



Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

A report commissioned by the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) as part of the *africa21* project, "*Target Africa 2015: development awareness, networking and lifelong learning among African organisations in London*"

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Table of contents

Diaspora and development: Executive summary	2
Key Findings	2
Conclusions and recommendations	3
Diaspora and development: Introduction	7
Methodology	7
Gaining Access	8
Limitations	8
UK-based African diaspora organisations	8
Profile of groups	8
Popularity of diaspora organisations	9
Groups' project financing	9
Successful development projects	10
Participatory management	11
Obstacles identified by African diaspora groups	12
Examples of good practice	13
African diaspora organisations and the 2015 IDT	13
Box 1: 2015 International Development Targets	14
Conclusions	15
Recommendations	16
Table 1 UK-based African diaspora groups, development activities, and their vision for Africa	19

**Diaspora and development:
Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development**

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Diaspora and development: Executive summary

This is a report of a piece of research conducted as part of a project entitled, “*Target Africa 2015: development awareness, networking and lifelong learning among African organisations in London*”. TA2015 was initiated by *africa21*, a consortium of five UK-based African development organisations. *africa21* members identified a need to legitimise, recognise and support the efforts of UK-based African diaspora groups in contributing to development in their regions of origin in Africa. The aim of the research was to set the work of these African diaspora groups against the backdrop of the 2015 international development targets (2015 IDT) around which much mainstream development effort is now organised (see Box 1). To this end the research investigated and documented UK-based African grassroots organisations' contribution to development in Africa and assessed their awareness of the 2015 IDT.

Key Findings

Thirteen UK-based grassroots, identity-based African organisations with members from Nigeria and Cameroon took part in the study. What all these groups have in common is their deep seated conviction that people who are poor and needy can with some assistance take control of their lives and work in partnership for their collective improvement. Data from these case studies demonstrate that rural development in Africa has been attempted and achieved among poor and deprived areas in collaboration with the rural communities.

Despite differences in background, ethnicity, culture and experiences all these organisations are united by a vision of what Africa can become in the future and how their contribution can facilitate this process.

The UK diaspora groups have succeeded in raising funds through membership fees, fines on late coming, continuous absence, emergency contributions, annual fundraising events and voluntary contributions. Only two of the organisations have received funding from external donors. Groups have used funds raised to build hospitals, maternity wards, vocational centres, bridges to link remote villages to services; to provide clean running water and electricity; to supply books and computers to schools; and to support income generating activities. All this has been achieved under what seemed at times very difficult circumstances.

The ability to respond to crisis in home countries is shaped by a number of factors. These factors include members' educational level, area of specialisation, employment status in the UK, immigration status, level of social and political consciousness, access to information in the UK, and the availability of reliable structures in hometowns to liaise with.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

All successful projects in this report stressed the importance of consultative approaches within the organisations and with counterparts in Africa. Successful projects are those that emphasised local involvement of counterparts on the ground in Africa. Local and diaspora groups' knowledge and capabilities proved to be more effective when they worked closely together and learnt from each other. Diaspora groups saw participation by rural communities in program design and operation as the most central feature of successful community development. For these diaspora groups, participation implies not just that the poor will profit from the outcomes of development, but also that they will contribute labour and funds and take part in planning and managing the projects.

Significantly, all though all 13 organisations surveyed are identity-based movements of people who hail from particular locations or attended a particular school, they are far from parochial in their outlook. Indeed, the organisations both support and draw support from other organisations made up of minority ethnic people in the UK.

Conclusions and recommendations

As social and civic entrepreneurs, these UK-based African diaspora groups have succeeded in pooling resources to create relationships, networks of trust and co-operation and social capital to provide local communities in Africa with access to financial, physical and emotional assets. Significantly, these diaspora groups conducted their work totally oblivious to the IDT 2015 around which many mainstream agencies such as the Department for International Development (DFID) now organise their work. And yet, an assessment of the types of projects these diaspora groups engage in shows that they have considerable sympathy for the international targets and indeed that they share common ground with their mainstream counterparts, even though few linkages exist between the two sets of actors.

Given the disparity that exists between African diaspora groups' awareness of 2015 IDT and the scale and scope of their actual activities, development awareness needs to be seen at times as an exercise in making the ideas and activities of an exclusive professional club of international development practitioners more accountable, accessible and meaningful to ordinary people. Thus raising development awareness needs to be seen as a two-way process between various social and civic entrepreneurs – including those within diaspora groups – and mainstream, formal and professional development organisations and actors.

