

Understanding Diaspora Organisations in European Development Cooperation – Approaches, Challenges and Ways Ahead*

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Abstract

This article examines how Northwestern European development aid agencies support the development activities of diaspora organisations, especially in fragile situations. The article interrogates the perceived relationship between diaspora involvement and development, and how this perception is reflected in the ways in which development agencies collaborate with diaspora organisations through mainstream funding schemes, special diaspora initiatives and network support. Three tendencies are identified: a high emphasis on technical fixes; a tension between perceptions of diaspora organisations as special development agents and a mainstreaming ideal; and, finally, that diaspora organisations appear as particularly risky recipient groups to some development professionals because of their personal involvement in the country of origin. The article further argues that policy incoherence as well as underlying notions of development as planned, professionalized and based on a sedentary bias contribute to the marginal role diaspora organisations currently play in the professional development field.

Keywords: development cooperation, development policies, diaspora, diaspora organisations, migration-development nexus, policy incoherence

Introduction

Since the early 2000s diaspora organisations have come to the attention of European development aid agencies as implementers of and partners in development cooperation. In contrast to the private and often family-based nature of remittances – the main focus of the global migration-development debate – collective remittances from diaspora organisations generally focus on the local community level or are intended to benefit broader parts of the population through support to social service provision, infrastructure, or civil society. Likewise diaspora organisations

are sometimes perceived to constitute linkages between Western societies and their homelands in some development circles (BMZ 2014; Turner and Kleist 2013). They have therefore emerged as actors in the migration-development nexus.

This article aims to contribute to the debate on the development potential of collective diaspora contributions by focusing on diaspora organisations¹. It examines how European development aid agencies engage with diaspora organisations as potential agents of change. I use the term diaspora organisation to refer to organisations based on origin in a particular place or country of personal or ancestral origin that do not coin-

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¹ Parts of the article have been published in an earlier version in Kleist and Vammen (2012).

cide with the country of settlement and whose leader and membership base primarily consists of persons identifying with this origin. Diaspora organisations thus include a wide range of organisations, including hometown associations, branches of homeland political parties, cultural associations, migrant youth associations, and many more (Sinatti and Horst 2014; Orozco and Rouse 2007). Their activities span social service provision, humanitarian assistance, advocacy work, political lobbying, or civil society involvement in the (ancestral) country of origin as well as cultural events and integration-related activities in the country of settlement. Contributions to development, relief and reconstruction are thus just one aspect of what diaspora organisations do, and they often go hand in hand with activities focusing on the country of settlement (Kleist 2007; Hammond 2013; Lacroix 2013).

In this article, I interrogate the perceived relationship between diaspora involvement and development and how this perception is reflected in the ways development agencies collaborate with diaspora organisations. I focus particularly on small and medium-sized diaspora organisations that contribute to and are involved in development or relief processes in their (ancestral) country of origin, especially in relation to fragile situations. Three questions structure the article: First, how do European development aid agencies perceive the role of diaspora organisations and their development potential? Second, how do they support and collaborate with diaspora organisations as part of their development cooperation activities? And third, what are the underlying assumptions and dilemmas in the ways that diaspora organisations have been incorporated in migration and development activities?

My approach to these questions is inspired by the anthropology of public policy (Wedel et al. 2005), exploring “underlying ideologies and uses” (2005: 34) of public policies, in this case of diaspora support. The empirical material for this exploration consists of policy documents, such as evaluations, reports, and studies on diaspora organisation support initiatives funded and

established by Northwestern European development aid agencies, primarily in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, UK, Germany and the Netherlands. It is supplemented with interviews with representatives from professional development NGOs in Denmark, conducted in 2011 as part of a larger study (Kleist and Vammen 2012) and in 2014.

