

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here and to share with you the research that I've been conducting on the role and contribution of the African diaspora to the development of their country of origin, especially the contribution of the Eritrean diaspora to Eritrea's development.

Migration has been man's visible and invisible partner since human dispersal out of Africa. The migration, most of the time, has been voluntary, but at times, involuntary. Except for the speed of information, connectivity, and the role of the media with its tremendous impact on migratory behavior, the case is similar in modern times. In this context, the upcoming UN General Assembly adoption of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration is important and long overdue. The future global compact should properly place diaspora communities at the center of development

In this presentation, I would like to focus on my first hand research engagement with the Eritrean diaspora and assess their contribution with the aim to identify some lessons and challenges.

Obstacles

In order for the process and adoption to be successful, few basic foundations should be acknowledged and addressed. A) Migration affects the country of origin, country of transition and the host country. It is therefore, beneficial for all involved to find a solution. B) Issues of migration (whether formal or informal) should not be politicized (such as pull factors/for example, using migrants as bargaining chips) by powerful nations. Politicization creates double standards and with double standards, international relations becomes imperial relations. C) In order to have a lasting solution, root causes should be addressed, not symptoms.

Policy and Implementation

Migrants are a bridge between the country of origin and the host country. Contributions of migrants and the diaspora (whether they are in the host country temporarily or permanently) are key to all dimensions of sustainable development, if they are implemented correctly. The African Union recognized the African diaspora as the sixth region and have embarked on a long process of strengthening ties between diaspora and the continent. Even though there are no boilerplate solutions, below are few points to consider:

1. National development policies

Including the diaspora as part and parcel of national development strategy, publicly available data is an important strategy in a development program (Bureau of National Statistics is important in this endeavor, however, to par with modern technology, investment in a center for geographic information system/GIS is crucial in collecting data). Access to clean water, education, health care and etc. are basic human rights, therefore, each developing nation should address its own need. Developed countries should support the development agenda of the developing nations, as partners, and not as donors with their own development agenda. The diaspora's role in national development policies is crucial. To cite an example, a group of young diaspora Eritreans from the United States started EriReader Project (1), with the aim of providing

one tablet for one Eritrean student, as inspired by the demonstrated need and policies of the Commission of Higher Education of Eritrea. Eri-Reader works in collaboration with Eritrean Development Fund (EDF) in Washington, DC. and Eritrean Relief Association (ERA-UK), in London, UK. So far, Eri-Reader has sent over 200 tablets and is in the process of sending 60 more in the near future. Other Eritrean diaspora activities support various ministries such as health by providing medical supplies, teaching, providing surgical services and social welfare by establishing women training centers.

2. Incentive to invest

Diaspora investment is more sustainable than “hit and run” investment, because the diaspora’s deep knowledge of the social, educational, cultural, environmental, and economic activities in the country make its investment more adaptable to local nuances. The Eritrean-American Center (2) in Asmara, Eritrea, has 345 members and 275 non-members engaged in various economic, social, and educational activities of Eritrea. Examples include funding for students, planting trees, investing in EriTel (telephone company), Asmara Beer, and Eritrean insurance. Most of the members and non-members are from the east coast of the United States. Ninety-five percent are of retirement age and five percent are young. They have invested in the tourism industry, internet café, car rental, construction, stock shares, and agricultural businesses.

Migrants’ home countries should not take their respective diaspora for granted; the diaspora should be given the same guarantee and respect that non-diaspora investors are accorded. Diaspora bonds which could be sold overseas are good examples of diaspora investment. Since bonds are a very good way of raising revenues, bonds have to be marketable. Bonds require a great confidence, worth and prestige of any government, therefore, the investment has to be honored. Granting dual citizenship also helps in investment. Requiring and presenting only the ID at an airport of the country of origin as a visa is an investment incentive. To cite an example, all Eritreans use Eritrean ID to enter Eritrea without a visa.

C. Support to migrant entrepreneurs

A grave concern for most developing countries is the “brain drain” of their citizens who migrate to developed nations. After investing heavily on human resources through increased training and educational opportunities for its youth, developing nations with their meagre resources, are left with a daunting task of filling the gaps created by people who migrated, which require time and investment. A pilot project whereby diaspora citizens in collaboration with the host countries create an organized “brain gain” for a certain period of time might be helpful. Host countries could support recently graduated migrants as entrepreneurs by creating and funding incubators for IT personnel, artists, and technicians in their country of origin. Another very innovative way of allowing the diaspora in the development of their country of origin was initiated by the diaspora themselves to help rehabilitate, build and develop Eritrea, which is a small, but symbolic form of taxation which started over twenty years ago.

I thank you.

1. <http://www.edfonline.org/projects/erireader/> accessed on July 21, 2017
2. Interview with both the manager and president of the Eritrean American Center in Asmara, Eritrea (July 17 and 18, 2017). There are other returnee organizations such as Eritro-German and Bologna Club.