



Participation of the Diaspora in the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership

The Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and Action Plan was adopted in Lisbon in 2007. This new strategy, which is often referred to as a 'people-centred partnership', was launched with the purpose of scaling-up political dialogue between the African Union (AU) and the EU in the interests of building a solid and sustainable continent-to-continent partnership. It aims to reinvigorate and elevate cooperation between Africa and Europe in the fight against poverty, injustice, human rights violations, lawlessness, insecurity and political and social instability. The priorities of the partnership programme are organised around eight themes: peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade, regional integration and infrastructure; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; and science, information society and space. The programme stipulates that Africa and the EU will pursue and implement policies and programmes that facilitate the active involvement of diaspora communities in the implementation of the strategy.

Participation of the diaspora in the Partnership

The Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership¹ offers a window of opportunity for the African diaspora in Europe to enrich the ongoing Africa-EU political dialogue. In this regard, the diaspora's proactive participation is indispensable. The partnership also provides feasible entry points for diaspora organisations to participate actively in the operationalisation of activities within the framework of the partnership. Most importantly, the partnership presents a unique opportunity for the AU, the EU, its member states and their subsidiary development circles to align themselves with the African diaspora in the implementation of this ambitious programme.

Today, the African diaspora in Europe is in the right position at the right time to effect great change. Due to the increased involvement of diasporas worldwide in the development of their homelands, the African diaspora has been able to position itself as a critical development actor within development policy circles. In fact, the African diaspora is currently contributing financial resources in excess of official

development assistance (ODA) levels to the social welfare and economic growth of the respective homelands. In addition to its considerable human and financial capital, the African diaspora in Europe occupies a vital strategic position linking Europe with Africa in a more meaningful way. There are, therefore, great advantages to working cooperatively with the African diaspora in the translation of the partnership policy priorities into feasible interventions and realisable actions.

Priorities identified by African diaspora organisations in Europe

In order to solicit the perspectives of the diaspora on the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and Action Plan, the African Diaspora Policy Centre organised a consultation meeting in The Hague on 9 July 2009. The meeting was initiated to strengthen the partnership by mobilising the considerable potential (capital, knowledge and networks) of the huge African diaspora in Europe to play a valuable bridge-building role in the process. The meeting was attended by key African scholars, experts and practitioners from 11 EU countries and identified several ways in which

1. For the full text of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, see www.europafrica.org

the diaspora can contribute to the policy dialogue of the newly formulated Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and the implementation of the Action Plan. They are:

- Advancing Africa-EU policy dialogue
- Diaspora building bridges
- Smart partnerships
- Strengthening cooperation between diaspora organisations and civil society institutions in Africa
- Employment

These five key issues reflect the concerns, challenges and priorities of African diaspora organisations in Europe. Participants considered them to be issues through which they can add value to the efforts to strengthen the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. While the diaspora already plays a very active role in some of these areas, its contribution has not been visible to or acknowledged by policymakers in Europe or Africa. In other areas, the diaspora has the potential to play a significant role if its resources are efficiently harnessed. In general, the impact and potential of the diaspora in all five areas can be significantly enhanced by the development of mechanisms that foster systematic involvement by the diaspora in the realisation of these goals.

1. Advancing Africa-EU policy dialogue

The diaspora has perspectives quite different from those held by the more established stakeholders in Africa and in Europe. It can mediate a healthy political dialogue that works to lessen cultural barriers and increase information-sharing among people in both continents. The diaspora is already involved in facilitating social contacts and networks – an activity that is helping to broaden the horizons and worldviews of people on both sides. This long-distance mediation by the diaspora is creating communities across racial and cultural lines and could contribute to laying the foundations for the emergence of a transnational society between Europe and Africa. Yet, diaspora knowledge and expertise have not been sufficiently harnessed by host country governments. Galvanising the potential of the diaspora in this respect within the framework of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership can strengthen the support for EU development cooperation with Africa.

There are three possible avenues that the diaspora can use to advance the Africa-EU policy dialogue, one of them being participation by the diaspora in the dialogue at higher EU and AU policy levels. This, however, requires that policymakers acknowledge the added value of the diaspora perspective to the development of a consolidated political dialogue.

The second way in which the diaspora can advance the Africa-EU policy dialogue is by facilitating channels along which the diaspora can communicate its ideas, perspectives and policy insights to African and EU policymakers. Such channels include diaspora-run radio and television stations, as well as newspapers and magazines produced in the host countries. These channels can also be used by the diaspora to inform and update its general constituency in host countries,

as there is still limited knowledge and understanding among Africans living in Europe of the new Africa-EU Partnership. It is also imperative to seek the participation of the diaspora in the meetings, forum discussions and media debates in host countries on the Africa-EU Partnership.

