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Roundtable 2

Session 2.4

Working with the Diaspora for Development

The Context:

International migration is an important factor impacting on economic relations between the developed and developing countries. At the start of the century the United Nations estimated that about 175 million people – roughly 3 percent of the world population – lived and worked outside the country of their birth. The remittances – money and goods – sent back home by these migrant workers have a profound impact on the living standards of people in the developing countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. In 2002 the flow of international remittances to developing countries stood at \$80 billion per year, which was much higher than total official aid flows to the developing world (World Bank, 2003).

In the last few decades there has been a change in perception on transnational migration of people throughout the world. Diasporas are both the products and the drivers of globalization. Demographic movement across borders is today an important facet of globalization. While the movement of educated, skilled and trained people was for long seen as 'brain drain', increasingly home countries across the world, are beginning to recognize that their Diasporas represent knowledge in diverse fields and that this knowledge reservoir can be drawn upon as 'brain gain'.

The heterogeneous diasporas spread across all major regions of the world and present in most countries in varying numbers, are products of different waves of migration over hundreds of years. They have distinct expectations from the host and home countries. In an increasingly global world, the need therefore, is to develop an inclusive agenda for engaging with the Diaspora that will draw on its eclecticism, provide for the wide range of roles and expectations and maximize its development impact for the mutual benefit of the host and the home countries.

Diasporas represent an important constituency with the ability and willingness to participate as partners in the development of the home country as well as promote its interests overseas. There is, therefore, a need to bring a strategic dimension to the

process of home countries engaging with the Diaspora. It is important to take a medium to long term view and forge partnerships that will best serve both the host and home countries and meet the expectations of the Diaspora as a significant constituency across the world. A key objective will be to nurture and sustain a symbiotic relationship between the home country and its Diaspora to address development challenges while giving the overseas community the opportunity to become partners in progress.

The focus must be on establishing an institutional framework for sustainable engagement with the Diaspora to lead the knowledge, expertise, skills and resources of the vast and diverse Diaspora community into home country development efforts. Such a framework will pull in the Diaspora as 'Knowledge' partners, the home countries as 'Stakeholder' partners and the host country as a 'Facilitator'.

The outcome expected from the session is the identification of the key elements that will have to be included in addressing the challenges to development, and articulating and mapping out approaches to establishing an institutional framework for sustainable and mutually beneficial engagement between the troika – the home country, the host country and the Diaspora.

The Strategy:

The Diaspora shares strong social and cultural bonds with countries of origin. They can and do individually and sometimes collectively 'invest' time, effort, knowledge and resources in their home countries. The challenge, however, is to transform this propensity into an institutional development strategy that can achieve targeted and measurable development outcomes.

Local Governments are important players in this process. It must be recognized that any initiative that overseas communities take, must be anchored in the home country if the development role of the Diaspora has to be maximized. Home and host countries must therefore be encouraged to develop a stake in the entire process of engagement with the Diaspora and become natural stakeholder partners. The focus of this effort must be to establish an institutional framework to benefit from networks with and among Diaspora institutions based on three value propositions:

- Through multi-skilled market driven entities spawned by home countries in the public-private partnership mode to lead investments, remittances, knowledge and philanthropy by the Diaspora into the home country.
- Promoting specific products and services to meet the diverse economic, social and cultural needs of the Diaspora.
- Multilateral / Bilateral support to develop and implement innovative technologies and practices to leverage the knowledge resources of the Diaspora institutions in health, education, poverty alleviation, micro credit, micro enterprises etc.

The Instruments of engagement:

The key elements of Diaspora participation in Development that need to be facilitated, institutionalized and sustained must include:

- Investments by overseas communities in home countries and promoting two - way flow of B-to-B partnerships.
- Leveraging the knowledge, skills and expertise of the Diaspora for socio-economic development of the home countries.
- Leading Diaspora philanthropy into home country efforts in poverty alleviation, health care and education.
- Capacity building and skill up gradation in countries of origin to match and meet the labour supply gaps in the destination countries to maximize the economic benefits of International Migration.

