

Peacebuilding

Key criteria of “good practice” for constructive diaspora engagement in peacebuilding

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Discussion paper based on fieldwork studies in
Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and
the United Kingdom

About the project

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Diasporas for Peace: Patterns, Trends and Potential of Long-distance Diaspora Involvement in Conflict Settings. Case Studies from the Horn of Africa (DIASPEACE) is a three-year research project looking into how diaspora groups can foster peace and development in their countries of origin.

DIASPEACE seeks to generate policy-relevant, evidence-based knowledge on how exiled populations from conflict regions play into the dynamics of peace and conflict in their countries of origin. In a globalised world such diaspora have become new forces shaping the interactions between countries, regions and continents. In the mainstream literature, diaspora are often seen to fuel conflict and exacerbate tensions through radical mobilisation along ethnic and religious lines. New research findings, however, show that diaspora groups are playing an increasingly prominent role in peace and reconciliation processes. In DIASPEACE the focus is on positive initiatives, while keeping in mind also the non-intended and negative impacts.

The project has an empirical focus on diaspora networks operating in Europe, which extend their transnational activities to the Horn of Africa. This is a region where decades of violent conflict have resulted in state collapse and the dispersal of more than two million people. The project involves six partners from Europe and two from the Horn of Africa and is based on field research conducted in both Europe and Africa.

DIASPEACE aims to: a) devise and test methodologies of multi-sited comparative research and to develop the conceptual framework for researching migrant political transnationalism in a conflict context; b) facilitate interaction between diaspora and other stakeholders in the Europe and in the Horn of Africa; c) provide policy input on how to better involve diaspora in conflict resolution and peace-building interventions, and how to improve coherence between security, development and immigration policies.

DIASPEACE consists of five main research components:

- Defining joint analytical tools and research methodologies;
- Providing a comparative assessment of transnational diaspora networks from the Horn of Africa and their interfaces with European civil society and state institutions;
- Case studies of diaspora as agents of conflict and peace from the Horn of Africa;
- Interaction between European institutions and diasporas in conflict resolution and peace building;
- Synthesis and dissemination of the research findings and identification of further research directions.

The project aims to generate new knowledge to better understand diaspora’s potentials, expectations and experiences as bridge builders between countries of residence and countries of origin.

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About ADPC

The African Diaspora Policy Centre (ADPC) is an independent policy research centre devoted to the study of migration and development-related issues from the under-documented perspective of the diaspora. It generates knowledge and information primarily targeted at three groups: African diaspora organisations in Europe, development practitioners and policy-makers dealing with diaspora-related issues both in Africa and Europe.

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Table of Contents

*Key criteria of “good practice”
for constructive diaspora
engagement in peacebuilding*

Introduction	5
Diaspora engagement and peacebuilding potential	7
Challenges to diaspora engagement	13
Key criteria for constructive engagement	17
Conclusion	21
References	23

This discussion paper focuses on the engagement of diasporas in peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin. The main argument put forward in this paper is that, given certain conditions, diasporas carry a potential to fruitfully engage in the field of peacebuilding. After substantiating this claim with a critical discussion of literature and research insight, the issue is further addressed by identifying and collating a set of key criteria of “good practice” for constructive diaspora engagement. This is to help third parties identify diaspora organisations and groups that have the potential to engage transparently and in long-term processes, while also presenting the capacity to foster the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts in their respective countries of origin. In an endeavour to strengthen cooperation between diaspora organisations and other actors, the aim of this discussion paper is therefore to offer to International Agencies, the European Union and its member states, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders an indicative tool that will assist them in the identification of potential cooperation partners within the diaspora community to work together in conflict settings. Given the particularly sensitive nature of interventions in this field, the suggested criteria take into account factors that are generally related to collaboration with diaspora organisations, as well as factors that take into account a specific concern for their engagement in peacebuilding. In addition, it is hoped that the criteria may also facilitate purposeful self-reflection among diaspora groups on how they operate and on new potential areas for engagement in their countries of origin.

In addressing the issues just outlined, this paper does not presume to be comprehensive and exhaustive. The considerations on which this paper is based are drawn from fieldwork carried out in a limited number of EU member states (namely the Netherlands, Finland, Italy, Germany and the UK) offering cross-country insight into the experiences of diaspora originating from the Horn of Africa (specifically Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea). The paper builds on some of the findings of the DIASPEACE research conducted under WP2 (Warnecke *et al.* 2009 and Warnecke ed. 2010). The nature of the data informing this paper therefore calls for precaution in the generalisation of its claims. Some of the issues raised, however, are worthy of consideration beyond the national boundaries of the case-studies utilised. The DIASPEACE study has shown that diaspora organisations do not passively wait for third parties in the country of residence or of origin to reach out to them. Instead, they often initiate development projects in the countries of origin in a voluntary and single handed way, often without receiving any form of assistance. The self drive and innovation which is behind most of this voluntarism is captured by Newland and Patrick in their observation that “the dense web of ties between the diaspora and country of origin is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the creation of individuals and groups acting on their own initiative, rather than a product of government intervention” (Newland and Patrick 2004, p. 17). It can be suggested, however, that enhanced collaboration between diaspora organisations and other actors would generate a more conducive environment for diaspora members to contribute to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in more meaningful ways.

This brief introduction is followed by a section of the paper that first discusses the broader issue of diaspora engagement in development, then looks more specifically at its peacebuilding potentials. The value added of engaging diaspora organisations in the process is explored here, as well as the extent to which their activities can be peace-relevant and contribute to peaceful transformation of

factors or root causes behind the conflict.¹ This discussion is supported by case-study examples drawn from the DIASPEACE research on Horn of Africa diaspora organisations and their activities, with an attempt to sketch out how the latter could underpin formal engagement in peacebuilding. Cross country experiences and cases of constructive diaspora engagement and development strategy are presented, to be used as examples from which lessons can be learnt. The following section looks at some of the potential challenges to diaspora engagement. While acknowledging the importance of factors that derive from the specific situation and conditions in the countries of residence and origin, as well as of structural factors at the international level that may influence these country policies, this section wishes to focus primarily on factors that are directly related to diaspora organisations themselves. These diaspora-related factors pertaining to organisational capacity but also to modes and fields of intervention are, in fact, of key relevance for policy formulation and programme design when taking into account diaspora engagement in peacebuilding.