The level of participation, dialog and consultation that these groups emphasised in their work is in marked contrast to perceptions of all diaspora groups as being out of touch with realities on the ground in Africa. This approach to their work stands as an example of good practice for all other African diaspora groups (and mainstream development organisations too) to emulate.

The contributions these African organisations make to their communities in Africa are often relatively modest in absolute terms. However, for neglected and isolated communities in Africa,

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

these contributions can make a significant difference. Furthermore, these contributions are “overhead free” in marked contrast to other, apparently larger contributions from other sources. However, diaspora groups in this study bring far more to Africa than just money. They bring energy, commitment, interests of community members, and they lift up the spirits and hope of members of their respective communities back home. They also represent continuity for most members of their communities as all 13 organisations pride themselves with remaining apolitical, non-ideological, accountable and self-reliant.

These groups have demonstrated through their effort, motivation and commitment that they should be considered as a resource in development. However, their working methods need to be assessed regularly to ensure sensitivity to changing needs and conditions.

If we are to tackle intractable social problems in local communities that have been the main global concerns for the last 50 years, we must engage all the resources at our disposal. This will require a move towards meaningful partnerships based on learning from good practice both within and outside different organisations (diaspora and mainstream).

There is a need to begin to identify strategic methodology for evaluating diaspora development projects in Africa to help guide diaspora work. The full implications of these projects have yet to be assessed in terms of their impact on the recipients in Africa.

These diaspora groups are largely entirely volunteer-led, members struggle to juggle multiple commitments with limited time. Moreover, their organisations have complex agendas, so taking up time to address what might initially seem to them to be matters extraneous to their main business often requires protracted negotiation and compromise. Thus those wishing to engage with such diaspora groups must allow for this degree of complexity; this ultimately translates into a labour-intensive, time-consuming, expensive process. If the intentions to engage with such groups are serious and genuine, then resources must be made available to make the consultation process meaningful and culturally sensitive. Such an approach is likely to yield rewards in marked contrast to the results of attempts to hasten and/or short-circuit the process on the grounds of efficiency.

Partnership between international agencies and diaspora groups will create appropriate conditions for joined-up action on the ground in Africa. This will take diaspora groups' initiative forward into a more co-ordinated stage of development with resources to assess their strengths and weaknesses, plan responses, evaluate projects, and prioritise needs.

Policies that aim to develop partnerships and address social problems must encourage rather than ignore social and civic entrepreneurship and innovation among the African diaspora. A move towards holistic and sustainable outcomes in development terms depends upon involving all those affected across the development system in a search for continuous improvement.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

There are many success stories but obstacles abound. To facilitate participatory processes, strategies need to be put in place to develop local rural capacity (keeping records, handling funds, raising subscription, electing capable leaders, identifying priorities, making decisions, organising meetings, making appropriate contacts, etc) for participation. In addition to local rural capacity in Africa, agencies in the UK need to give thought to how to help facilitate the communication, relationship-building and maintenance process between diaspora communities and communities in Africa.

There is a need to assess the social conditions of diaspora organisations in the UK as well as the ways in which they are either included or excluded from participating in international development.

“Development” has now become a top-down, professionalised and impersonal service that concentrates too much power in the hands of various agencies in the developed northern countries, including the UK. This paradigm needs to shift to working with diaspora groups – based on their network of relations, trust and commitment – to empower local communities in Africa to make decisions about their own development.

All agencies involved in development should recognise that continuous (or lifelong) learning, experimentation and innovation are required.

All agencies need to work towards open-ended visions that allow room for other perspectives.

Diaspora groups need to develop comprehensive processes of reflection and monitoring their activities. Research into areas of good practice should continue as well as areas where failures have occurred and this material shared among diaspora groups to enable continuous learning.

This project did not specifically set out to address gender issues, however, some preliminary observations suggest that the majority of members in most of the groups surveyed are women. There is lack of clarity in relationship to the issues that promote or undermine their contributions to these groups. There is a need to explore the role gender plays in these processes by examining the ways in which socially and culturally constructed roles of women and men affect individual and group contribution to development.

The links that these organisations have already formed with African (and other) organisations from other regions doing similar work forms the basis for developing a solidarity-based movement of diaspora peoples tackling poverty, promoting social inclusion and social justice and building a self-reliant, autonomous Africa.