To catalyze Diaspora ability and willingness into well thought out projects and programs for development and to transform individual initiatives into community action and achieve critical mass, there is a need to establish institutional structures of engagement. This session must seek to promote, support and nurture such instruments.

The following instruments in particular must engage the attention of policy makers of home and host countries and multilateral organizations dealing with International Migration:

- Home countries with significant overseas communities must establish a separate department or unit dedicated to ongoing interaction with its overseas community. India for instance has created a full-fledged Ministry to serve as the nodal point for its Diaspora.
- Where home / host country laws permit, efforts must be made to provide the benefits of dual citizenship to enable Diaspora members to participate in the development efforts in their home countries. India's 'Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card' is a good model that extends a host of benefits on par with Indian Nationals to its Diaspora without providing dual citizenship.
- A special purpose vehicle in a public-private partnership mode must be established in home countries to serve as a 'One Stop Shop' and lead Diaspora investments into the home country and enable the Diaspora to benefit from the emerging economic opportunities in their home countries. Here again India's initiative to establish a 'not for profit trust' in a public – private partnership with industry is a good model to emulate.
- A Diaspora Philanthropy Foundation promoted by home countries and supported by Diaspora Associations to channel philanthropic propensities of the Diaspora in key National social development initiatives in the home countries focusing on health and education. The Ministry of Overseas Indian affairs has pioneered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) to work together in the field of Rural Health Care in India.
- Factors like globalization and global demographics will accelerate International migration. There will emerge in the global economy labour supply gaps that will

have to be met my migrant workers. It is therefore important for both origin and destination countries to take steps for capacity building and skill up gradation to best serve the economic needs of both and transform migration into a well managed and win-win economic process. India is pursuing the bilateral /multilateral modes for managed migration.

Diaspora and Development – The Global Connect:

The knowledge resources of the Diasporas and their significance in the context of home country development are well known. The ‘virtual presence’ of overseas nationals across various sectors and in most part of the globe constitutes a key opportunity to leverage the knowledge, expertise and skills of nationals abroad for a meaningful contribution to the development imperatives in home countries.

Today’s global information society, enabled by information and communication technology (ICT), offers the opportunity to tap Diaspora knowledge resources and establish a dynamic interaction between the Diaspora and the development process in home countries. This is best achieved by developing Diaspora Knowledge Networks (DKN). Such DKNs must be promoted by home countries and supported by multilateral organizations and should have the following features:

- An ICT supported Diaspora Knowledge Network (DKN) - an electronic platform for dynamic exchange of knowledge between home countries and its Diaspora.
- An appropriate information space for information exchange and interaction.
- Operating protocols for exchange of information / interaction.
- Knowledge management strategies to enable flow of knowledge and expertise from the Diaspora back into the home country and facilitate collective action.
- Moderated user groups or communities of interest that can develop sector specific development templates, transform ideas into well thought out projects, introduce innovative technology and knowledge led interventions and then enable home countries to replicate it as a national initiative.

This will require multilateral organizations to provide technical assistance and resources to emerging economies to establish, manage and operate country specific knowledge networks that can best serve their development needs and enable them to connect with their Diaspora world-wide.

Sustained engagement: Promoting enabling platforms

Diasporas in a generic sense represent a vibrant whole of many cultures, languages, religions and regions. The invisible thread that holds this heterogeneity together is their social and cultural bond with their home countries even as they

participate in and contribute to the development of their host countries. Diasporas are also consumers of products and services across the economic, social and cultural space. While the market does offer many products and services it is equally true that large segments of the overseas community are not adequately served. Home countries must work with market partners on the one hand and multilateral organizations on the other to institutionalize a two-way process of engagement that is mutually beneficial – the Diaspora participating in development initiatives and the home country addressing the concerns of the Diaspora. Sustainability will rest on the twin principles of mutual benefit and ongoing interaction between the two. This will require robust enabling platforms for the Diaspora and the home country to meet, interact and work in tandem regularly.

