

Session Four: Approaches to Diaspora, Developing Country Options

Albania: Mobilising Highly Skilled Diaspora Eno Ngjela, United Nations Development Programme

Eno Ngjela began by noting that Albania's diaspora population has played an increasingly large role in poverty alleviation in the country. As of 2007, an estimated 25 percent of Albania's population lived abroad, amounting to an estimated 35 percent of its workforce. Among the those with university educations, emigration has been especially acute, with a Migration DRC study released in early 2008 indicating that around 50 percent of the country's researchers and intellectuals had left the country since 1990, and about 66 percent of Albanian university students who studied abroad in Western Europe and the USA during the same time period did not return after earning their degrees. However, the Albanian diaspora sent home an estimated €947 million in 2007, more than three times what Albania attracted in direct foreign investment and twice what it received in development aid. These funds helped alleviate poverty levels in the country, but most of the money was expended on consumable goods, as opposed to being invested in long-term development strategies.

Given these substantial remittances, the Albanian government has increasingly tried to engage its diaspora population through both public and private measures. A series of government measures have sought to stimulate the return of skilled diaspora members from abroad. These policies have included raising academic salaries and creating 400 new positions in higher education targeted at recent graduates who have studied abroad. This has occurred alongside the liberalisation of higher education in the country, which has seen the recent establishment of 10-12 private universities and the doubling of the country's university student enrolment numbers. The government has also created salary incentives in an effort to attract diaspora members to jobs in the public sector and has introduced soft loans and low-interest mortgages aimed at diaspora members. These measures have been complimented by laws which make return migration easier for members of the Albanian diaspora.

These measures mark merely the first steps in the Albania government's attempt to engage with its diaspora population, which it sees as part of an overall strategy for development which it hopes will eventually lead to consideration for EU membership. Return migration is seen as being essential to the long-term restructuring of the country's education system, while a more comprehensive country labour profile needs to be carried out to determine the country's most pressing labour needs. Policies must also be aimed to 'retain brains' – not simply to encourage return migration. The IT sector presents a possible area for growth, with current penetration of Internet access in the country limited to 60 out of every 1,000 Albanians.

Policy Options of Countries of Origin in Encouraging Diaspora Participation: The Issue of Dual- and Multiple-Citizenships Tasneem Siddiqui, RMMRU, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Tasneem Siddiqui noted that one way in which governments have tried to reach out to their diaspora populations – and encourage return or circulation migration – is to introduce dual or multiple citizenship programmes, or at least to provide some legal rights to members of their diaspora that are usually reserved for citizens. She defined 'diaspora' broadly for the purposes of the presentation: As people living outside their country of origin who, even if they have not retained their citizenship, continue to possess strong economic, political, social and/or emotional ties to it.

Siddiqui pointed out that diaspora populations are not homogenous, and some governments have sought to target particular segments of their diaspora populations with dual-citizenship measures. Bangladesh was one of the first countries to pursue such a policy in 1978, as the country's military government offered citizenship to its diaspora members living in the UK, the US, and Australia. The Philippines, meanwhile, created a dual-citizenship policy in 2003 that was open to its diaspora members living in any country in the world. India, by contrast, extended economic rights to its diaspora members in 2003, but stopped short of extending political rights to them.

These policies have had mixed results in terms of engaging the respective diaspora groups in question. In the case of India, the extension of full economic rights to the Indian diaspora aided existing diaspora investment, but this may have had as much to do with the country's overall development as with the government's extension of additional rights to diaspora members. In Bangladesh, the private sector, including banks, universities, and hospitals, has played a key role in encouraging the return of the country's diaspora, in addition to the country's dual citizenship measures. Bureaucratic hindrances, meanwhile, have caused some large-scale investment bids launched by members of the Bangladeshi diaspora to collapse completely. The Philippines has seen members of its diaspora invest as philanthropic groups, as they have helped to build hospitals, roads, and IT infrastructure in the country. These examples show that there is nothing to indicate that dual-citizenship policies are a panacea, and their success partly depends on the individual conditions which exist in each country – and the nature of the diaspora population itself.