Development is more than a technical, professional project-based activity with goals, purpose, outputs, activities, inputs, assumptions, and indicators. It is, or should be, a human-centred process of social transformation that takes as its starting point people's own visions of where

**Diaspora and development:
Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development**

they want to go in shaping their destiny. In this respect, the vision demonstrated by these groups of Africans in the diaspora, standing in solidarity with counterparts in Africa, is an important resource in its own right for the international development community to tap into and against which they can test their own views for Africa's future.

**Diaspora and development:
Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development**

Diaspora and development: Introduction

This is a report of a piece of research conducted as part of a project entitled, “*Target Africa 2015: development awareness, networking and lifelong learning among African organisations in London*”. The report is released in its current form for use as a resource for TA2015 day taking place on Saturday 30 September 2000. The findings, conclusions and recommendations will hopefully feed into and generate discussion during the day that will in turn feed into the ongoing research effort of which this initial activity has been a key part.

TA2015 was initiated by *africa21*, a consortium of five UK-based African development organisations. *africa21* members identified a need to legitimise, recognise and support the efforts of UK-based African diaspora groups in contributing to development in their regions of origin in Africa. The aim of the research was to set the work of these African diaspora groups against the backdrop of the 2015 international development targets (2015 IDT) around which much mainstream development effort is now organised (see Box 1). To this end the research investigated and documented UK-based African grassroots organisations' contribution to development in Africa and assessed their awareness of the 2015 IDT. AFFORD took responsibility for commissioning and co-ordinating this research effort on behalf of *africa21*.

This report starts with a brief description of the methodology used and the study's limitations. Next is a general description of UK-based African diaspora groups, their aims and objectives, particular approach to development, and basis of popularity and support among Africans in the diaspora. The report goes on to analyse the process of initiating and implementing development projects by examining the way the groups raise funds for the projects, the services that they provide to members and to communities back home in Africa, and what motivates members to participate in group activities. Next will come an examination of success stories, management styles, obstacles groups face, and examples of good practice. A focus on the groups' awareness of the 2015 IDT and their contribution to the international development targets will follow. Finally the report draws some conclusions and makes a number of recommendations.

Methodology

A broadly ethnographic approach was adopted using a range of qualitative methods. These were focused discussion groups, document reviews, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Three focused discussion groups were held, ten in-depth interviews conducted with presidents and vice-presidents of organisations while participant observation at fundraising events and contact with the groups was ongoing throughout the study. The study was designed to elicit information about the following: organisational data, main activities, strengths and weaknesses, development projects, level of awareness of international development targets, and their vision for Africa.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Gaining Access

Initially a phone call was made to all identified grassroots organisations followed by a letter introducing the rationale of the project. The letter was followed by telephone conversations to arrange meetings, attend fundraising functions, etc. In cases where obtaining official permission from groups to legitimate participation was proving difficult, the researcher made separate contacts with other members of the executive board to promote the project and encourage their participation. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted during regular meetings, at leaders' homes, during fundraising events, and via email. At fundraising events, I was able to observe how groups attract sponsorship for projects.

Limitations

Because of resource and time constraints, we decided to focus on a limited number of groups to explore their vision, aims and communication channels. Owing to the limited number of groups involved, we can not claim that the sample is representative, neither can we claim that the findings are universal. However, the study raises some very significant issues for Africans in the diaspora, African development policy makers on the continent, international development agencies, and other actors.

UK-based African diaspora organisations

The study focused on 13 groups from two West African countries, Nigeria (five organisations) and Cameroon (eight organisations). These groups were selected on the bases of accessibility to the researcher, readiness to participate in the study and AFFORD's interest to develop contacts with groups from these countries. (See Table 1 for details).

All 13 organisations are identity-based and have been developed by members from the same village, town, division, province or school. They rely on the skills of members, volunteers' time, donations from members and fundraising events. Although these groups do provide welfare support to members here in the UK, the main beneficiaries are usually based in Africa. Reasons for forming these organisations as identified by our respondents fall into five categories:

- To promote cultural and social unity
- To uphold and promote their cultures, particularly among the younger generation
- To offer support to members in times of need
- To assist alma mater by transferring skills, providing financial assistance and acting as role models for current students
- To make practical contributions to healthcare, social and economic development among communities in the UK and Africa.

Profile of groups

The 13 groups covered by the survey contain a total of 630 members, 366 women and 264 men. All 13 groups are structured along the lines of formal organisations with management

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

committees, sub groups, chair, president, secretary, volunteers, a constitution, and so on. However, only two of the groups are registered as charities.