The article is further inspired by Bourdieu’s notion of field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). I approach the perceptions and practices of diaspora organisations and how these are reflected in diaspora support models as part of a professionalized development field in which different actors interact. The field is guided by implicit and explicit ‘rules of the game’ – such as underlying notions of development, bureaucratic set-ups that reproduce and circumscribe development interventions, and ideals of proper implementation and professionalism. According to Bourdieu, all actors in a field recognize the existence of the ‘rules of the game’ whether they take them for granted or contest them. Understanding development in this way implies that the ways development aid agencies support and interact with diaspora organisations not only reflect explicit intentions or value judgements (though these certainly play a role) but also convey underlying notions of how diaspora organisations *can* be perceived within the professional development field and how certain practices may not be recognized as ‘proper’ development, falling outside the field. However, there are different positions within a field, and in this article I pay special attention to these positions and the tensions between them.

The article is divided into five parts: perceptions of diaspora organisations as agents of change; diaspora support models in current European development cooperation; lessons learnt from these models; a case study; and policy-related implications. Three tendencies are identified: First, emphasis on technical fixes, expressed in the widespread use of and attention to capacity development when supporting diaspora organisations. Second, there is a tension between perceptions of diaspora organisa-

tions as a special kind of development agent and the predominant mainstreaming ideal. Third, I suggest that though diaspora organisations and other small development NGOs may face many similar challenges vis-à-vis development aid agencies, diaspora organisations may appear as particularly risky and problematic recipient groups because of their (possible) personal and transnational involvement in the country of origin. Such involvement might disturb ideals of development engagement as neutral, professionalized and based on sedentary notions of the good life, widespread in current development thinking (Bakewell 2008b).

Diaspora Positions

The term diaspora derives from Greek and means 'the scattering of seeds' or to 'sow over' (Cohen 1997). Originally a term referring to the expulsion and scattering of Jews and other expelled groups such as Armenians and Greeks, the diaspora category started to become more widely used in social science, anthropological and cultural studies in the 1990s (e.g. Cohen 1997; Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1991; van Hear 1998), broadly understood as referring to transnational communities, dispersed from an original homeland. This notion of the diaspora category – in more or less well-delimited versions – has deeply resonated in academic, policy and public discourse (Brubaker 2005). Today the diaspora category is employed by academics, development aid agencies, international organisations, political actors, and migrant groups and their descendants who make claims or frame expectations in the name of the diaspora (Kleist 2008a), often related to moral obligation and political or humanitarian agency. The category has thus moved from being primarily research-oriented and has entered the world of policy.

The wide proliferation and elasticity of the diaspora category has made some researchers suggest that the diaspora category is more usefully approached as a category of identification (Axel 2004) or mobilization (Kleist 2008a, 2008b; Sökefeld 2006; Werbner 2002) than referring to

actual communities. It can be argued that the analytical value of the term is eroded when used in so many different ways (Faist 2010). However, the elasticity and vagueness of the term may also be one of its strengths insofar as it lends itself to different modes of identification and mobilization (Dufoix 2008; Tölölyan 1996; Kleist 2013) that can be attributed to different actors, actions, and perspectives. Nevertheless, the academic discussion on the theoretical particularities or (lack of) usefulness of the diaspora concept is generally not reflected in policy usages. Indeed, as Sinatti and Horst argue, European development actors understand diaspora as referring to actual communities with particular traits (2014: 2) rather than as a category of mobilization or identification. Below, I outline two central positions in how diaspora organisations are perceived in European development cooperation: as transnational agents of change and as long-distance nationalists.

The perception of diaspora as referring to collective and transnational agents of change which contribute to development in their ancestral homelands started to proliferate in international development aid circles in the beginning of the 2000s. Because of (actual or perceived) affiliations with and involvement in both the country of origin and residence (and possibly more places), some diaspora groups are seen as bridgeheads between the established development industry and local actors and contexts in developing countries. In these usages, the diaspora category is mostly employed exclusively with reference to highly skilled groups living in Western countries, ignoring large migrant and refugee groups in neighbouring countries (Bakewell 2008a) as well as low-skilled migrants and persons in irregular situations. A key characteristic of this diaspora position is the (expectation of) acquired skills through 'exposure' to Western countries as well as involvement and knowledge of the local cultures and languages (see Orozco 2007). Living in the West but maintaining relations to the country of origin, diaspora groups are perceived to hold potential resources for local and national

homeland development (Mohamoud 2005). This position is found among international development organisations, such as the International Organisation for Migration², the African Union³, sending governments (Turner 2013; Kleist 2013), and indeed diaspora organisations.