The elements presented in the preceding two sections inspire a set of key criteria, which are illustrated next. These criteria are intended as a guide on the basis of which third parties can identify more specific indicators for the selection of diaspora organisations in view of their effective engagement in peacebuilding. Finally, some conclusions are drawn by synthesising the main issues emerging from the discussion in the paper. Some of the limitations presented by the suggested criteria are recalled here, indicating possible paths for improvement by way of future research.

¹ *The DIASPEACE project adopts a broad definition of peacebuilding, which is inclusive of actions that directly address the peace process as well as actions that can indirectly promote and maintain long-term peace. This definition is further detailed later in the paper (p. 10 and footnote 3).*

Diaspora engagement and peacebuilding potential

*Key criteria of “good practice”
for constructive diaspora
engagement in peacebuilding*

The potential represented by migration and diasporas² for the development of their countries of origin has increasingly become an issue of policy as well as research interest. “The transfers of social, financial and cognitive resources by migrants for the benefit of origin-country development have recently gained substantial attention in the ‘migration and development’ debate” (de Haas 2006, p. 8). A large body of literature on the migration-development nexus discusses the various ways in which sending countries benefit of financial remittances (Ratha and Shaw 2007), social remittances (Levitt 1998; Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.* 2002), skills transfer (Brinkerhoff 2006a; Lowell *et al.* 2004; Skeldon 2005) and, more broadly, of diaspora engagement in social and community projects aiming at promoting development in countries of origin (Adepoju 2008; de Haas 2005; Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.* 2002). Direct diaspora engagement has, in fact, even been touted by some as a way of harnessing the diaspora potentials for contributing to development in their countries of origin that can integrate the efforts undertaken by other external actors such as development agencies (de Haas 2006; Gamlen 2008; Ionescu 2006; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001; van Hear *et al.* 2004).

Despite a large bulk of research and theorisation, coupled with a strong policy interest in this field, a number of questions still remain unaddressed about how the engagement of diaspora organisations can favour the promotion of homeland development. This statement applies particularly in certain circumstances. The potential for homeland development remains unclear, for instance, in contexts that are characterised by conflict. In these cases, the interest for diaspora potentials needs to be taken a step further in order to address existing policy and strategy gaps in an effort to tap into the diaspora potentials for conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Mohamoud 2005a and 2005b). This holds particularly true in the case of many African countries. Recent years, in fact, have seen the emergence of large and significant African diaspora communities in Europe and elsewhere in the Western world. The African diaspora is however composed of extremely diversified groups originating from different parts of the African continent. Countries that have experienced political upheavals, dictatorships and civil wars or that are still experiencing ongoing conflicts have more representation in the diaspora compared to those living in a situation of peace and stability. This is a “phenomenon of the contemporary African diaspora which is largely the result of violent conflicts and wars that have flared up in many African countries since the early 1990s” (Mohamoud 2006, p. 2). With the examples of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, the Horn of Africa represents a relevant region for a closer analysis of the links between migration and development in settings characterised by conflict.

Existing theorisation on the linkages between diasporas and conflict has more often focused on the problematic aspects of such a relationship, with migrants described as contributing to the transnationalisation of conflicts by engaging in them from a distance (Brinkerhoff 2006; Collier 2000; Demmers 2002; Duffield 2002; Kaldor 2001). In recent years, however, a number of authors has started to challenge this assumption by looking also at the ways in which diaspora can play a positive role in the peacebuilding sphere (Cochrane 2007; Hansen 2008; Leroy and Mohan 2003; Mohamoud 2005a and 2005b; Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.* 2002; Orjuela 2006; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Smith 2007; Zunzer 2004). In particular, diasporas

² For further discussion on the concept of diaspora see also Brah (1996) and Safran (1990). An overview of the use of the concept made within the DIASPEACE project is offered in Pirkkalainen and Abdile (2009).

are believed to have an ability to contribute to peacebuilding by undertaking and promoting activities that aim at the sustainable transformation of structural conflict factors and patterns in all relevant social, economic and political spheres. Such an understanding of ‘peacebuilding’ presupposes a long-term commitment to a process both by local and external actors which simultaneously addresses both the material (infrastructural) and attitudinal (inter-group) level of conflict.³

The still limited research and theorisation on the positive side of diaspora engagement in peace processes is followed by a general lack of interest, on behalf of countries of residence, in exploring new opportunities that immigration from the Horn of Africa may pose to favour conflict resolution, reconstruction and development in the Region. Such a lack of interest is justified by general assumptions about the complex and ambiguous role of diasporas and exiles in conflicts in their countries of origin (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). The influx of large numbers of refugees from the Horn of Africa has therefore led several European countries to largely link the diaspora to some of the past and ongoing conflict (Demmers 2002; Mohamoud 2006). It has been pointed out, for instance, that in policy discussions on conflict in Africa diasporas are mentioned only in passing and are more often referred to as negative agents in the process, without further substantiation (Mohamoud 2006). Nonetheless there are a few cases of studies on positive contributions of African diaspora groups that have been commissioned and used also by policy-makers (Bercovitch 2007; Ionescu 2006; Sheikh and 2009).