The groups comprise:

- Eight hometown associations (of which two are women's groups)
- Two groups structured around clusters of villages
- One ex-students (alumni) association
- One professional association
- One women's group.

Membership cuts across class, income and religion. Such groups are usually seen as the "equaliser" focusing on providing standard services to all members regardless of status, education or gender. Among the key sub-groups, individuals' work status has a bearing on feelings of involvement. Those with jobs are more likely to say that they feel involved compared with those without jobs, who may also not have a right to work in the UK.

Popularity of diaspora organisations

These organisations are very popular and enjoy widespread support and legitimacy within their respective communities. This is explainable by several factors including:

- Groups usually limit their activities to the needs of a village or groups of villages, province or school
- Commonality of interest reinforces group solidarity
- Incentives to join are attractive when membership is regular (interest-free loans, assistance during bereavement, marriages, childbirth, illness, and so on)
- Leaders have to prove their worth, members feel able to hold leaders to account for their actions
- Mechanisms exist to ensure members participate in decision making processes
- Members are oriented towards the advantages of collective action and development projects to support the needy.

Groups' project financing

All 13 groups broadly raise money in three ways:

- Contributions from members
- Annual fundraising events
- Voluntary contributions/donations.

Eight groups raise additional money from fines for late-coming, non-payment, bounced cheques, and continuous absence. Emergency contributions are also useful sources of income. Fund raising events are very popular with these groups. During this study I attended five fundraising events organised by participating groups. The fundraising events consist mainly of inviting as many ethnic minority organisations and other individuals as possible. A variety of traditional

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

food and drinks are served to guests free of charge on the day. The groups also perform a number of traditional dances, plays and masquerades. After the dinner and performances comes the actual fundraising.

The actual fundraising consists of calling the names of individuals starting from the high table followed by special invitees, organisations and any other members wishing to donate. Every donation is openly recorded. The names of those donating and the amount donated are announced on the floor unless the donor says otherwise. Traditionally groups will make an effort to give an account of the money collected and how it was spent to encourage trust and commitment to their causes. I noticed that prior to inviting donations, projects achieved through previous donations were highlighted to enable prospective donors to have confidence that their money will go to the right causes. A thank you letter is usually sent to all donors.

Also very significant was the amount of donations that came from other similar groups across Africa. Although groups are set up to support causes in the hometowns, divisions, colleges, or countries, a significant amount of their funds go to projects outside their remit. There is a very high spirit of co-operation within and between groups. Similarly most groups noted that they have contributed to supporting other countries outside Africa.

The financial officers of the organisation are expected to render a full account of the money to the group during the next meeting, which is usually within a month.

Out of the 13 organisations interviewed, 11 have never attempted to seek funding from external sources and have no information about such possibilities. The Millennium Awards For All and Comic Relief have funded two groups –Cameroon Community Welfare Development Association and Buguma Internal Affairs Society, which are both registered charities –. The majority of development projects implemented by these 13 groups are therefore largely self-funded.

Successful development projects

The diaspora groups in this study are actively involved in the development of Africa and their contributions include personal money transfer, community to community transfer, economic, educational and social development, and awareness raising in the UK. The ability to respond to crisis in home countries is shaped by a number of factors. These factors include their educational level, area of specialisation, employment status in the UK, immigration status, level of social and political consciousness, access to information in the UK, and the availability of reliable structures in hometowns to liaise with. The diaspora groups interviewed have implemented several projects in Africa that ranged from building hospitals, road construction, supporting schools to income generating activities. (Table 1 has full details.)

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Some examples of projects include:

- Nyemoni Improvement Society spent £5000 developing a vocational training centre and employed staff to run training programmes and £3000 to supply books and computers to deprived schools
- Ogidi Women Association contributed £2,769 towards supplying clean water and refurbishing the general hospital
- Nigerian Nurses Association spent £750 on needs assessment and donations to a rehabilitation centre for disabled children
- Metta Cultural and Development Association contributed £5000 towards constructing an operating theatre, they also helped to build bridges to link remote villages to services and set up schemes to assist farmers
- Manyu Elements Cultural Association spent £4000 to build a hospital ward, £5000 to build a community hall and is in the process of setting up a free drug provision scheme
- Sacred Hearts Ex-Students Association set up 10 annual scholarships to motivate students and contributed £5000 towards providing a school bus.