At the other end of the spectrum is an understanding of diaspora groups as security threats or, as Benedict Anderson (1998) has formulated it, as long-distance nationalists. In this understanding, the migrant's distance to the erstwhile homeland results in lack of accountability. In the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks in London and Spain, the fear of migrant long-distance nationalism has increased. In Western countries, the fear of attacks and of so-called home-grown terrorism (Byman et al. 2001) has resulted in a securitization of migration where migrants and diaspora groups are perceived as potential terrorists through organising, financing, or conducting terrorism (Demmers 2002; Collier 2000). While the securitization of migration – or the migration-security nexus – is not the main focus of development cooperation activities, it may still shape development aid agencies' collaboration with diaspora groups through anxiety of supporting radicalized groups. The implication is that diaspora organisations, if they are not ruled out completely, may be at least considered problematic or risky recipient group or partners for development aid agencies.

Diaspora Support Models

In the following section I examine how Northwestern European development aid agencies support diaspora organisations. Several European development aid strategies mention support to migrant and diaspora development activities as part of their portfolio, including Germany (BMZ 2014), Norway (Erdal and Horst 2010), the UK (Thornton and Hext 2009; Vammen and Brønden 2012; DFID 2014), and the Netherlands (Dutch MFA 2008). Likewise so-called co-development policies are part of French, Spanish

and Italian development cooperation policies (Nijenhuis and Brokehuis 2010) but these are not included in the scope of the article.

Table 1 below identifies three diaspora support models employed by European development agencies to support development contributions by diaspora organisations: general co-funding schemes for development NGOs, special diaspora initiatives, and support to networks. The three models often co-exist and their activities may overlap. As the table shows, capacity building activities and matching fund schemes are the two most common ways of supporting diaspora organisations. I examine these approaches in more detail below, followed by discussion of the lessons learnt and dilemmas associated with these approaches. I thereby wish to interrogate the underlying notions of diaspora organisations and their development potential.

Mainstreaming

One of the most common ways that Northwestern European development aid agencies support diaspora organisations is through large funding schemes targeting small and medium-sized development NGOs. Such grant schemes are often administered by large NGOs or umbrella organisations, rather than development aid agencies themselves. Financial support usually requires self-funding, sometimes with the opportunity of self-funding 'in kind', such as equipment or self-coverage of per diem. In some cases diaspora organisations are mentioned as one of the primary target groups, like the British Common Ground Initiative which explicitly states that it is open to "both small and diaspora organisations to create real and sustainable change"⁴. However, it varies from initiative to initiative whether special support is offered to diaspora applicants.

In addition to matching funds, capacity-building activities for diaspora organisations (and other small development organisations) to develop their capacity in relation to propos-

² <http://diaspora.iom.int/>

³ <http://pages.au.int/cido/pages/diaspora-division>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/international-development-funding/common-ground-initiative-cgi>

Table 1: Development aid agencies' support to diaspora organisations (DOs)

Principle	Characteristics	Examples
Mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to matching fund schemes on equal terms with other development NGOs - Capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil Society in Development (Danida), 1996- - Oxfam Novib Linkis (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 2004-2011
Special diaspora initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to matching fund schemes for DOs only - Capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Diaspora Programme (Danida), 2010-2015 - Pilot Project Pakistan (NORAD), 2008-2010
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish DO networks and platforms - Facilitate collaboration between DOs - Facilitate collaboration between DOs and other development NGOs - Capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EADPD⁵ (European Commission (EC) with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Dutch MFA, and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)), 2010-2013; (SDC), 2014-2016

als and project management is a common feature. Specific objectives may include up-scaling of projects, strengthening the quality of proposals, enhancing participation in policy decision-making and public debates on development, and enabling common platforms of understanding. Courses offered as part of capacity-building cover a great range of fields, such as civil society, organisational development, project cycle management, leadership, proposal writing and fund-raising capacity, procurement, financial management, etc.