Experiences in several European countries covered by the DIASPEACE project⁴ reveal increasingly high levels of diasporas organising through various platforms for collective action. Diaspora organisations are however diverse in terms of their countries of origin, of the activities undertaken at both the national and international level, of their networks and organisational forms, hence they cannot be reduced to a singular collective actor (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). More specifically, the ways in which the diasporas from the Horn of Africa organise are shaped by a number of factors, among which the historical connections with the country of origin, the degree of political stability in the country of origin, the level of social inclusion in the country of residence, education, degree and type of political and social consciousness.

As observed also by many other sources, diaspora groups are numerous and they exhibit a high degree of spontaneous and independent efforts on behalf of individual migrants as well as of migrant organisations to contribute to homeland development (van Hear *et al.* 2004). According to Orozco, four critical factors enable the formation of a group into a diaspora. These include “the level of community – and particularly elite and activist – consciousness about the need or desire for a link with the country of origin; the homeland’s perceptions of emigrants; the outreach policies by governments in the homeland, and the existence of relationships between source and destination countries” (Orozco 2005, p. 5). These aspects are more discernable at the international level, as a location which also “enables them to mobilise substantial financial resources, extensive transnational networks, powerful international forces, and political connections that span the globe and through which they could make a difference to the situation in the country of

³ For further insight into the definition of peacebuilding and in particular of the interpretation adopted within the DIASPEACE project see Warneke *et al.* (2009, pp. 10 – 11).

⁴ For an extensive discussion of the case studies and findings of this research see Warnecke (ed.) (2010).

origin for better or for worse in different respects” (Mohamoud 2006, p. 3). The transnational engagement with the country of origin therefore facilitates the creation and reinforcement of a diaspora commonality. This is also enhanced by the fact that the Horn of Africa diasporas like their counterparts from elsewhere endeavour through their “shared experiences to seek more meaningful forms of political participation, and the evolution of an increasingly globalised repertoire uniting outlooks and actions” (Cohen 1998, p. 9). In the case of conflict-derived diasporas, the fragmentation that has been observed, for instance, within the Somali diaspora is at times downplayed or even disappears when a common “enemy” is identified. DIASPEACE data has shown this to be the case, for instance, as regards the Ethiopian invasion. This does not mean to deny that fragmentation within diaspora groups does occur and remains undeniable.

In terms of peacebuilding, the diaspora and their organisations have been suggested as potential critical agents (Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Mohamoud 2006) who can and do make significant contributions to peacebuilding, conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction efforts in their respective countries of origin. This view is based on the notion that the diasporas and their organisations have better familiarity with their country of origin combined with life experiences in the countries of residence compared to other external players such as development agencies. Their potentials therefore lie in their linkages with countries of origin and their experiences as a diaspora in the countries of residence. At the transnational level, the diasporas also have the potentials to play a significant role in peacebuilding related activities as major stakeholders and part of the broader civil society organisations. This role is informed by the view that diaspora communities present an interesting facet of civil society in that they are neither wholly external nor internal, but somewhere between the two. This unique position therefore anchors the diaspora organisations as “a key part of civil society activism and they can play a number of roles in conflict and attempts to build peace within divided societies” (Cochrane 2007).

The extent to which diaspora potentials and activities can be translated into pragmatic measures that contribute to peaceful transformation of factors/ root causes behind the conflict is however an issue that still requires further investigation. Engaging the diaspora to promote conflict resolution (Lyons 2004; Mohamoud 2005b; Shain 2002), in fact, requires their activities to be actually peace relevant and to be undertaken with an aim of contributing to peaceful transformation of factors or root causes behind the conflict in the country of origin. Mohamoud, (2006, p. 5) suggests that there are four critical areas through which the diaspora interact with the country of origin dynamics that are of policy interest. These include remittances and conflict in the country of origin; diaspora political involvement in the country of origin; diaspora civic-oriented involvement in the country of origin and diaspora lobbying in the countries of residence.⁵ Although the four factors suggested by Mohamoud underpin much of diaspora engagement, the diaspora involvement in the country of origin can in fact take different forms, with diverse implications for social, economic and political development. As aptly described by Cassanelli (2001) the nexus between social, economic and political development “at home” and in the diaspora is a “dialectic relationship.”

⁵ *The last point suggests that diaspora engagement with the country of origin in a constructive and peace-relevant way can also take place indirectly through activities undertaken in the country of residence.*

This also means that “social remittances” (Levitt 1998)⁶ including attitudes that foster peaceful conflict resolution or democratic practices can only have a positive impact on the situation in the country of origin if they are firmly rooted in the diaspora (Tezare *et al.* 2006).

In the country of origin, the diaspora can be involved in peacebuilding through direct political participation, for instance in nation-level peace conferences or electoral processes as was the case in Ethiopia in 2005 or in the recent Djibouti process concerning Somalia. The diaspora can also engage with the country of origin through civil society organisations that operate at the local, national and international levels. The latter provide an opportunity for diaspora groups to take part in development and/or humanitarian activities such as health, education and relief services. In Somalia, for instance, these services have shown to transform the factors underpinning the continued suffering under the conflict. Other examples include the diaspora facilitation of reconciliation efforts at the local level (i.e. in the case of Somalia where support for the reconciliation between clashing clans through service delivery in strategic locations has brought together different clans and communities for interaction, sports and elders meetings).⁷ These examples confirm the observation that diaspora groups can function as simultaneous bridge-builders and have the potential for reducing conflict by fostering constructive dialogue processes or contributing to positive economic developments through remitting money and knowledge (Zunzer 2004; Mohamoud 2005b). With a view to engage diaspora organisations as peacebuilding partners, however, it is important to differentiate between the types of activities they undertake. It is, in fact, essential that an organisation actually focuses on reconciliation, education, community and peacebuilding efforts. In most of the cases studied within the DIASPEACE project, diaspora organisations choose activities that are not directly or explicitly peacebuilding in nature and focus, instead, on forms of humanitarian and/or development assistance. This choice of engagement strategy is often related to the perception held by the diaspora of the conflict and of its own role. In some cases of Somali organisations covered by the DIASPEACE project, for instance, the conflict is perceived as being influenced or protracted to a large extent by external interferences (such as interventions by neighbouring countries), or the politics of the country of origin is seen as run by corrupted individuals. In these circumstances, the diaspora groups may feel that they do not have the means or the motivation to engage at that level and thus they chose to undertake very practical development work at the local level. Similarly among Ethiopian organisations, there is hardly any group with an explicit or exclusive focus on peacebuilding or peace consolidation. A number of groups, however, engage in the field of conflict resolution, reconciliation and human rights and can thus be considered to indirectly contribute to reconstruction and stabilisation in Ethiopia. Activities range from awareness raising in the field of human rights (e.g. conscientious objection), to conducting conflict research, to organising discussion events, to implementing peace and reconciliation projects at the community level in Ethiopia. While these forms of engagement may still allow diaspora organisations to contribute indirectly to peacebuilding processes, their activities must prove an