There is a very strong sense of belonging, goodwill and good intention that underpins the focus of these groups. This driving force is recreated and reinforced through the cultural activities that underpin annual fundraising events. Members of the younger generation are encouraged to appreciate and pass on this spirit of togetherness, belonging and responsibility towards hometowns. Hence the overriding emphasis on cultural promotion in the constitutions of all the groups interviewed. One group eloquently sums up the strengths of these groups. *“Our strength is collectiveness, local knowledge of problems, international experience, awareness and the desire by all to succeed where all has failed, to make a difference.”*

Participatory management

Discussions with these groups indicate that projects are developed after thorough consultation with the local population. Manyu Elements' vice-president explains why they selected the hospital project:

“This was conceived after consultation with the population at home and heated debates at our monthly meetings and a final decision made on the grounds of consensus or voting. This is a project to help improve the infant care and reduce infant mortality rate, which is presently very high in Manyu Division. Through provision of basic hygiene and improved standard of care in the wards, we can give the people hope, confidence, quality of life, and expectations to sustain the ills of society inside a healthy body.”

Manyu Elements have what they call responsible officers to build participation at local levels. They provide information that is useful for local and external decision-makers.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Metta Cultural Association rely on the parent group in Cameroon to nominate projects for sponsorship. The parent group contributes initial ideas that are refined as the planning process moves forward to take on board local conditions.

Ogidi Women Association have a process of formulating a two-year plan from the bottom up. Their last project included an initial phase of commissioning a professional to record the views of hospital staff, patients and the conditions of the ward on video. This video was used to identify and agree priorities with the hospital leaders.

The outcome of participation cannot simply be measured in quantitative terms. There are substantial gains that are intangible. Participation enables rural communities to discover the possibilities of identifying and prioritising problems thereby becoming capable of managing their own development. It also helps to release the untapped human resources of rural people to precipitate the development process.

Obstacles identified by African diaspora groups

The groups appear very self sufficient as they structure themselves around their key objectives, however, there are a number of obstacles that undermine effective participation in and implementation of projects. Key problems identified by all 13 groups interviewed included:

- Time constrains, inability to focus on activities due to pressure of work
- Some members not financially viable to contribute much
- Being mothers and wives at the same time gives little time to concentrate on issues of organisations
- Members cannot go home to supervise projects
- Feedback from Africa may not be accurate
- Problems of remitting funds as money transfer can be expensive
- Problems with local logistics and local expertise
- Lack of funding
- Lack of reliable structure in home countries to collaborate with
- Lack of project management skills

Given the fact that most members of these groups, and particularly the leaders, are in full-time work or education, it is not surprising that lack of time is listed by all the groups as one of the biggest factors preventing effective planning and delivery of projects. The second biggest obstacle is lack of reliable structures back home to work with. As one group noted:

“Last year our organisation told a school that we could only send them computers under the condition that they would be able to have finances to pay for custom duties and they assured us that they had made all the necessary arrangements. But when the computers got home, it turned out that that was not the case... We also contributed money to a women's co-operative association but the transaction never materialised because of poor communication. The money came back”

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Another group encountered the following difficulties at the planning and implementation stages of building a vocational centre:

“The starting of this project initially ran into some difficulties when the chairman of the local authority insisted that his wife should be appointed the co-ordinator of the project and not the person we wanted. As a result we decided not to use the premises offered by the local authority and rented another premises. The renovation of the premises ran into another difficulty when the contractors we hired charged us more than we had earlier agreed. Having paid the new amount, we then discovered when we arrived to launch the project that the renovation of the premises was not complete. Most of the items we paid for were not even there or done. We then had to hire another contractor to complete the renovation for us. The centre is now running very well”.

Examples of good practice

Some organisations have identified examples of good practise in facilitating projects back home that may be useful to other organisations. Examples included:

- Negotiating well in advance with local authorities and relevant professionals on logistical matters
- Working very closely with similar groups back home
- Working with trustworthy elders in the villages
- Not making cash donations
- Requesting regular reports with pictures and evidence of progress

The above suggestions have worked for some groups. However, these groups recommend utilising more than one approach to minimise problems. Groups also noted that having a facilitating organisation that is trustworthy, reliable, committed and focused to work with indigenous organisations will be very effective in overcoming some of these problems. Liaison with this facilitating organisation and accountability of the organisation to the groups of organisations involved with it would be fundamental in moving these organisations towards actively contributing to sustainable development in Africa.

