



Connections for Development

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# Diaspora Civil Society: The great Un-tapped resource

## Background

### CfD - who we are and what we do

Connections for Development (CfD) is a UK, Diaspora led, membership based organisation committed to ensuring that UK Diaspora communities, and the organisations they are involved in here, are supported in the process of shaping and delivering policy and projects that affect their countries of origin or interest. CfD is unique in its support and representation of the UK Diaspora on ID issues and currently has a membership of over 400 organisations and individuals across all four countries of the UK.

CfD's objectives include the promotion and development of interest, co-operation and action on international development issues, and areas of activity such as poverty reduction and raising the level of awareness about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) amongst Diaspora civil society organisations in the UK, with interests overseas. The Department for International Development (DFID) has funded CfD with the aim of building a stronger, better-informed and more effective Diaspora community to engage in international development, and providing a framework for the open sharing of views and constructive dialogue. CfD regularly mobilises BME communities and their organisations to take part in policy consultations with relevant UK Government Departments. This is our way of voicing our members' opinions or enabling their engagement in the UK domestic and/or international policy debates. We also offer capacity building events and hold regional conferences to facilitate more participatory engagement with the wider CfD membership.

### Diaspora - Un-tapped resource

The main driving force behind CfD is the knowledge that the UK Diaspora holds a huge resource of untapped knowledge, skills, experiences and expertise regarding all areas of international development. We are convinced that if governments, international NGOs and the Diaspora work together, utilising each other's strengths, we can, collectively, have a greater impact on global development.

It should be recognised that many Diaspora civil society groups already conduct noteworthy development projects overseas and, in doing so, contribute significantly to the achievement of the millennium development goals. Unfortunately, it appears that the government and international NGOs do not consider the Diaspora as serious development actors, and the recent focus on remittances, although good in itself, has further overshadowed the overseas project work and other ID issues that the Diaspora are involved in. Nonetheless, we are working hard to bring such work and its value to the attention of the government, international NGOs and the general public.

# Let's Work Together

There are a number of considerable global development challenges confronting us all. So why should some sectors of the community, for example the Diaspora, be virtually excluded from contributing to the solution of such challenges?

CfD is aware of the huge contribution the Diaspora could make to global development issues, and we have made a pledge to our membership, and the Diaspora as a whole, to ensure that Diaspora voices are heard and acted upon. We are also working tirelessly to break down the barriers that prevent Diaspora Civil Society engaging fully in ID issues, which include lack of recognition and huge difficulties accessing adequate funding.

Two areas in which CfD, its membership and the whole Diaspora Civil Society are determined to contribute increasingly more significantly to are:

## Millennium development goals

In July 2005 the leaders of the G8 met at Gleneagles in Scotland under the Presidency of the UK. The two key objectives set were: promoting development to end extreme poverty, with particular focus on Africa and achieving the millennium development goals; and responding to Climate Change.

Despite the fact that there was huge public interest with millions of people campaigning worldwide to “make poverty history”, the commitments of the G8 have not been followed through in their entirety. This is the reason why CfD is committed to actively urging the G8 to fulfil their commitments, while working with the UK government, leaders of Africa, civil society and international partners towards ending extreme poverty. Further, since our membership reflects the entire developing world, we are also working with governments in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and South America to achieve the same.

The eight MDGs, which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all have a target date for achievement of 2015. Whilst many developing countries have made significant headway to the achievement of the MDGs, Africa has demonstrated less encouraging progress. For example the UN itself reported that “At the midway point between their adoption in 2000 and the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, sub-Saharan Africa is not on track to achieve any of the Goals.”<sup>1</sup>

CfD believes that with a fully inclusive collaborative approach involving the experiences, skills and abilities of the Diaspora, greater inroads can be made in meeting the MDG targets in Africa and the rest of the developing world. Our challenge is to engage governments and international NGOs with our membership, and the Diaspora as a whole, to develop the required collaborative approach. We do not see this as an easy task, but we believe sense must prevail since not tapping into such a resource base would constitute a travesty of missed opportunity.

## Migration and development

CfD views migration as a positive phenomenon for both host and home countries, resulting in economic development for both north and south. The link between migration and development has come under intense scrutiny over recent years and considerable research has been conducted into the “...actual and potential contributions of migrant communities to sustainable development or the reduction of poverty in their countries of origin”. However, “...the findings have not been systematically translated into policy guidance. One result is that little coherence is to be found between the development policies and the migration policies of governments in either countries of destination or countries of origin”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Africa and the Millennium Development Goals, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Migration Policy Institute (MPI), Migrant, Migration and Development policy work, see [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migration\\_development.php](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/migration_development.php)

Global international migration has undergone a transformation in the last decade and one of the main elements in this has been the substantial increase in non-permanent, circular migration between nations. This change has produced a number of challenges to both policymakers and researchers, since mainstream knowledge and theory hinges on a permanent migration paradigm.

CfD and its members have been actively involved in the migration and development debate; have contributed significantly to the UN high level dialogue on international migration, been involved in pan-European programmes on media coverage of migration issues, and plays a pivotal role in the UK Civil Society Migration and Development Practitioners Group.