⁶ *The notion of social remittances according to Levitt entails not only “progressive” thinking, norms, behaviours, it is however important to note that the diaspora in fact can also be very “conservative” and regressive (i.e. against the modernisation of the country).*

⁷ *Many examples of this kind have been encountered in the DIASPEACE study of Somali organisations based in the Netherlands and in Italy. Despite strong differences in the country of residence settings and organisational setup, these initiatives have proved to have a positive impact on the peace process in Somalia.*

awareness of the conflict-related dynamics they might address. Whilst refusing to declare an upfront peacebuilding focus, moreover, most diaspora groups perceive themselves as having an important role in contributing to the promotion of peace.

As mentioned above, diaspora can contribute indirectly to peacebuilding in the country of origin by engaging also in activities in the country of residence or at the transnational level. Diaspora organisations offer to their communities a setting in which individuals and groups are able to formulate their problems, articulate their interests and present them in different fora and at different levels to other actors in the countries of residence. The articulation of diaspora interest, for instance, often takes the form of lobbying which extends beyond the country of residence also to the international level. Diaspora networks have been noted to act as important facilitators of internal, inter-state, and worldwide political, cultural and economic connections. According to Sheffer, they are seen as “precursors of post-modern trans-state social and political systems” (Sheffer 2002, p. 245). The cross-country contacts established by diaspora are often based on personal networks and transnational links to branches in other countries. These efforts have the potentials for awareness creation on conflict issues, and drawing the attention of different actors, governments, and development agencies. The evidence of their impact, however, is always a subject of debate. As observed by Eva Østergaard-Nielsen “diaspora seldom make a government adopt a policy unless that policy is in the national interest of the country” (2006, p. 10). Such observations are critical for analysing the extent to which diasporas can be engaged at policy level and the extent to which such processes and inputs could translate into peacebuilding outcomes in the country of origin.

Diaspora networks, of course, involve relations not only with actors outside the diaspora, but also within the diaspora. At this level, diasporas can play a peacebuilding role within their own communities in the countries of residence by aggregating people on the basis of shared and common goals. Most of the groups investigated within DIASPEACE have been working primarily towards “immigrant politics” (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003), undertaking activities to improve the social status of the community in the countries of residence. Before undertaking activities in the country of origin, in fact, it is important for the diaspora to obtain “recognition” and the fulfilment of basic rights in the country of residence. In all the countries covered by this study, it appears that the level of integration (or of recognition and rights) in the host society allows for different degrees of mobilisation towards activities targeting the country of origin. Moreover, although not directly aiming at peacebuilding, activities promoting the improvement of living conditions in the countries of residence can be said to have a unifying effect within the diaspora. These constructive attempts to create common identities and mobilise towards common goals (Axel 2004; Kleist 2007) therefore simultaneously have the effect of mitigating conflictual identities relating to the country of origin.⁸ Similar processes occur within the diaspora also at the transnational level. The DIASPEACE study has shown that the diaspora from the three Horn of Africa countries considered all have very broad networks operating transnationally. This is due to the fact that most of the refugees from these countries are widely dispersed in various locations in Africa, Middle East, Europe, North America and Australia. The transnational linkages that have been generated by this geographic dispersion offer critical connections for potential diaspora

⁸ *It has, however, also been observed that when the diaspora engages towards the country of origin, such as in the case of Somalia, fragmentary lines can also re-emerge.*

involvement in the country of origin. DIASPEACE field data has shown that a number of diaspora organisations have been able to develop close linkages with a number of likeminded organisations in other European countries and North America. Somali organisations based in Finland, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK have shown to be part of various transnational networks with basis in Somalia and focal points and affiliations in several countries in Europe, USA and Canada. One organisation even established contacts within the Horn of Africa through Kenya, in order to facilitate smooth operations with local partners in southern and central Somalia. Similarly, among the Ethiopian diaspora in Germany, the DIASPEACE research uncovered a number of organisations with transnational ties to other Ethiopian communities around the globe. This holds true especially for groups organised around ethnic identities. These transnational networks proved an ability to accumulate significant resources to be invested in development projects in Ethiopia, however research revealed very few concrete co-operation efforts between different groups at the project level. There are also groups who explicitly aim to foster dialogue processes among conflicting groups and parties by facilitating dialogue processes within the Ethiopian diaspora. Although the effort to invite conflicting parties to the discussion table was not always successful, these initiatives show the willingness and to some degree the ability to negotiate and overcome ideological differences and cleavages. Moreover, there is no real evidence of the impact that these intra-diaspora reconciliation efforts might have on political and social processes in the countries of origin. It can however be assumed that coalitions between different political fractions in the diaspora, for instance, might in fact have some influence on party politics or conflict proceedings in the countries of origin.⁹ The development of similar transnational linkages and activities that transcend different countries not only may lead to the mitigation of conflict and intra-group dialogue, but may also lead to greater potential for the mobilisation of various groups, while also allowing individual organisations to tap into broader experiences across several countries of residence.