African diaspora organisations and the 2015 IDT

None of the 13 organisations have knowledge of the 2015 international development targets despite the implicit sympathy they have for them and the evident contribution they are making towards achieving them. Before they knew precisely what they were, all 13 organisations assumed that their work had no links with these targets. However, these groups were able to see the links between their work and the 2015 IDT as they became aware of the targets. These groups' awareness of the 2015 IDT (and of mainstream development jargon in general) is in sharp contrast to their general contribution through their development work to achieving these targets.

**Diaspora and development:
Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development**

Box 1: 2015 International Development Targets

- The proportion of people on the planet who are poor should be halved by the year 2015
- Every child in every country should have access to primary education by 2015
- Within six years, girls should have the same chance to get education and be treated as fairly as boys in primary and secondary schools
- Children's chances of surviving past their first and fifth birthdays must improve; the proportion who will die before they are one – or five – must fall by two thirds by 2015
- The proportion of women dying as a result of having children must fall by three quarters by 2015
- Men and women who want it should have straightforward access to contraception, no later than 2015
- All countries must come up with green strategies which take care of their natural resources, so that current environmental losses are reversed by 2015

Adapted from Halving World Poverty in 15 years, Department for International Development, Christian Aid

There is a need to legitimate the work that these groups are doing and to acknowledge factors that are central to Africans' notions of wellbeing and what is termed sustainable development. This will provide the basis not only for an assessment of the effectiveness of governmental policies relating to developmental programmes, but will also assist in formulating policies that will reflect the voices of Africans in Africa and the diaspora.

Despite differences in background, ethnicity, culture and experiences all these organisations are united by a vision of what Africa can become in the future and how their contribution can facilitate this process. The groups noted that their vision for Africa is to:

- Contribute towards developing a self-reliant Africa
- Bridge the gap between the poor and the rich, make basic necessities affordable for all
- Collaborate in facilitating greater co-operation and partnership
- Support and develop a better, healthier and more independent communities
- Develop Africa's natural resources to their full potential
- Increase literacy levels

People's vision and ideas are often richer than what is captured by the international development targets. These organisations have a broad vision of social inclusion in terms of their members, their needs and the needs of people in Africa.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

The scale of these African diaspora groups' activities should not be underestimated especially considering the low level or non-existence of official support such groups receive. The building of social capital and social outcomes mark significant achievements for these diaspora or transnational communities (as they are sometimes called) and their home countries.

It is therefore essential for development agencies to develop mechanisms to enable them to link with African diaspora groups. However, international agencies cannot and should not assume that this linking will be or should be solely on their terms. There needs to be a break with the long history of co-opting minority organisations and their interests into wider agendas without due regard for what they can contribute or indeed what their own agendas might be. Linking international development agencies with these groups – done in the right way and for the right reasons – is essential for the following reasons:

- Significant innovations already exist that can be built upon
- There is evidence of existing achievements
- Professional practice of diaspora and mainstream organisations is improved as a result of working more closely together
- It is the most effective way to begin the process of connection with existing social entrepreneurs.
- It will promote learning across boundaries.

Conclusions

As social and civic entrepreneurs, these UK-based African diaspora groups have succeeded in pooling resources to create relationships, networks of trust and co-operation and social capital to provide local communities in Africa with access to financial, physical and emotional assets. Significantly, these diaspora groups conducted their work totally oblivious to the IDT 2015 around which many mainstream agencies such as the Department for International Development (DFID) now organise their work. And yet, an assessment of the types of projects these diaspora groups engage in shows that they have considerable sympathy for the international targets and indeed that they share common ground with their mainstream counterparts, even though few linkages exist between the two sets of actors.

Given the disparity that exists between African diaspora groups' awareness of 2015 IDT and the scale and scope of their actual activities, development awareness needs to be seen at times as an exercise in making the ideas and activities of an exclusive professional club of international development practitioners more accountable, accessible and meaningful to ordinary people. Thus raising development awareness needs to be seen as a two-way process between various social and civic entrepreneurs – including those within diaspora groups – and mainstream, formal and professional development organisations and actors.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

The level of participation, dialog and consultation that these groups emphasised in their work is in marked contrast to perceptions of all diaspora groups as being out of touch with realities on the ground in Africa. This approach to their work stands as an example of good practice for all other African diaspora groups (and mainstream development organisations too) to emulate.