Special Diaspora Initiatives

In contrast to the mainstreaming approach, some development aid agencies have established initiatives exclusively targeting diaspora organisations, also consisting of matching funds and capacity development. There is a tendency that such funding schemes delimit their target group to organisations focusing on selected countries, offering context-sensitive programmes and activities. They are often pilot projects, expected to show quick results and with the objective of

making the involved diaspora organisations able to participate – and compete – in regular programmes and funding schemes. Furthermore, they usually target larger migrant or refugee groups originating from states that receive substantial development or humanitarian aid. Like mainstream funding schemes, they are often administered by a large professional NGO. Examples of special diaspora initiatives include the Norwegian Pilot Project Pakistan (PPP), a three-year NORAD-funded project running between 2008 and 2010 (Erdal and Horst 2010) and the Danish Diaspora Programme, funded by Danida and run by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). I return to the DRC Diaspora Programme later in the article.

Networks and Umbrella Organisations

Finally, the promotion and establishment of networks between different diaspora organisations and between diaspora organisations and other development NGOs constitute a significant trend. Networking activities aim at fostering coordination, cooperation and partnerships between organisations. Network support can be divided into two overall approaches: the promotion of networks as an added bonus and the establish-

⁵ European-wide African Diaspora Platform for Development, <http://ae-platform.org/>

ment of diaspora organisations networks and platforms.

Network as an added bonus can be promoted through capacity training or other activities with different kinds of participants, such as other development NGO representatives, policy makers and development professionals. This kind of network promotion is broad in scope and may range from mutual inspiration to the formation of formal collaboration between diaspora organisations and other development NGOs. Explicit network support takes place through the establishment of or support to diaspora organisation platforms, networks, and umbrella organisations by development aid agencies (or their implementing partners). In addition to more general networking benefits, such initiatives may also aim at providing an overview of diaspora organisations through membership registration and mapping exercises. Indeed, the issue of whether diaspora organisations 'represent their diasporas' or which spokesperson or diaspora organisation is the 'most representative' is sometimes brought up (Ars Progetti 2007; GTZ 2009). However studies and evaluations show that externally supported networks and umbrella organisations rarely have legitimacy within their target groups and are not sustainable without external support (Ars Progetti 2007; Horst et al. 2010; Thornton and Hext 2009).

Priority Areas in Diaspora Support

Northwestern European development aid agencies have been supporting diaspora organisations through general development NGO funding schemes from the middle of the 1990s and special diaspora initiatives from the middle of the 2000s. While some evaluations and studies highlight the positive potential and opportunities in collaboration with diaspora organisations (Erdal and Horst 2010; Horst et al. 2010; JMDI 2011), others point to mixed results (de Haas 2006), or conclude that it is still too early to say much about their effect (Newland 2011). There is thus no overall agreement of the development potential of existing diaspora organisation support

models. Nevertheless, four priority areas can be found in most external evaluations and migration policy research on the topic: capacity building, adequate selection criteria, local anchorage, and a participatory approach.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is a central part of all three diaspora support models, as shown in Table 1. Capacity building is employed as a means to improve the development effect of diaspora involvement in developing countries as well as to ameliorate the capacity of diaspora organisations more generally. Capacity building activities may range from training courses to tailor-made support to proposal writing, project management, monitoring, and accounting etc. It is widely recommended in evaluations and studies as it may create "a level playing field" (de Haas 2006: 100), perceived as a good and valuable activity.

However, capacity building also reflects power relations between development aid agencies and diaspora organisations. The ability to build capacity is placed in the hands of donors (or implementing partners) while diaspora organisations are the ones whose capacity needs to be developed. This understanding both reflects perceptions of diaspora organisations and of the nature of development (cf. Sinatti and Horst 2014). Many smaller diaspora organisations – like other small development NGOs – are run by volunteers with ensuing constraints on their time and resources. This means that diaspora organisations' approach to development projects may be different from development aid agencies and other parts of the professional development industry who may find or fear that they lack capacity to engage effectively and professionally in development cooperation; for instance, in relation to demands on financial and project management. According to Sinatti and Horst (2014), European development agencies work with a rather narrow understanding of development as the change generated by "the planned activities of professional development actors" (Sinatti and Horst 2014: 6). This has implications for smaller

diaspora organisations because it “inevitably leads to the conclusion that diaspora organisations – in similar ways to many other small civil-society organisations – lack the technical skills to compete in the official development world” (ibid). The emphasis on capacity building can be seen at least partly in this light, accentuating the hierarchical relationship between the professional and the amateur in the development field as well as a belief in technical fixes.