⁹ *Examples of this nature have been encountered among political coalitions of Eritrean parties and movements in the near diaspora.*

Challenges to diaspora engagement

*Key criteria of “good practice”
for constructive diaspora
engagement in peacebuilding*

Engaging diaspora organisations can be beneficial to various stakeholders in many ways. For the diaspora groups, it enhances their potentials for networking and viable contact establishment in the countries of residence, but also gives them the platform, capacities and resources which can enable them to effectively implement activities in the countries of origin. For the country of residence institutions, agencies and government, engaging the diaspora can provide a critical avenue for learning from the diasporas' relevant activities, and valuable information from the country of origin, for their policy considerations. The positive aspects of diaspora engagement outlined above require however to be integrated with additional considerations on some of the challenges posed by involving diaspora in peacebuilding processes.

Alongside structural factors relating to the countries of origin and of residence, as well as to the international level (Orozco 2005, p 5), factors relating directly to diaspora organisations and their capacities also play a significant role in framing the opportunities for diaspora engagement in peacebuilding initiatives and processes. As aptly put by Smith, in fact, the engagement of diasporas in conflict processes has to be assessed “by tracing not just the capacities of the diaspora (agency) but also the transnational opportunities available to it (structure)” (2007, p. 9). An analysis of the intervening structural factors goes beyond the scope of this paper, which aims at identifying relevant characteristics possessed specifically by diaspora organisations to be suitable peacebuilding partners. The latter will therefore be the main focus of this section.

Before fully entering the discussion on the characters of individual diaspora organisations, it is worth mentioning that the first difficulty faced by third parties wishing to engage with diaspora from the Horn of Africa (and elsewhere) is the fact that accurate information on what activities they are actually undertaking is largely lacking. Fragmentation within the diaspora, coupled with the small scale of many of its initiatives mean that only those groups that are well established and engage in activities that are visible in the public domain are easy to identify and access. This lack of in depth knowledge and understanding of what the Horn of Africa diasporas are engaged in has, in turn, contributed to a lack of critical knowledge on their potentials. Few exceptions can be cited to this tendency, such as the ongoing discussion on the case of the Somali diaspora (Hansen 2007; Horst 2008; Kleist 2007 and 2008; Lindley 2007 and 2009), which however takes place more at an academic level rather than at a level that can inform policy and practice. Particularly in the case of diaspora originating from conflict areas, such as the case of many Horn of Africa countries, much of the interest in the countries of residence has focused, instead, on issues such as the legality or illegality of migrants (Lindahl 2008; Willen 2007), migration management (Piper 2006), integration (Bosswick and Heckmann 2006; Münz 2008) and diaspora links to conflicts (Koser 2003; Lyons 2004).

Despite a lack of strong attention for this issue, in most of the countries of residence studied within DIASPEACE, diaspora organisations have been noted to engage in a number of activities that could immensely contribute to peacebuilding. In particular, they engage with each other within their respective communities, they mobilise their members for the purpose of visibility and they establish formal relations with institutions, development agencies and local authorities. The latter, of course, is easier in cases where diaspora activities and engagement frameworks are institutionalised. From such frameworks, influential networks tend to develop where diasporas are of sufficient size and concentration and have sufficient time to organise (Lyons 2006, p.5). Networking with country of residence actors is a two way process, which depends on the existing policies

and interest of the country of residence to engage its diaspora communities, as well as on the capacity and the level of professionalism of diaspora organisations themselves, which will be discussed next. As it has been put by de Haas, therefore, it is also important to question the role played by development actors in enhancing diaspora involvement. In his view, questions need to be asked about “what practical policy recommendations can be formulated so as to help and motivate development actors and migrant organisations in building mutual partnerships” (de Haas 2006, p. 5).

Although some of the structural factors just mentioned are key in defining the possibilities for diaspora engagement, it is important to recognise that “diasporas are not powerless victims of circumstances. Diasporas have agency, however limited” (Smith 2007, p. 15). The nature and type of diaspora organisations, however, poses some challenges in their successful engagement in peacebuilding activities.

The already mentioned fragmentation within the diaspora poses the first challenge to the selection of relevant partner organisations. The diversity and complexity that characterise many diaspora communities not only make it difficult for an outsider to untangle their complex universe, but they may also hinder the possibilities for cooperation with country of residence institutions and development agencies. Fragmentation within the diaspora, in fact, can be related to previous or ongoing conflicts in the country of origin, which have spilled over into the diaspora (Lyons 2006). To assess whether a diaspora organisation is capable of constructive engagement in peacebuilding, therefore, conceptual differentiations have to be made between the different groups that make up a diaspora community. It is thus important to recognise the *heterogeneous* nature of diasporas and to pay attention to the ways in which fragmentary lines are drawn within a given community on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, clan, profession and generation. In selecting a specific group for undertaking peace-building activities in the country of origin, institutions and development agencies unavoidably also “legitimise” this group to act, hence excluding others. Engaging diaspora groups, in fact, also means providing them with means and opportunities, which may have the counter-effect of offering resources to some, while creating new competitions and misunderstandings among others. In one recently investigated case regarding the *Associazione Diaspora e Pace* (ADEP, a network of Somali women’s associations acting in Italy), their interaction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been criticised as the dynamics just described were at work. One group was legitimised against others, which also translated into financial resources managed by a few, while the others felt excluded. From this and similar examples a significant lesson to be drawn is that it is important to take into account how an explicit and transparent criterion for the selection of certain groups must be established in order to avoid productive legitimisation of certain diaspora groups at the expense of others. In this sense, diasporas are not a neutral third party, but an actor with own interests, views and perceptions. This holds particularly true in sensitive conflict issues and must be taken into account by third parties wishing to identify suitable diaspora partners (Mezzetti and Guglielmo 2010).