The contributions these African organisations make to their communities in Africa are often relatively modest in absolute terms. However, for neglected and isolated communities in Africa, these contributions can make a significant difference. Furthermore, these contributions are “overhead free” in marked contrast to other, apparently larger contributions from other sources. However, diaspora groups in this study bring far more to Africa than just money. They bring energy, commitment, interests of community members, and they lift up the spirits and hope of members of their respective communities back home. They also represent continuity for most members of their communities as all 13 organisations pride themselves with remaining apolitical, non-ideological, accountable and self-reliant.

These groups have demonstrated through their effort, motivation and commitment that they should be considered as a resource in development. However, their working methods need to be assessed regularly to ensure sensitivity to changing needs and conditions.

If we are to tackle intractable social problems in local communities that have been the main global concerns for the last 50 years, we must engage all the resources at our disposal. This will require a move towards meaningful partnerships based on learning from good practice both within and outside different organisations (diaspora and mainstream).

The recommendations that follow are designed to direct attention and resources into the spaces that have been largely ignored between mainstream agencies and diaspora groups, between existing and new diaspora initiatives and between agencies and communities. What is now required is a framework to ensure that progressive transformation of international development is built on holistic outcomes for local communities and diaspora or transnational communities as voiced by them. The best implementation always comes from self-motivated and committed people.

Recommendations

There is a need to begin to identify strategic methodology for evaluating diaspora development projects in Africa to help guide diaspora work. The full implications of these projects have yet to be assessed in terms of their impact on the recipients in Africa.

These diaspora groups are largely entirely volunteer-led, members struggle to juggle multiple commitments with limited time. Moreover, their organisations have complex agendas, so taking up time to address what might initially seem to them to be matters extraneous to their main business often requires protracted negotiation and compromise. Thus those wishing to engage with such diaspora groups must allow for this degree of complexity; this ultimately translates

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

into a labour-intensive, time-consuming, expensive process. If the intentions to engage with such groups are serious and genuine, then resources must be made available to make the consultation process meaningful and culturally sensitive. Such an approach is likely to yield rewards in marked contrast to the results of attempts to hasten and/or short-circuit the process on the grounds of efficiency.

Partnership between international agencies and diaspora groups will create appropriate conditions for joined-up action on the ground in Africa. This will take diaspora groups' initiative forward into a more co-ordinated stage of development with resources to assess their strengths and weaknesses, plan responses, evaluate projects, and prioritise needs.

Policies that aim to develop partnerships and address social problems must encourage rather than ignore social and civic entrepreneurship and innovation among the African diaspora. A move towards holistic and sustainable outcomes in development terms depends upon involving all those affected across the development system in a search for continuous improvement.

There are many success stories but obstacles abound. To facilitate participatory processes, strategies need to be put in place to develop local rural capacity (keeping records, handling funds, raising subscription, electing capable leaders, identifying priorities, making decisions, organising meetings, making appropriate contacts, etc) for participation. In addition to local rural capacity in Africa, agencies in the UK need to give thought to how to help facilitate the communication, relationship-building and maintenance process between diaspora communities and communities in Africa.

There is a need to assess the social conditions of diaspora organisations in the UK as well as the ways in which they are either included or excluded from participating in international development.

“Development” has now become a top-down, professionalised and impersonal service that concentrates too much power in the hands of various agencies in the developed northern countries, including the UK. This paradigm needs to shift to working with diaspora groups – based on their network of relations, trust and commitment – to empower local communities in Africa to make decisions about their own development.

All agencies involved in development should recognise that continuous (or lifelong) learning, experimentation and innovation are required.

All agencies need to work towards open-ended visions that allow room for other perspectives.

Diaspora groups need to develop comprehensive processes of reflection and monitoring their activities. Research into areas of good practice should continue as well as areas where failures have occurred and this material shared among diaspora groups to enable continuous learning.

**Diaspora and development:
Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development**

This project did not specifically set out to address gender issues, however, some preliminary observations suggest that the majority of members in most of the groups surveyed are women. There is lack of clarity in relationship to the issues that promote or undermine their contributions to these groups. There is a need to explore the role gender plays in these processes by examining the ways in which socially and culturally constructed roles of women and men affect individual and group contribution to development.

The links that these organisations have already formed with African (and other) organisations from other regions doing similar work forms the basis for developing a solidarity-based movement of diaspora peoples tackling poverty, promoting social inclusion and social justice and building a self-reliant, autonomous Africa.