Adequate Selection Procedures

Good selection criteria constitute another key priority in matching funding models for diaspora organisations and other organisations alike. The question of whether special funding should be made available for diaspora organisations is at least partly linked to the question of the quality of applications, and hence to selection criteria. On the one hand, selection may be viewed as a technical issue – e.g. as a question of formulating a convincing project proposal, showing ability to comply with procurement, accounting and reporting demands, etc. On the other hand, it relates to a value assessment, selecting diaspora organisations whose objectives are in line with donor priorities and, not least, avoiding funding organisations that finance conflicts or terrorism. This is, of course, as it should be. However, the political aspects of selection are sometimes downplayed. Selection is not only a technical issue but also a political process, not least in relation to fragmented diaspora groups operating in fragile situations (Horst et al. 2010). As James Ferguson (1994) has famously argued, development projects may turn into an anti-politics machine where development is understood as technical solutions to technical problems; hence, development becomes a technical fix rather than a deeply political process. The tendency towards depoliticisation can also be found in relation to diaspora involvement (Turner and Kleist 2013; Horst 2013). The political aspects of selection criteria may thus be downplayed or disguised.

Local Anchorage

Local anchorage is a third cross-cutting priority area employed by development aid agencies to assess the quality of diaspora organisations’ development potential. Local anchorage in relation to development projects is generally understood as close collaboration with partners based in the area of reception and that the development project in question is based on local needs and requests. It thus refers to a close connection between development partners and a locality. Local anchorage constitutes a basic condition for obtaining funding in both mainstream and special diaspora support schemes (JMDI 2011). In relation to diaspora organisations, there are often expectations that ‘the local’ coincides with the community of origin of the diaspora organisations involved. However, just as the concept of diaspora is flexible in its geographical scale and localisation of origin, ranging from continents to quite specific localities (Kleist 2013), expectations to ‘the local’ may be flexible too. Nevertheless, it tends to be related to notions of origin and expectations of close social relations and networks.

The emphasis on ‘the local’ as a connection between people and locality may also reflect the sedentary emphasis in much development thinking. As Oliver Bakewell has argued, much contemporary development thinking is interventionist in nature and based on “an underlying assumptions that development is about enabling people to stay home” (Bakewell 2008b: 1342). In this understanding, migration constitutes a deviation to be corrected and controlled through different kinds of interventions; migration is perceived as a crisis symptom and development is seen as one of the ways to fix it. The notion of diasporas as development agents based on belonging to a particular homeland, desire, or even a sense of obligation to contribute to its development, simultaneously feeds into this discourse as well as it challenges it through the emphasis on mobility and transnational belonging.

A Participatory and Consultative Approach

Finally, long-term engagement and a participatory approach is mentioned in several policy documents (BMZ 2014; Danish MFA 2014; Dutch MFA 2008) and consistently called for in the major guidelines and studies (de Haas 2006; Horst et al. 2010, JMDI 2011) as well as in several evaluations (de Bruyn and Huyse 2008; Erdal and Horst 2010; Thornton and Hext 2009). This approach accentuates the importance of mutual learning processes in development aid agencies and diaspora organisations, establishing mutual interests, objectives, and monitoring procedures throughout the process. Likewise, policy consultation is highlighted: rather than existing as merely implementing projects, diaspora organisations are included in policy-making processes with the opportunity of actually shaping policies. A consequence is thus to dissuade a top-down approach where diaspora groups are perceived as 'tools' to be mobilized or 'tapped', according to a pre-conceived agenda – or as possible 'political messengers' (Englom and Svensson 2009). Comparing NGO involvement in development cooperation with diaspora organisation engagement, Jennifer Brinkerhoff warns against the dangers of co-optation and instrumentalization. She concludes that "if donors and governments seek to maximize diaspora development contributions, rather than rushing to instrumentalize diasporas, they would do well simply to embrace diasporans as independent partners, not extensions of their own agendas" (2011: 47; cf. de Haas 2006).