On the basis of the considerations just made one might also question that diaspora organisations as such are, in fact, the most suitable actors to engage in peacebuilding. As observed in the case of Italy, participation of the Somali diaspora in peacebuilding processes in the country of origin took place at the individual level rather than through the associational dimension. At least two factors concurred in explaining this trend: 1) *clan discourse*, which is actually the general criterion of selection for delegates during the three last peace processes; 2) *the specific type of Somali associations in Italy*. Insofar as clan has been chosen

as a constitutional element by the new Somali institutions, Somali diaspora associations have de facto been excluded from taking part in the peace process (Mezzetti and Guglielmo 2010). The danger of entirely excluding the diaspora from conflict resolution initiatives in the affected countries lies in the consequences of marginalising a critical constituency whose input has been significant for the sustainability of those communities experiencing difficulties brought about by conflict. The remittances sent back by the diaspora into these communities play a significant role in shaping the living conditions and other dynamics on the ground. As such, their constructive involvement in peace processes is an integral part of the solution even if some groups in the diaspora have also been behind the conflagrations in the countries of origin. In this context, it can be argued that any form of diaspora engagement for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa requires a critical look at the political processes in the concerned countries and how the diaspora can effectively make a contribution. With protracted conflicts as in the case of Somalia, or in Ethiopia and Eritrea where the existing governments are strong and are part of the previous and emerging frictions, the diaspora input could be mobilised through mechanisms that bring all the stakeholders on board. This requires developing frameworks and processes in which a constructive role of the diaspora is accepted as an element in the overall contribution to peacebuilding.

Another series of restrictive factors for diaspora engagement pertain more closely to the features of diaspora organisations themselves. The resources that they are able to mobilise pose a particular challenge. Most activities engaged in by the diaspora are, in fact, purely voluntary in nature. This means that the time that is dedicated to them is often limited as individuals must first fulfil work and family commitments. Empirical data collected within the DIASPEACE project confirms that most diaspora organisations are small in size and that they face the continuous challenge of having sufficient – time and financial – resources to work efficiently, while members deal with personal everyday difficulties in the country of residence such as unemployment, economic hardships, social and family problems.

The degree of continuity and stability of diaspora organisations is an additional important factor for consideration, that might help exclude from partnership spontaneous and short-lived initiatives. The latter often spring up in response to political, social or economic crises “at home”. Other groups, even with a very low degree of formalisation might well be firmly established and highly effective, even though they might not be officially registered.

Another limiting factor relates to the difficulty to find a legitimised and trusted position (Vasanthakumar 2005), which hinders cooperation both with the authorities and with the respective diaspora communities in the country of residence. While the legitimacy of diaspora organisations begins in theory with formal registration with national authorities, in practice this may not automatically translate into ensuring financial and moral support from country of residence officials. This is often occasioned by the perceived “bad reputation” of diaspora organisations as there have been cases of money misuse and lack of accountability. Legitimising a position among the diaspora community, instead, relates to motivating people to get “on board” and to contribute to activities directed towards the country of origin, which in some cases may be difficult. Diaspora members, for instance, may have lost the hope of improving the situation in the country of origin. In a case like the one of Somalia, for instance, the length of the conflict situation may act as a dissuasive for people to wish to actively intervene.

Another important factor, which relates to the resources of particular diaspora groups, is their networking capacity with other affected stakeholders in the country of residence or through transnational linkages. In this regard migrants have become progressively more transnational in their orientations and can thus be simultaneously involved in two or more societies at the same time (Vertovec 1999). Evidence provided in the previous section of this paper shows that in general the Horn of Africa diaspora groups have managed to network extensively at the transnational level. In the cases covered by the DIASPEACE research, in fact, diaspora organisations have proved to rely on these transnational networks in remitting money through globalised banking systems or informal channels and in carrying out fundraising for development or humanitarian purposes. This has allowed diaspora networks to undertake initiatives in the country of origin without depending on support coming from external actors. Although this should be indicated as a strength of diaspora organisations, the transnational reach of these initiatives may in fact pose a problem to the establishment of partnerships at the level of the country of residence on the basis of differences in scale and reach.

The diaspora understandings of the conflict and its local dynamics are another important factor that can challenge diaspora engagement. On the one hand, a clear understanding of the conflict and of the context in which it takes place represent an added value that the diaspora can contribute. On the other hand, however, it is also well known that diasporas tend to have rather romanticised views of the home country and that they are more inclined to adopt extreme positions (Anderson 1992; Skrbis 1999). The latter may be attributable to the fact that they do not directly face the outcome of actions undertaken in the country of origin, but also to the marginalisation they face in the country of residence (Demmers 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006). In general, the diaspora groups or organisations’ ability to read or understand the conflict beyond a mere local dimension may depend on different factors, namely: their capacity of being present in different locations of the home region either as a development actor or performing other functions within the local community; the leaders’ involvement and their historical background in national politics; the ability of establishing “strategic partnerships”; the associations’ mandates, especially when linked to the agendas of international organisations (Mezzetti and Guglielmo 2010).