The third mechanism by which the diaspora could positively impact the policy dialogue is by being granted observer status at meetings to discuss the promotion of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. Having observer status would enable the diaspora to keep abreast of the political dialogue and to contribute, on the basis of first-hand experience and realistic judgment, to the policy discussion. It would also provide the diaspora with needed recognition as a critical stakeholder and strategic partner in this ambitious programme.

2. Diaspora building bridges

There are several ways in which the diaspora can harness its bridge-building capacity in regard to development in Africa within the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. One is to build relations between diaspora and public institutions at both the state and continental levels. Diaspora professional networks and organisations, for example, can work with public institutions to boost the capacity of a particular sector, such as health or education. Diaspora health professionals are already active in several countries of origin, such as Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa. Diaspora members can facilitate links between the sectors within which they work in host countries and those in their home countries to transfer needed equipment and materials and to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building.

Another way for the diaspora to enhance its bridge-building capacity is for entrepreneurs to network with the private sector both in host and home countries. To this end, trade links between European and African companies and business enterprises must be established and promoted, and investment seminars and trade exhibitions organised. The diaspora can play an advisory role for enterprises from Africa wishing to do business with companies in Europe, and vice versa. Moreover, diaspora members can transfer valuable trading know-how, knowledge of the economy and creative business practices from Europe to Africa. This is of particular importance, as many African businesses, small, medium or large, lack the professional capacity to market their products and the know-how to conduct public relations. A good example of such an advisory relationship is between the diaspora-established firm Teampro, based in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, and the companies they serve in Africa.²

Finally, the bridge-building potential of the diaspora can be used to transfer resources to the homelands. Due to a lack of data regarding the effectiveness of such transfers, the potential of this activity has yet to be fully realised and harnessed. Yet, this method of development assistance is used skillfully by certain diaspora organisations to transfer resources, know-how, expertise and practical experience from

2. For further information, see the website of Teampro, <http://www.teampro.nl>

host countries to their homelands. This transfer of resources accomplishes the secondary goal of facilitating valuable contacts and networks as well as links between sectors, firms and institutions across countries in Europe and in Africa. Furthermore, some diaspora organisations have set up innovative programmes by which they skillfully use the knowledge and practical experience gained in host countries, networks they have already constructed there, and resources, expertise and partners to implement projects with them.

3. Smart partnerships

There are various ways in which the diaspora can enter into strategic partnerships for the development of Africa within the framework of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. One area of opportunity lies in the community development projects that many African diaspora organisations in Europe are already involved with in their homelands. The activities of the diaspora in this area could be bolstered if smart partnerships are initiated between diaspora organisations and the mainstream development agencies at the local level. This strategic collaboration would enable both development sectors to work in partnership for development in Africa, and to complement each other's strengths and work constructively towards a mutual objective.

Another area in which smart partnerships can be initiated is in the private sector. For instance, diaspora-established companies could eventually set up joint ventures with homeland companies. Such partnerships would allow local companies to gain access to financial resources, expertise, innovative trade practices and valuable business networks abroad. In addition, diaspora entrepreneurs can help bring together companies from Africa and Europe and acquaint them with each other. They can also mediate in the promotion of viable and sustainable trade relations between companies in Europe and those in Africa. Particular examples of diaspora networks making use of such partnerships include the Nigerian diaspora in Germany as well as the Ghanaian diaspora in the Netherlands. Diaspora entrepreneurs can also play a crucial role in marketing local products abroad and thereby facilitate the creation of new markets in Europe for export products from Africa. This is an activity that most local companies in Africa cannot undertake because of their limited marketing capacity. While this is already a mid-stream trend, it needs to be a popularised, widespread practice across countries in Africa and Europe.

A third area in which smart partnerships can be initiated is through capacity building programmes. For example, diaspora communities can participate in capacity building programmes implemented in their respective home countries or at the continental level by making their skills and expertise available to institutions in the homelands, either through individual or institutional means. For instance, the diaspora already transfers skills and expertise to the homelands both individually and in groups organised along professional lines, such as the Ethiopian medical doctors from Canada and the US as well as Ghanaian medical doctors from Canada and the UK. They are also involved through institutional links such as the Fundo de Apoio Social de

Caboverdinaos em Portugal (FASCP), which formally collaborates with municipal and local government institutions in the homelands.³ For example, FASCP implements a skills-transfer scheme that teams up highly skilled Cape Verdean diaspora members with native Portuguese to undertake a collective capacity building mission in Cape Verde for a few weeks or months. The design of the project enables local institutions in Cape Verde to benefit not only from the skills and expertise of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Portugal, but also of the native Portuguese. Such a programme could be usefully redesigned or scaled-up into smart programmes within the current Africa-EU Partnership.