Development is more than a technical, professional project-based activity with goals, purpose, outputs, activities, inputs, assumptions, and indicators. It is, or should be, a human-centred process of social transformation that takes as its starting point people's own visions of where they want to go in shaping their destiny. In this respect, the vision demonstrated by these groups of Africans in the diaspora, standing in solidarity with counterparts in Africa, is an important resource in its own right for the international development community to tap into and against which they can test their own views for Africa's future.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Table 1 UK-based African diaspora groups, development activities, and their vision for Africa

Organisation	No of members	Gender	Aims	Activities	Vision	Awareness of IDT 2015
Nyemoni Improvement Society Formed 1989	130	80 F 50 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help less fortunate in Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £5000 on vocational centre and teachers to provide sewing and computer training • £3000 for school books 	Increase literacy level by 10% - 20% Trained skilled workers	No
Nigerian Nurses Association Formed 1998	48	45F 3M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to healthcare and health promotion in UK and Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £750 for a member to conduct needs assessment and donations to disabled children's centre • Presently fundraising to meet identified needs. • Publication of health journal • Health education initiatives 	Develop our natural resources to full potential Work together in partnership to achieve the best for Africa.	No
Ogidi Women Association Formed 1997	22	22F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster a network of communication with other agencies • Promote development in London and Nigeria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised £2,769 towards refurbishment of general hospital in Ogidi • Provided running water and equipped hospital maternity ward 	To live in a beautiful continent that is not dependent on foreign aid for its existence.	No
Ogwashi-Uku Women's organisation Formed 1987	17	17F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to members • Promote culture • Identify and finance projects in Nigeria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £500 on bed linen for wards in community hospital, classroom furniture in a secondary school and two doors in a new catholic church. 	A well-fed healthy population Peace and prosperity	No.

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Buguma Internal Affairs society Formed 1987	120	50F 70M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support members • Promote culture • Contribute to development in Nigeria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2000 towards provision of electricity, water and town hall development • £500 on a prestigious throne for the King 	Peace prosperity and harmony with nature	No
Mankon Development Council Formed 1997	20	10 F 10M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to development in health and sanitation • Support members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £600 towards equipment for village health centres 	Make visible and positive contribution to the wellbeing of Mankon people of Cameroon.	No
Nweh Mundani Socio-Cultural Association-UK Formed 1990	19	14F 5M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance education, health and relieve poverty in hometown • Support members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2500 on books and computers for secondary schools • Money to women's co-operative association in hometown (but money came back because of poor communication) 	A self-sustaining Africa	No
Metta Cultural and Development Association. Formed 1991	30	22F 8M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote culture and provide mutual support • Contribute to health and social development projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £6500 on construction of an operating theatre in Mbengwi. • Constructed bridges linking remote villages • Set up a scheme to sell fertilisers/seedlings to member farmers at half the retail price 	To bridge the gap between the poor and the rich, increase life expectancy and help make all basic necessities affordable for all	No
Cameroon Community Welfare development Association UK Formed 1999	80	20F 60M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice and support services • Advance education • Provide facilities for recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's party • Educational seminar • Cameroon cultural festival • Football trips 	Greater co-operation and partnership	No

Diaspora and development: Contributions by African organisations in the UK to Africa's development

Manyu Elements Cultural Association Formed 1977	80	45F 35M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and social development • Mutual support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £9000 on hospital development and community hall • Free drug provision scheme • Aids/health awareness seminars 	Better, healthier, less dependable and integrated community	No
Bali Women's Association Formed 1993	25	25F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a forum for expression and support in social and cultural development • Generate a spirit of co-operation and dynamism among members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2000 providing beds, linen , towels and improving sanitary conditions in the general hospital in Bali 	Able to work together to achieve common goals	No
Sacred Hearts Ex-Students Association (SHESA) UK Formed 1995	32	32M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support development effort at college through skills transfer and financial support • Motivate students through provision of scholarships • Social forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten scholarships which run on a competitive base annually to motivate students • Contributed to shipping a school bus to college • SHESA UK contribution to college £5000 	A self-reliant, confident Africa.	No
Menke Wiy Africa Formed 1997	10	10F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist development efforts of women in Cameroon • Provide support to needy and vulnerable women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £700 in supporting survival efforts in a village destroyed by war and neighbourly disputes. 	To work in partnership with other agencies to promote a self-reliant Africa.	No.