Key criteria for constructive engagement

Key criteria of “good practice” for constructive diaspora engagement in peacebuilding

The research insight provided above confirms that diaspora organisations have the potential to be considered as prospective new actors in the field of peacebuilding. As suggested by Zunzer (2004), if sufficiently empowered the engagement of diasporas as collaborative partners in peacebuilding initiatives favours the development of win-win situations for both host and home societies. Their knowledge of the country and context, as well as their motivation represent valuable assets that could integrate the efforts already undertaken in the field of peacebuilding by governmental and non-governmental actors in Europe. Engaging diaspora in peacebuilding actions, however, also presents a number of challenges, some of which are outlined in the previous section. For partnerships between the diaspora and other external actors to be effective, in particular, migrant organisations should meet some basic requirements. This should be part of a process of negotiation, by which diaspora groups should be expected to meet given requirements, while third parties should also be prepared to adapt their ways and standards in order to favour the establishment of mutual collaboration. More specifically, a preliminary number of characteristics presented by organisations that are active in the field of reconciliation and peacebuilding were identified by the DIASPEACE project itself while setting sampling standards for the selection of case studies for further in depth research to be conducted.¹⁰ The research data later collected among the organisations selected, moreover, showed that a number of factors can shape and influence diaspora organisations’ ability to engage in peacebuilding constructively. This research-based insight into some of the limiting and enabling factors is therefore used here to suggest a set of key criteria that diaspora organisations should meet in order to qualify as potential partners in peacebuilding activities. Presented here in an order that is not indicative of their relative importance or priority, these criteria are proposed as preliminary elements to be taken into account by Governments in the countries of residence, International Agencies, NGOs and other third parties who wish to identify diaspora partners for their peacebuilding activities.

a) Transparency within the diaspora organisation

Transparency as a criterion relates to issues pertaining to the organisational structure and modes of governance, which must be clear and open. Legal registration of a diaspora organisation in the country of residence with the right authorities, for instance, constitutes a sign of transparency. The latter, however, can also be verified on the basis of the organisation’s internal structures and procedures, in particular as regards decision making processes. The establishment of frameworks for supervisory roles and oversight functions (as in the case of the nomination of a Board or other leadership positions within the organisation), for instance, indicate that diaspora organisations operate with clear rules and laid down procedures.

b) Inclusiveness of the diaspora organisation

The heterogeneous nature of many diaspora communities requires explicit attention to be paid to the issue of diversity and fragmentation within the various communities. The latter can be declined along ethnic, religious and/or gender

¹⁰ *As diaspora organisations rarely declare explicitly to be working in the areas of reconciliation and peacebuilding, the following criteria were used for a first assessment of the nature of the activities undertaken: inclusiveness towards members and partners, continuity and stability of activities, transparency, cooperation with stakeholders in the home country (Warneke et al. 2009).*

lines. Third parties need to identify ways of acknowledging this fragmentation and dealing with it constructively. For the purposes of effective engagement, third parties may seek for diaspora partners that can prove a commitment to being inclusive, regardless of existing differences within the community. This commitment can be sought in the organisation’s plans and in the mission or agenda for which the organisation was set up. This, however, may not always be a feasible option, as conflict situations in the country of origin may be reflected also in fragmentation and contrapositions among the diaspora. In these cases, it must be clear to third parties which particular diaspora constituency is represented by potential partner organisations. This, in fact, will result in the exclusion of certain sections of the diaspora from envisioned activities, an issue that becomes particularly sensitive in the case of engagement in the field of peacebuilding.

c) Accountability within the diaspora organisation

The nature of accountability within diaspora organisations is critical for their engagement, in that it shows an active effort to show rigour in an organisation’s processes, procedures, records and audited reports. These activities and frameworks guarantee accountability and integrity in the management of the diaspora organisations’ affairs both to constituents and to supporting donors. That the latter should find accountability desirable is rather self-explanatory, however the role played by this virtue also within diaspora communities themselves should not be overlooked. Accountability is, in fact, a critical element for the building of trust within diaspora organisations, since lack of trust is recognised as one of the causes of fragmentation and conflict within diaspora communities. Lack of trust also hinders reconciliatory efforts in the country both of residence and of origin. Selecting groups on the basis of their accountability would therefore send the right signals and it is likely to encourage openness in the diaspora organisational management at all levels.

d) Cooperation with institutions/individuals in the country of residence

The nature and extent of cooperation with other relevant actors and institutions in the country of residence are important factors providing insight into the profile of diaspora organisations. This key criteria, which can be easily translated into measurable indicators,¹¹ can reveal how diaspora organisations are embedded within the institutions, human rights and development actors in the country of residence and their ability to establish relevant networks for broader input in different areas of development and peacebuilding. These forms of cooperation, in fact, are critical for the sharing of knowledge and experiences that, in turn, can favour the incorporation of new perspectives and insights into peacebuilding policies and programmes. Moreover, cooperation with institutions and development organisations in the country of residence could serve as a starting point for these third parties to actively engage in the countries of origin of the diaspora, thus favouring the promotion of new initiatives.

e) Cooperation within the diaspora and transnational ties

Besides diaspora interactions and cooperation in the countries of residence, contacts within the diaspora also represent a highly critical aspect in diaspora engagement. Firstly, contacts may give way to forms of collaboration of a

¹¹ *Such as, for instance, the number of existing partners, the number of collaborations established, the attendance rate at key relevant events, etc.*

transnational nature. The research findings illustrated above, for instance, suggest that the more diaspora organisations are transnational and the more they are likely to succeed in their interventions. Reliance on a transnational web of contacts, in fact, enables them to mobilise resources and capacities more effectively to the advantage of activities implemented in the country of origin. Furthermore, transnational ties favour a greater visibility of diaspora activities. Secondly, forms of cooperation may be established within the diaspora with an ability to cut across internal divisions and contrasts. In these cases, collaboration becomes an indicator of the ability and willingness of a particular diaspora group to discuss, negotiate and overcome ideological, ethnic or religious differences and cleavages that might be at the basis of conflict situations in the country of origin.

f) The diaspora perceptions on peace and conflict in the country of origin

Diaspora perceptions on peace and conflict are another key criterion for diaspora engagement in peacebuilding. Taking into account these perceptions requires finding ways of assessing how the diaspora looks at the conflict situation in the country of origin. Such an endeavour cannot do without a solid understanding of the causes of conflict and its dynamics in a given country context. Because of the diversity in the nature of conflict situations, specific indicators will have to be elaborated on the basis of each country’s context. It is, however, essential that any chosen indicator should be able to recognise existing differences between the perceptions of those living in the country and the perceptions of the diaspora. Exposed to the effects of long distance, in fact, the latter tend to become rather simplistic and categorical in nature. Any chosen indicator, moreover, should also take into account the ways in which ongoing developments in the country of origin continue to shape the perceptions of conflict and peace within the diaspora. The diaspora’s perceptions, in fact, inform their choices of activities, therefore affecting the opportunity for effective engagement in any envisioned peacebuilding process.