Secondly, there is need to bring the strategic dimension into the relationship. Over the next two decades several countries of origin will be well on their way to join the ranks of developed countries and important players in global development. What would be the level and nature of the relationship? How much of this transformation will be buttressed by the partnerships that are being forged today? What are the enablers that will make more partnerships bloom and thrive? What is the next frontier for engaging the Diaspora for Development?

Thirdly, if the relationship has to move into higher gear, what is the role of specialized groups within the Diaspora? Ten years from now, what will be the nature and content of the interaction between the youth in home countries and the Diaspora? What will the role of women be? How will elected officials and men in public life network with each other? What is the nature and range of forums that need to come up to sustain this engagement? Some of these issues will ultimately feed into the Diaspora agenda.

Fourthly, it is time that ‘gender’ is acknowledged as an important dimension of the diaspora. In the formation of the diasporas over several waves of migration and their successful transformation into ‘knowledge’ diasporas, women have made a tremendous contribution. Their voices ought to be heard. Many Diaspora women have become successful in their professions, including in advocacy on gender matters and can guide and mentor those in need back home.

Finally, over the happiness at the close links between home countries and their Diasporas hangs a cloud of uncertainty. Do the youth across the diaspora feel connected today? Would they feel connected ten years from now? What would it take to establish and nurture this connectivity? As in the case of women, the time has perhaps come to realize that the youth represent a unique and valuable part of the diaspora. They are very aware of the world they live in and full of hopes and aspirations for themselves, for their countries and perhaps for their home countries. The important thing is to see that they are provided the opportunities to discover their home country – its glorious past, exciting present and promising future.

There is for all of these reasons, a need to ensure ongoing dialogue between the home countries and the diaspora at the national, regional and international levels. We must establish and support enabling platforms that will bring the knowledge, expertise and skills of the vast and diverse Diaspora community on a common platform. These platforms will help develop and sustain the agenda for a symbiotic relationship between

home countries and their Diasporas. India for instance has an annual conclave of its diaspora attended by overseas Indians from across the world.

Such platforms must be outcome driven and aim to target specific development outcomes. These would, we believe, transform ideas into individual initiatives and community action reinforcing the dynamic of home countries and their Diasporas as 'partners in progress'.

Such enabling platforms can build greater understanding of the development and philanthropic propensities of the diaspora and use this understanding to facilitate partnerships and sustainable development links with home countries. They can also present the grass roots perspectives on development by bringing together the policy makers in the home countries and the major diaspora associations.

In an era of accelerated globalization, the relationship between diaspora resources and economic and social development of the home country is increasingly relevant. The recent experience with the Tsunami has shown how the diaspora can be mobilized at short notice to respond to sudden disasters faced by home countries. This reaffirms the emotional bonding of the diaspora with its country of origin.

Apart from one-time contributions at times of national calamity, many Diaspora associations are hands-on into various development initiatives. Thus the national and regional enabling platforms can become the ideal forums through which a number of new partnerships can be built, existing ones strengthened and the range and reach of diaspora collaboration in development scaled up.

Establishing and strengthening these dialogue platforms will require the technical and financial support to home countries from multilateral organizations. This will ensure best practices and will be in the interest of the troika – home country, host country and the diaspora. Indeed it will be in the larger interest of global development and International migration.

Summing up:

The key outcomes that this round table must target include:

- Developing an inclusive agenda for the diaspora for home country development.
- Seeding the idea of diaspora networks and drawing up a road map for establishing them.
- Making the home and host countries active stakeholder partners in the networks.
- Developing templates for individual initiatives and community action to leverage the knowledge and other resources of the Diaspora.
- Drawing a road map for meaningful engagement of the Diaspora in development round the year and across the globe.
- Developing templates for ongoing dialogue between home countries and the diaspora at the National and Regional levels.

- Developing capacity building programs in home countries through multilateral support.