Thus, initiating smart partnerships on concrete projects enables the diaspora and other development actors to join forces in the implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. It also contributes to the incorporation of the diaspora into development circles in a more structured and formal manner and thereby widens the development constituency in the partnership. These smart partnerships should not be limited to purely material development (i.e., community development projects) but should also cover non-economic aspects, such as the transfer by the diaspora of new technological skills, innovative business and trade practices, knowledge, capacity-building training, valuable transnational networks and contacts.

4. Strengthening cooperation between diaspora organisations and civil society institutions in Africa

The AU has recently created two institutions aimed at interfacing between non-political bodies and the Union itself. One is the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO),⁴ which is mandated to deal with overarching issues in the relationship between overseas diasporas and continental-level institutions in Africa. The other institution is the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), which was established to facilitate effective dialogue and the development of mechanisms for civil society participation in the Africa-EU Partnership Project.⁵ African civil society forums were also created in all five regions of the continent to monitor the practical implementation of the partnership programme. For example, both the AU and its member states have officially committed to meeting the obligations of the partnership and implement its priorities through successive short-term action plans. The African civil society forums were therefore established to monitor closely the implementation of the partnership on the African side. They are particularly mandated to ensure that continental institutions such as the AU and national governments in Africa keep their promises by translating their policy commitments into practical actions that can be realised within a foreseeable period.

The creation of regionally based civil society forums in Africa offers an opportunity for African diaspora organisa-

3. See further, www.fascp.org

4. See the CIDO website: www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/BCP/CIDO/cido.htm

5. See the report on the second AU-CSO consultation on the 'Implementation of the Africa-Europe Partnership', Nairobi, Kenya, 3-5 March 2009.

tions and associations in Europe to build partnerships and strategic alliances with them for the effective implementation of the partnership. The joining of forces between diaspora organisations and civil society forums on the continent has valuable advantages. The organisations and forums will strengthen each other's advocacy and lobbying capacity with regard to policies and practices that enhance participation by civic institutions in the policy dialogue between Africa and the EU. The collaboration would also help them to become a formidable centre capable of collectively monitoring implementation of the partnership project both in Europe and in Africa. In the current AU structure, diaspora civil society organisations represent the sixth geopolitical region of Africa. Therefore, close cooperation between civil society institutions in Africa and diasporas in Europe could contribute significantly to the development of empowered and emancipated civic bodies on the continent.

There are several ways in which the collaboration between diaspora organisations and civil society forums in Africa can be strengthened within the Africa-EU Partnership context. First, African diaspora institutions could establish formal institutional links with intercontinental bodies such as CIDO and ECOSOCC. These institutional links should result in regular consultation meetings between representatives of the diaspora and the intercontinental bodies regarding the progress of the partnership programme both in Europe and Africa. It should also result in the development of formal communications channels rather than ad hoc contacts. Furthermore, continental and diaspora institutions can undertake joint activities within the framework of the partnership. Such activities, however, would have to be actionable and achieve concrete, measurable results within a relatively short time, from which further partnerships could gradually stem. The establishment of formal and institutional links between diaspora institutional and intercontinental bodies would also enable the diaspora to showcase the added value of participation by civic institutions in government efforts to promote the partnership. It would also allow for the diaspora to influence the AU's policy agenda regarding the involvement and participation of the civil society forums on the continent in the effective implementation of the partnership programme.

Secondly, diaspora organisations and institutions can join forces with civil society forums in Africa in several areas to promote both the deepening and advancement of the policy dialogue regarding the partnership and the implementation of its Action Plan. They could collectively undertake such activities by setting up a permanent monitoring team composed of representatives from diaspora and civil society forums in Africa. This monitoring team would be mandated to act as a pressure group on governments and intercontinental institutions in both continents to meet their obligations to advance the partnership. Moreover, diaspora organisations and civil society forums can establish an informal forum in which they could share information, experiences and expertise. The informal forum would also enable them to exchange visits and organise expert meetings, conferences and workshops so that they can remain abreast of each other's

activities, progress made and goals achieved. The structural cooperation between diaspora and civil society associations has so far been a missing link that has not been promoted despite the potential benefits for both entities.