g) The diaspora engagement strategies

The engagement strategies adopted by diaspora organisations are also an important criterion for selecting them as potential partners in peacebuilding. A suitable indicator should firstly cover the nature of the declared aims of the organisation, in order to assess the compatibility with the third party’s own aim, as well as relevance for the purposes of peace, reconciliation or community building. Moreover, the ways in which the organisation’s aims are then pursued in practice should also be subject to evaluation. The means chosen by the organisation should be explicitly peaceful and have the ability to challenge attitudes and identification patterns that have a potential to generate conflict. Finally, the nature of the specific activities undertaken and of their beneficiaries could also be taken into account in the overall assessment of adequate diaspora engagement strategies.

h) Continuity and sustainability of the diaspora organisation and its activities

Although several diaspora organisations exist in the respective countries of residence, many have been noted to exist only on paper, due to a lack of ability to translate their aims into concrete interventions. Few diaspora organisations, in fact, have the capacity to implement activities and to do so in a way that is stable over time. This statement affects the continuity and sustainability of diaspora organisations’ membership as well as activities. Many initiatives of individual diaspora members who bring personal motivation and resources become unsustainable when those individuals leave the organisation. This is reflected

in a frequent lack of continuity in the organisations’ activities in the countries of residence and even more so in the country of origin. In the latter, the potential for continuity and sustainability can be assessed by means of the resources available to the organisation on the ground. In particular, the nature of local partners and the type of collaborations established with them are key factors that should be taken into account.

Drawing on the findings of earlier DIASPEACE research (Warnecke ed. 2010) and the discussion presented in this paper, several concluding points should be made. The DIASPEACE project, in fact, has so far offered valuable insights while also raising critical issues for consideration in the anticipation of engaging the Horn of Africa diaspora in order to tap into its peacebuilding potential. Some of the issues touched by this paper, moreover, also raise new questions for further research that should be anticipated here.

The set of key criteria just illustrated aims at facilitating the selection of diaspora organisations with which third parties might wish to engage in conducting activities in the country of origin. Following the presentation of these criteria, some considerations need to be recalled, however, on their reach and limitations. It should be newly stressed that the criteria are not intended in normative terms, but wish to offer a few indications of relevant organisational traits that third parties might wish to take into account prior to establishing collaboration with diaspora groups. This non-normative nature is further strengthened by the fact that not all the suggested criteria may be relevant for all diaspora organisations. Transparency and accountability (criteria a and c), for instance, should be weighed particularly in the case of organisations that engage politically or that are organised along ethnic lines when the latter have played a role in the conflict situation. Similarly, the criterion of inclusiveness (b) should not be taken into account in the case of a women’s organisation, which presents a non-inclusive nature by definition. These considerations therefore require that the criteria listed in this paper should be analysed and adapted to each case with particular care, selecting those that might be relevant, excluding those that are not appropriate, and defining a weighting system able to attribute greatest importance to those criteria that address features that are particularly key in a given context.

It should also be noted that while some of the criteria apply more broadly to collaboration between diaspora and other actors for undertaking activities of various nature in the country or origin as well as of residence, others are more directly concerned with a specific engagement in the field of peacebuilding in home countries. The criterion relating to diaspora engagement strategies (g), for instance, is crucial in conditioning the effectiveness of potential collaborations in this field. The complexity and extreme diversity of the situations in the home-country, however, together with the complexity and extreme diversity of diaspora organisations’ own interventions make this a challenging criterion to frame in practice.

The translation of each criterion into measurable indicators will also require a good degree of case-specific adaptation, particularly for those criteria that are not easy to operationalise. The diaspora perceptions of peace and conflict in the country of origin (criterion f), for instance, are not only difficult to assess but they also require an implausible effort, on behalf of interested third parties, to understand the context in the country of origin in detail and to grasp the complexity of the conflict situation.

Lastly, no explicit distinction has been introduced in this paper between criteria that third parties might expect from their partners and criteria that might facilitate effective diaspora engagement in peacebuilding regardless of their degree of desirability among third parties.

Alongside their limitations and the efforts required for their translation into specific indicators, it should also be stressed that these criteria are unable, alone, to ensure that collaboration with diaspora organisations leads to effective

engagement in peacebuilding. The factors taken into account in the elaboration of these criteria, in fact, only consider elements that are internal to the diaspora organisations themselves, whereas the DIASPEACE research has shown that also a number of factors that are *external* to diaspora organisations have a power to influence the success of their peacebuilding efforts. While some of these factors have been briefly recalled in this paper, their effects on successful diaspora initiatives and on effective third party collaboration with them in maintaining and promoting peace, go beyond the considerations contained in this paper.

The issues just raised call for further research to be conducted that could add to our current knowledge of some of the enabling and restricting factors to constructive diaspora engagement in peacebuilding processes. Some relevant areas of enquiry will be addressed by the DIASPEACE project under WP4, covering the institutional framework in which diaspora organisations operate in the countries of residence and enquiring into existing collaborations that are relevant for peacebuilding between diaspora organisations and other actors. Alongside providing examples of best practices and lessons learned, it is hoped that this new research may uncover which forms of collaboration prove to be more effective. Collaboration in itself, in fact, can take many forms and certain partnerships, as well as given fields of intervention, may favour effective diaspora engagement in peacebuilding better than others.

References

Key criteria of “good practice”
for constructive diaspora
engagement in peacebuilding

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