The emphasis on a participatory approach in development thinking is not new but goes back to Robert Chamber's work in the 1980s. The aforementioned emphasis on local anchorage can also be seen as an aspect of this tendency. However, there is a potential tension between the participatory approach and the emphasis on (especially standardized) capacity building and technical criteria. While the former approach emphasises flexibility and mutuality, the latter relies on professionalised, planned, and hierarchical notions of development. This is not to

say that the two approaches cannot co-exist, let alone that development aid agencies (and their implementing partners) do not engage in a participatory approach. Rather, my point is that that the overall model of planned and professionalised development frames what is seen as good development engagement.

A Case Study: Between Mainstreaming and Special Diaspora Initiatives

To examine the tendencies outlined above in more detail, I now turn to a case study on Danida support to diaspora organisations. The case focuses on a respectively mainstreaming and special diaspora initiative: Civil Society in Development (CISU) and the DRC Diaspora Programme⁶.

CISU⁷ is a union of more than 280 Danish civil society organisations (CSOs). About 15% of the member organisations are diaspora organisations, many with focus on Somalia but also on Congo, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. CISU has received Danida funding since 1996 to support civil society involvement in developing countries and administers the Danida-financed Civil Society Fund to support civil society projects conducted by Danish CSOs in partnerships with local CSOs in developing countries. All Danish CSOs – including diaspora organisations – can apply for funding.

CISU started receiving an increasing number of inquiries from diaspora organisations in the late 1990s (Frederiksen 2007), and from 2005 a consultant was employed to strengthen diaspora organisations and to extend their membership in CISU. Activities included training courses and seminars, the establishment of networks, and proposal writing assistance. No special funding was made available. The inclusion of diaspora organisations thus evolved through membership demands but was further strengthened by organisational initiatives – a development also

⁶ The case study is based on interviews with employees at CISU and the DRC Diaspora Programme in 2011 and 2014 as well as on their websites and documents.

⁷ www.cisu.dk

found in other funding schemes, e.g. the Dutch Oxfam Novib Linkis project (de Bruyn and Huysse 2008).

In 2010 CISU delimited its support to diaspora organisations. An external evaluation (NCG 2010) pointed to ambivalent results of the diaspora initiative: while CISU had been successful in increasing the number of diaspora organisation members, it had not necessarily increased diaspora organisations' ability to conduct development aid projects according to CISU objectives. The suggested reason was that most of CISU's diaspora member organisations focused on fragile and conflict areas, prioritizing reconstruction and social service, rather than civil society development. The demands from diaspora organisations and CISU services thus did not match each other (NCG 2010: v). Therefore, the evaluation recommended developing a separate diaspora funding initiative outside CISU auspices. This recommendation was realized with the creation of the Diaspora Programme as a pilot project in 2010, administered by the DRC and funded by a Danida grant. Diaspora organisations can still apply to CISU on similar terms with other Danish-based development NGOs, given their projects focus on civil society development.

The DRC Diaspora Programme offers matched funding and capacity building to Somali and Afghan diaspora organisations – two groups that are among the largest refugee populations in Denmark and whose home countries are significant recipients of Danish development aid. Eligible projects can focus on social service and civil society development alike and must adhere to a range of criteria including local needs, sustainability, measurability and capacity⁸. A board with representatives from Somali and Afghan diaspora organisations as well as CISU and DRC members “function as ambassadors between their respective diasporas and the DRC⁹”. Likewise, field officers from DRC or DACAAR (Danish

Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees) support and monitor the projects in Somalia or Afghanistan. The final decision of approving or rejecting funding applications rests with the DRC. The Diaspora Programme thus exemplifies the policy tendencies outlined above, including a (relatively) consultative approach and a transnational programme design.