Finally, diaspora organisations and civil society forums in Africa can strengthen their cooperation by working to boost their lobbying and advocacy capacities in both Europe and Africa. The lobbying and advocacy capacity of the diaspora in Europe has not yet been sufficiently and purposefully tapped, but is a latent source that can be skilfully and creatively harnessed for the implementation of the partnership in Europe and Africa. Diaspora and civil society forums in Africa can also play an effective role by undertaking lobbying, campaigning and advocacy activities to pressure governments on both sides to meet their policy commitments regarding the implementation of the partnership. In this regard, professional diaspora associations can provide advocacy training for the civil society forums in Africa and contribute to capacity building. They can also undertake lobbying activities collectively on both continents and thereby jointly raise their profiles. In short, the joining of forces between diaspora and African civil society forums in advocacy activities would indeed make them a formidable constituency in both continents. The African diaspora in Europe and civil society forums in Africa must collectively seize this opportunity to play a meaningful role in the newly formed relationship between Europe and Africa.

5. Employment

Employment and job creation is a vital aspect of development cooperation between Europe and Africa, requiring serious policy attention. Supporting livelihood projects is an important activity, but the experiences of the past decade have taught the development world that such projects rarely promote job creation. There is an urgent need to shift contemporary development cooperation policy to the realisation of employment and job creation in Africa. Practically, this means investing a portion of development aid money in job creation in the homelands, which will promote several multiplier effects.

Job creation is both timely and relevant to the current discussion on migration and development-related issues, and can have an enormous impact on the homeland labour market. For instance, the creation of jobs and employment opportunities in the homelands helps to generate income that can contribute to the reduction of poverty as well as to the achievement of the MDGs. Similarly, job creation generates domestic wealth and prevents the brain drain caused by the emigration of the best and brightest to other countries. The African diaspora wishes to convince the development cooperation sector and its subsidiary donor organisations to support not only livelihood-related projects but also job-creation projects in the homelands. This effort, however, will require a change in the prevailing mindset not only among development cooperation actors in more financially stable Western countries, but also among aid-recipient governments in Africa.

The diaspora believes job creation in Africa can be promoted in several ways. The first is to put job creation at the head of the agenda of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. It should be one of the priority areas that African governments have to table in their dealings with their counterparts in Europe. Furthermore, job creation should go beyond current political rhetoric, and there should be concrete agreements devoted to increasing employment opportunities in Africa within a foreseeable period, particularly among the teeming youth. For example, timelines should be set with specific and measurable targets in mind. More importantly, a portion of the development aid should be set aside to achieve such an objective. Also, diaspora organisations need support in order to scale-up initiatives and projects for the creation of jobs in their respective home countries.

Coupled with the job creation is the urgent need to train many skilled people in vocational and technical areas. Particularly, the provision of basic technical skills such as carpentry and bricklaying to the large numbers of unemployed youth that congregate in cities all over Africa is urgently needed. Technical and vocational education and training have not enjoyed much success in Africa in the past, probably because of negative social attitudes towards skills and crafts training. A grave consequence has been the shortage of skilled people to perform the routine maintenance of physical infrastructure such as buildings and roads, a situation that has left many African countries in a state of deplorable disrepair.

The skilled African diaspora in Europe is prepared to contribute to improving technical and vocational education and training in Africa. For example, the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) is currently implementing employment and job-related projects in Sierra Leone mainly targeted at unemployed youths, such as former child soldiers.⁶ In the view of the diaspora, employment-boosting efforts coupled with technical and vocational education and training should be made a key priority within the framework of the Africa-EU Partnership in the foreseeable future. And the diaspora is prepared to play a key role in this endeavour.

6. See further the website of AFFORD, www.afford-uk.org

Summary and conclusions

The African diaspora in Europe occupies a critical strategic position from which both Europe and Africa can benefit if the diaspora's knowledge is skillfully harnessed. As discussed in this policy note, the diaspora can contribute to the development of democratic political habits and practices, to peace building, capacity building in governance institutions in Africa, and to the diffusion of ideas about freedom, tolerance of differences, human rights issues and gender equality in the homelands. The diaspora can also play a role as ambassadors and improve diplomatic relations between the host and home countries. But this can only happen if the diaspora is empowered. The most appropriate way to empower the diaspora is by supporting the setting up of an EU-wide diaspora platform. This platform would strengthen the capacity of the diaspora to play an effective role. The advantages gained from establishing a diaspora platform are enhanced lobbying and advocacy capacity for African diaspora organisations in Europe; strengthening the networking and coordination capacity of African diaspora organisations in EU countries; and the increased exchange of information within the African diaspora in Europe and ability to undertake initiatives across countries. In short, the establishment of a diaspora platform would facilitate the evolution of African diaspora organisations in Europe into an influential constituency that plays a valuable bridge-building role in the newly formed EU-Africa Partnership.

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