussion participants were asked to share their experiences on stabilization and peacebuilding programs that engaged diaspora members or communities. Only a limited number of documents and links were shared. This could be because of limited research on

assessing the impact and factors of success and sustainability of diaspora engagement. The majority of current research focuses on reconciliation and capacity building.

- Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) Diaspora Project: 1st time truth commission engaged diaspora population systematically (Link)
- Former Ministry of Senegalese Living Abroad as a best practice example of a government mechanism to include diaspora voices from abroad. This is example was mentioned in the discussion as a possible valuable approach in peacebuilding processes as well.
- Capacity Building Facility (CBF), supported by UNDP and Soros Foundation in Kosovo since 2003
- The NORCAP roster was suggested as a successful example of recruiting (diaspora) experts for protection related projects and activities by different agencies; it was suggested to list diaspora experts for peacebuilding activities in rosters more widely, in order to facilitate their employment by international agencies.

Drafted Recommendations

The results of the e-Discussion allow drafting the following recommendations. Some of them were already mentioned during the discussion:

1. For any peacebuilding related program it has to be ensured that diaspora engagement contributes to the programs aims and complements the supply of skills. This supply should be identified by an assessment that inventories skills among local staff and shows the potential short and long term personnel gaps.
2. Lessons learned on diaspora engagement must be gathered, analyzed and shared amongst practitioners and experts working in stabilization and peacebuilding to gain a clearer understanding of how synergies and cooperation potentials can be maximized.
3. Selection processes for the recruitment of diaspora members for peace operations must focus on the level of knowledge of political and cultural aspects of the area of responsibility a person potentially has to work in. This supports a successful and efficient working relationship between diaspora individuals and their local counterparts. There is no need for a special selection method in regards to the motivation of diaspora members because the self-selection process already assesses motivation.
4. Expectation management has to be part of any recruitment process and has to be tailored sensitively when it comes to recruitment of diaspora members. This avoids frustration and disappointments that might lead to a tense working relationship with local counterparts, and therefore, result in low impact and even bad performance.
5. The planning processes of peacebuilding related programs should be bottom-up to ensure transparency and the needs of the local population. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that diaspora members should only be engaged to a certain level. This prevents the perception that diaspora members are favored over local actors, which could reduce the positive impact of the program.

Conclusion

Over all the e-Discussion left the impression, that a discussion on diaspora engagement cannot be a general discussion. Diaspora engagement has different impacts not only in different phases of a peace process but also in different regions and countries. There is a need for regional case studies that carefully draw lessons learnt to determine who should be considered in upcoming and future peace operations and peacebuilding related programs.

Diaspora Resources:

Find a comprehensive bibliography on diaspora engagement and peacebuilding, stabilization and development efforts: <http://www.prio.no/diaspeace/Literature/Bibliography/>