Diaspora and Development: The Indian Experience
S.K. Sasikumar, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, India

S.K. Sasikumar noted that the Indian diaspora constitutes a huge potential resource in terms of financial and human capital. It is currently estimated to consist of 25 million members, but this a heterogeneous population that has been part of different historical waves of migration, most recently high-skilled workers moving to the economic north and low-skilled workers moving to the Gulf and other countries in South Asia. Emigration has increased across all categories of migrants in the past decade, with migration to the USA and Canada, in particular, doubling or tripling in the last 10-15 years.

The Indian government has undertaken a number of measures to try to engage particular segments of the diaspora. This has included the establishment of the Ministry for Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004, in an effort to confront the lack of coordination of government policy on migration. This was an important step, as even attention to skilled migrants by government agencies had previously been non-existent. There was also an expansion of the Overseas Citizen of India programme, providing lifelong, visa-free travel to India for members of the diaspora, as well as full economic rights. A 'Know India' programme, which provides trips around the country for diaspora youth, has also been established, and a university for persons of Indian origin located in India is being discussed as a possibility for the future.

Sasikumar indicated that it is too early to judge the long-term success of these policies. Diaspora remittances totalled US\$27 billion in 2007 (a figure that does not include investments made by non-residents Indians in the country), and such remittances have been shown to significantly reduce poverty rates in states such as Kerala. IT professionals have also increasingly returned to the country to set up business centres, although this is arguably due to

the larger trends of economic growth in India as opposed to government policies. However, there has been an important split between attracting highly skilled diaspora back from abroad, on one hand, and ignoring the need for social protection policies for low-skilled Indian labour migrants, on the other. This is an area that is currently lacking in the Indian government's engagement with its diaspora population.

Discussant: Claire Mercer, University of Leicester

Claire Mercer noted that the term 'diaspora' opens up new ways for thinking about people's mobility, and is perhaps a less derogatory term than 'migrant', which often carries negative connotations. The presentations, she said, focused mostly on the ways in which governments have approached members of diaspora as individuals who possess resources, in accordance with neoliberal economic policies. In addition to this view, Mercer invited the audience to consider the ways in which members of diaspora populations contribute to national development as groups. For example, 'hometown associations', which tend to be made up of low-skilled migrants, typically send money home to support projects in their home communities.

Policymakers want to engage with diaspora populations, but how? Diaspora populations are often splintered, making engagement a difficult task. At the same time, diaspora groups exist organically, and they should not be forced into conceptual boxes by policymakers. In addition to this, it is not productive to try to see diaspora solely through an 'ethnic lens'. Importantly, diaspora members' investments in home countries are often secondary to their concerns in their new country of residence – even when their investment in countries of origin is substantial.

General discussion

Questions overview: One participant pointed out that the diaspora approach taken by some governments is a new approach vis-à-vis encouraging return migration, and that even policies which promote engagement with highly skilled migrants have focused on encouraging short-term investment in business and industry and neglected more long-term needs such as investment in health and education. Others pointed out that the number of people who qualify for dual citizenship in Bangladesh is actually rather small, and questioned policies which engage directly with diaspora groups, as this would likely involve a policy which would 'pick winners'. Another participant raised the role of destination countries, many of whom have hostile policies toward circular or return migration. Another audience member added that there have been hometown associations in West Africa for at least the past 40 years; these started out as networks established in response to and increase in internal and regional migration and have now been adapted the context of north-south migration. The issue of skills shortages in countries covered in the presentations was also raised.

Sasikumar said that there are skill shortages in India but contended that migration is not putting a significant stress on these areas. He said that India is exploring ways to accredit skills that are at an EU-level of accreditation. He added that 'hometown associations' were a salient feature of the Indian diaspora, and, among other things, have provided disaster relief help following natural disasters. These diaspora groups are potential partners for policies which build migration processes into development strategies. He reiterated that more state planning at the grassroots level is crucial for engaging all segments of India's diaspora.

Siddiqui said that while hometown associations consisting of members of the Bangladeshi diaspora are common in North America, it is difficult for the Bangladeshi government to engage

with them because of their inter-group rivalry. The exception to this is the Bangladeshi lobby in Washington DC, which is also a hometown association, of sorts. She also pointed out that policy coordination with destination countries is important. For example, Bangladesh had been developing skilled workers in the catering sector to come to the UK, before the UK government altered its immigration policy, rendering the programme irrelevant.