



Diaspora Engagement in the Horn of Africa
Co-operation for Fostering Peace and Development
Co-operation Seminar for Horn of Africa Organisations

Saturday, 14 November 2009, 10:30-18:00

Objectives of the Workshop

The workshop aimed to provide an open discussion forum both with regard to the findings of the DIASPEACE research, but also regarding the own personal experiences and perspectives of diaspora members during their engagement. During the workshop, research results of the DIASPEACE project on Ethiopian diaspora organisations in Germany and their engagement towards peace and development in Ethiopia were presented and discussed. In addition, participants exchanged their experiences and ideas on approaches to facilitating diaspora engagement and the collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Workshop Proceedings

The morning session started with a welcome by the organisers and an introductory round of all participants, who briefly stated their background and expectations for the discussions. On behalf of BICC, Andrea Warnecke gave a short introduction to the aims and perspectives of the DIASPEACE research project (see presentation) and presented empirical results on Ethiopian diaspora organisations and framework conditions for diaspora engagement in Germany. The ensuing discussion focused on potential obstacles to cooperation among diaspora groups, especially with a view to inter-ethnic cooperation. Several participants expressed their wish to coordinate their efforts more closely with other groups, and to learn from their experiences with regard to fundraising, project management or identifying partner organisations in Ethiopia. Another point of discussion was the concept of peace or peacebuilding and the different approaches but also specific skills needed to implement projects in the field of peaceful conflict transformation.

Following the lunch break, the afternoon session commenced with input from two representatives of organisations that provide advice and other services to migrant organisations.

Ms. Sylvia Becker from bengo (Beratungsstelle für private Träger der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit) and Mr. Miguel Paulino from the Forum der Kulturen Stuttgart, an umbrella organisation for migrant organisations in Stuttgart. Bengo offers advice to privately-run organisations that plan to implement development projects. According to Ms. Becker, many migrant organisations lack the financial capacities and do not always meet the comparatively high formal standards required to apply

successfully for project funding at the German Federal Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ). While there are also additional donor organisations whose standards might be easier to comply with, the sheer wealth of actors and institutions often led to confusion and prevented many migrant or diaspora organisations from applying for funding.

Mr. Paulino Miguele also highlighted the need for professionalism, especially for those organisations desiring to implement projects in their countries of origin and apply for external funding. In giving an account of the activities and history of the Forum der Kulturen Stuttgart, Mr. Miguele explained that the “cross-country approach” of the Forum, i.e. the cooperation of diaspora organisations from rather diverse cultural and regional backgrounds, served as one of its biggest assets and helped to exchange best practices, but also improve communication among and within diaspora organisations.

The subsequent discussion focused on two topics: a) Co-operation within the diaspora; b) and co-operation with German institutions and NGOs. At the end of this session, Mr. Christof Kögler, BICC, presented the interactive online forum Here&There (www.here-there.org), which will hopefully serve as an instrument to continue the discussions and exchanges beyond this workshop.

Discussion Results and Recommendations

Obstacles to constructive diaspora engagement

Repeatedly, the distrust among different Ethiopian groups and ethnic identities was raised as a hindrance to constructive diaspora cooperation. Strong ethnic identities and a high degree of politicisation as well as generational differences, appear to hinder collaboration frequently.

An additional obstacle mentioned relates to different degrees of integration, which is manifested by the general employment situation of people of African descent and a very low representation of diaspora members in governmental and non-governmental development institutions.

Among the participants, the high degree of frustration in the face of bureaucratic delays is perceived as hindering fundraising and other activities of diaspora organisations.

In the country of origin, the limited scope of action of diaspora initiatives was considered a major hindrance.

Participants agreed that diaspora engagement needs to be supported by other actors. Several participants emphasized that diaspora organisations would benefit from learning specific skills in peaceful conflict resolution. It was also stressed that support schemes of German institutions should not limit their support to diaspora organisations from specific regions, but should aim to connect migrant organisations from different regions.

Recommendations

- 1) How to improve the co-operation between diaspora organisations and other institutions?

- As support organisations like bengo have to cover the entire geographic spectrum of diaspora groups, it is impossible for them to have detailed knowledge of all country-specific funding possibilities. Participants thus emphasized the importance of exchanging experiences among diaspora organisations, especially with those that already have concrete project experience.
- A central contact point for diaspora organisations (diaspora forum), which could pool knowledge and expertise, was considered to be a useful institution to facilitate such exchange.
- Development actors should actively approach the diaspora and vice versa.
- Institutions that give advice to migrant organisations should be sensitive to the legitimate concerns and fears of diaspora groups and make sure to get specific country information.

2) How to improve co-operation among Ethiopian diaspora organisations

- Participants agreed on the need for a neutral institution/ a cross-country network/ a multi-ethnic forum for enabling exchange and dialogue among Ethiopian diaspora organisations. Ethnic identities within this forum should be balanced with other identities.
- Discussion should begin with non-controversial topics, such as cultural traditions or events.
- Ethnic identities and concerns always should be acknowledged and respected by the stakeholders involved. However, some participants also expressed their wish to overcome ethnic identities and the divisions generated by them.

Follow-up

On Here&There, BICC created a new group called DIASPEACE Co-operation, Germany, which will serve as an exchange forum for workshop participants and other interested members to further exchange experiences and ideas on diaspora engagement in the Horn of Africa. You are cordially invited to sign up and join our group on www.here-there.org.

On the group's homepage, we have uploaded the presentations from the seminar and photos of the event. On the group's page, you will soon find our upcoming publication on Ethiopian and Somali diaspora organisations in Germany (January 2010).

Information on upcoming events within the DIASPEACE project will also be published via this site. Please feel free to make use of this interactive tool by publishing information on your organisations and activities.