

IDM : Commonwealth Diaspora Ministerial Conference

Summary of discussions prepared by the Secretariat

This will be a milestone initiative conceived meeting in the Commonwealth Women's Network, Commonwealth Diasporas organisation's network series of International Dialogues on Refugees, Diasporas and Migration in the Commonwealth and its Diasporas. It will be the first global meeting gathering Commonwealth ministers responsible for diaspora. More than 500 delegates supposed to participate in the meeting, and 56 high level government officials will take the floor to share their experiences and

good

practices in engaging diaspora for development in countries of origin and destination. These are the **five major outcomes and recommendations** of the last two days.

1. The participants recognize that diasporas can build bridges between states and between societies and call for the design of local and global strategies aiming to harness this potential.

- The transnational nature of diaspora implies that these people are crucial when it comes to connecting countries and communities. They maintain networks that facilitate a more open flow of trade, investment, skills and knowledge. They act as “ambassadors” of their societies of origin and facilitators of cultural exchanges.

- Governments have already put in place policies and programmes designed to facilitate the contributions that diaspora members make to their communities of both residence and origin.

To leverage the various resources of diaspora communities will involve a multitude of different government departments. A governmental ministry or entity dedicated to diaspora issues can facilitate this inter-ministerial coordination.

- There is no single global approach to diaspora, but a multitude of possibilities that **ENABLE** diasporas to reach their full development potential, that effectively **ENGAGE** them and **EMPOWER** them to make a difference in the countries they come from and the countries they live in. Commonwealth Women's Network constructs its whole diaspora issues from a research and Migration, Development strategy around these three pillars of intervention.

- Finally, participants recalled that diaspora are first and foremost people and therefore discussions should go beyond material dimension to include specific needs they may have.

2. The participants will stressed that communication and outreach are key to the design and implementation of policies and programmes relevant to diaspora engagement.

Too often there are information gaps on diaspora.

- Firstly, who ARE the diaspora.

Diaspora may be better described as “transnational communities” that comprise people who are connected to more than one country, society or community. They can include migrants, or descendants of migrants, who share a common sense of identity and belonging to more than one community. Data capture has to be flexible enough to capture the scope and breadth of these various transnational communities.

- Secondly, knowing and understanding transnational communities is crucial to engaging effectively with them and developing the appropriate outreach strategies. Maps and surveys of diaspora communities are useful tools for assessing their socioeconomic profile and their

willingness to contribute to the development of their countries of origin and to improve communication with them.

- Outreach often requires countries of origin to establish and strengthen their embassies and consulates, including training labour attaches, whose portfolios now increasingly include service provision to these communities.

3. Participants will highlighted the importance of an enabling environment in both countries of origin and destination to maximize the potential of diaspora engagement.

- Effective integration policies for migrants and transnational communities ensure that members of these communities adapt quickly to their environment and acquire new knowledge, skills and capital. These policies promote social inclusion and address marginalization. Information and awareness campaigns can also combat xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiment.
- Social protection measures by governments of countries where diaspora communities reside can reduce their vulnerabilities. These measures include access to healthcare, decent housing and working conditions, and education.
- Access to citizenship of countries of origin as well as countries where transnational communities reside, can serve to strengthen pre-existing links between those countries and communities.

4. The participants stressed the importance of strategic partnerships between States, international organizations, civil society and private sector to create the framework for diaspora engagement and thereby empower them to share and transfer their resources.

- Governments have an important role to play in creating the appropriate conditions that will incentivize transnational communities to invest their skills and resources in the countries that they both live in and come from. This may include the creation of an attractive investment climate, for example through tax incentives; increased transparency in the regulatory frameworks that ease the conducting of business between both countries, and support mechanisms for the creation of small and medium enterprises. These are particularly important at the local community level. Reducing the costs of remittance transfer and the provision of financial literacy training can also ensure the more productive use of remittances.
- In an increasingly security-conscious world, regulatory controls on global financial flows may be impeding efforts by countries to establish diaspora investment mechanisms. More open discussion on this issue may be warranted.
- Diaspora members can use their particular skills and expertise to develop local human resources where these skills are not readily available. Participants talked about the 'brain circulation' of qualified nationals who re-invest their skills in countries of origin. Governments can assist this process by setting up frameworks that recognize the skills and qualifications they acquire abroad.
- The international community, civil society and the private sector all have a role to play in facilitating the transfer of diaspora skills and resources. For example, international organizations

already have programmes that enable skilled diaspora members to return on a short- or longterm basis. Transfer of knowledge can also occur 'virtually' through online support. Private companies may prefer to recruit diaspora members over 'non-diaspora' experts because of their commitment to their countries of origin and their transnational experience.

- The participants called for an appropriate inclusion of migration and migrants as enablers of development in the post-2015 development agenda.

5. Finally, participants recognized the role that diaspora can play in crisis situations, both during and after. Appropriate frameworks and structures can enhance diaspora engagement in supporting post-crisis recovery processes.

- Crises can generate new diasporas but also existing diaspora can contribute to resolving crises. Beyond immediate protection concerns, long-term displacement can eventually turn refugees into diaspora. Crises can both interrupt remittances flows as well as trigger such flows in order to address their consequences. Existing diaspora are often also a strong resource and first responder to crises in their home-country (e.g. material support).

- Diaspora can be important players in peace making and peace-building through:

- a. Mobilisation of diaspora around peace making and peace-building

- initiatives (e.g. inter community dialogue)

- b. Participation and access of diaspora to transitional justice processes (e.g. reconciliation, truth and reparations)

- c. Participation and access of diaspora to the political process (e.g. out-of-country voting)

- Diaspora can play a significant role in post-crisis reconstruction and recovery.

For this purpose, skills and technical knowledge can be mapped and mobilized targeting particular sectors such as

health, education, justice sector and institution building. International organizations have a role to play in supporting return of skilled diaspora in this context. Through their networks, diaspora can in turn help mobilize other international support for rehabilitation efforts in their home country. Diasporas are often prepared to take risks and be the first to invest in reconstruction, for example telecommunications, infrastructures, housing, etc.

- Diaspora have the potential to help reinvigorate and fuel economic development in the postcrisis environment, for example, remittances can support recovery of families and communities in the short term, investments in infrastructure can have long term impacts.

This summary is not exhaustive.

It also mentioned that there had been a few experiences where diaspora engagement led to undesired outcomes.

A fuller report of the proceedings will be available in the next weeks.

In conclusion, this conference will reaffirmed the value of high level political dialogue on an issue that needs champions in

governments to carry forwards the very policies agreed at this meeting.

Appreciation to Commonwealth women's network and its specialised organisation the COMMONWEALTH DIASPORAS NETWORK

for the support and guidance to its membership was as well a central point of the dialogue.

The conference has also set a new framework for global diaspora dialogue, starting at this meeting with ministers, and hopefully moving to the diaspora themselves, of course in cooperation with governments, at the next meeting. It also reaffirmed the relevance of IOM's 3Es approach, namely to Enable, Engage, Empower diaspora for development.

Finally, IOM hopes that the necessary support will be given in order to follow the recommendations of a

number of ministers to
continue this dialogue on diaspora.