In particular, CfD, through its membership and country-wide Diaspora network, has the ability to augment the knowledge-base of modern-day migration and development and can help shape migration policies both here and overseas, and ultimately benefit the course of global development. Our challenge is to convey this message to the British government and other governments, international NGOs and other stakeholders, and to initiate the process of common dialogue for common aims. We see our meeting today as one stage in this inclusive process.

## Barriers to Diaspora Involvement

There are a number of barriers preventing Diaspora civil society engaging fully in ID issues, and CfD is focussed on reducing these. Those most pertinent are:

### Recognition

One of the most significant barriers to more complete Diaspora involvement in ID is recognition: recognition by government and international NGOs of the hugely significant contribution that the Diaspora make in both host and home countries, and the massive potential it holds to do so much more.

In CfD's and its members' experiences, international NGOs show complete indifference to Diaspora Civil Society and their contribution to global development, and engage with it only on a very superficial "tick box" level. CfD believes that the government needs to spearhead a collaborative, and we believe, more successful approach to ID, since if left to international NGOs it is highly unlikely to happen, particularly in what appears to be a "funding assured come what may" situation from them, despite a less than wholly successful track record.

All CfD is working towards is equity: equity in recognition, equity in access to policy makers, equity in engagement. We are not looking for empty promises, political correctness, platitudes or shallow support – CfD and its membership has made a commitment to significant involvement in ID – it is now CfD's task to ensure this becomes a reality.

More than recognition, CfD wishes to establish an internship scheme with major international NGOs, where our members spend time working with these NGOs to gain further experience which can be cascaded back into their own organisations and strengthen their own endeavours.

Ultimately, CfD believes that international NGOs must work with the Diaspora to improve ID outcomes, and we see recognition and internships as the vehicle for stronger working relationships in future.

### Funding

Poor access to funding has been instrumental to the lack of engagement of Diaspora Civil Society both here and in their countries of origin. Whilst we are aware that lack of capacity in some quarters has contributed to the funds shortage, this can not explain the "across the board" dearth in funds available to Diaspora organisations.

DFID, for example, have a number of funding programmes for work overseas, but the number of Diaspora organisations accessing funding through DFID are insignificant. Is it really all about lack of capacity and poor project planning? Or is about a lack of commitment and an attitude of "how do we reject" rather than "how do we strengthen" project proposals?

Funding difficulties are echoed for work here in the UK and, noting that Diaspora groups have little hope of impacting in their countries of origin if they are not stable here, many find it impossible to establish the critical mass of resources to make the impact they should be making.

CfD is not suggesting that Diaspora organisations should be favoured; rather that they are given equitable access to potential funds. We are working with various funders to break down the commonly held understanding that most Diaspora organisations are manned by people intending to use the money for “other purposes”. This misnomer must be addressed and stamped out and we look towards the government for advice and support in this area.

## CfD's Vision

### CfD as an inclusive network

We are determined to establish an inclusive network of ID actors, including Diaspora Civil Society, local and central government, international NGOs and other stakeholders. CfD believes that it will attain the status of the “main hub” between the traditional international actors (government and international NGOs) and the Diaspora. Already we have had success in our collaborative work with VSO, Water Aid, Oxfam, and we are working hard to expand this network.

For us to continue on this path, we require support from government and other stakeholders. This support is not just financial, but a real commitment to engaging with CfD, its membership and the UK Diaspora as a whole.

### Allocation of grant funding

Our membership, as indicated in national mapping exercise conducted in 2006<sup>3</sup>, is demanding that we offer small grants for ID projects. We have approached DFID on this issue but it has been dismissed without any definitive reasons.

DFID has subcontracted grant allocation to other organisations, including the Development Education Association (DEA), and we have investigated the capacity requirements of doing so. CfD is convinced that it can assess, award, and monitor and evaluate grants for small projects overseas, and it feels that this commitment on behalf of the British government and DFID will engender more support, engagement and, ultimately, better outcomes in international development endeavours.

### CfD as a Diaspora umbrella organisation

CfD, in its five years' existence, has become a focal point for Diaspora organisations across the whole UK. It has brought together Diaspora organisations country-wide for training, conferences, debates, and policy review that has impacted on national and international levels. Nonetheless, we need to do more. We must engage with government more, international NGOs more, third sector more, private sector more, civil society more, and with other stakeholders more. We need to stress the resource base of the Diaspora and the fact that we are establishing ourselves as the interface for stakeholders to tap into that resource.

CfD has positioned itself as the umbrella support organisation to Diaspora groups (capacity building, information, signposting etc). However, it sees itself more than a generic umbrella organisation, but more as a facilitatory body, enabling Diaspora to engage in ID at the level they feel comfortable with but also opening avenues for high level collaboration with those organisations with the appropriate capacity.

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<sup>3</sup> Murray, Paul (2006), “Profile of UK Diaspora Civil Society Groups Involved in International Development. Interests, Attitudes and Involvement: A Mapping Exercise”, for Connections for Development, July 2006 (reprint February 2007).