A midterm evaluation of the programme from 2014 showed positive results: The evaluation concluded that the majority of Diaspora Programme funded projects have a visible impact for the beneficiary communities and states that “[t]he Diaspora is perceived as an extremely important actor for the development of countries of origin [...] thanks to the common origins that donors and beneficiaries share” (Saggiomo and Ferro 2014: 4). It thus highlighted the position of diaspora organisations as transnational development agents.

Though demonstrated in different ways, both CISU and the DRC Diaspora Programme express an understanding of diaspora organisations as (potentially) special development agents. In the words of a CISU employee, the aim of CISU's mainstreaming approach is to strike a balance so that diaspora organisations can “use their advantage without preferential treatment”¹⁰. This advantage refers to knowledge of culture and language in the country of origin in line with the perception of diaspora as development agents. Their special position should not be particularly supported, though. This indicates that in spite of ideas of a ‘special advantage’, CISU's underlying ideal is that diaspora organisations behave and are evaluated like other Danish development NGOs. Such ideals are also found among other development aid agencies, such as in the case of the before-mentioned NORAD-funded Pilot Project Pakistan. In spite of a very positive evaluation, this project was discontinued, as NORAD found it was too costly and ineffective (Molde 2011). This shows that though donors and implementing agencies may want the ‘diaspora advantage’, they may not want it enough to devote the

⁸ <https://drc.dk/relief-work/diaspora-programme/looking-for-funding/>

⁹ <https://drc.dk/relief-work/diaspora-programme/meet-the-team/>

¹⁰ Interview, May 2014.

necessary resources or adjust their programs accordingly.

From the point of view of diaspora organisations, this is bad news as several studies show that many diaspora organisations have comparatively low success rates when applying to general development NGO funding schemes (Erdal and Horst 2010; Trans and Vammen 2008; de Bruyn and Huyse 2008), including CISU (Frederiksen 2007; NCG 2010). The mainstreaming strategy may thus be less advantageous for diaspora organisations. Furthermore, while special diaspora initiatives may offer flexibility in terms of project criteria, the financial support is often lower¹¹ and short-term, programmes tend to be time-limited and support is often delimited to few diaspora groups. Or, in other words, there is a tension between mainstreaming and 'special advantage' approaches where the former is the most prioritized. In the Danish case, this is also reflected in the fact that the new Danish Civil Society Strategy only mentions diaspora once in relation to remittances (Danida 2014: 12) and does not mention diaspora organisations at all. Diaspora organisations still do not seem to be recognized as proper actors by some development aid agencies, at least not by those writing the policy strategies. This also indicates that there are different opinions within the development field and some initiatives may become invisible.

Institutional Barriers and Challenges

The recommendations and priority areas presented above apply to small development NGOs and diaspora organisations alike (cf. Brinkerhoff 2011; Sinatti and Horst 2014). Likewise, both types of organisations may face similar institutional barriers and challenges vis-à-vis interaction with development aid agencies. In the following sections, I go through some of the institutional barriers that have been identified in the literature and evaluations of diaspora sup-

port programmes. I argue that though many of these challenges are of a more general nature, diaspora organisations seem to appear as a particular problematic target and recipient group in the eyes of some development aid agencies.

Short-Term Commitment and Lack of Continuity

The volatile and short-term nature of many diaspora support programs is identified as a significant barrier for diaspora organisations' access to support and for developing successful projects. As Table 1 indicates, there is a high degree of pilot projects, changed programs, and funding opportunities, constituting an extremely volatile program landscape. Studies and evaluations emphasize that successful collaboration with diaspora organisations requires trust, confidence and knowledge that can only be obtained over long time (e.g. Ars Progetti 2007; Thornton and Hext 2009). This is especially so in relation to fragile situations where conflict may have created fragmentation and where development and reconstruction projects are difficult to conduct due to lack or weakness of local institutions, insecurity etc. The fact that many diaspora organisations focus on fragile situations – and special diaspora funding schemes often have fragile states as target countries – emphasises the importance of long-term collaboration. While the problem of short-term funding opportunities may apply to diaspora organisations and other small development NGOs alike, special diaspora initiatives are characterized by a very high degree of pilot projects.

Donor Scepticism

The understanding of development interventions as 'planned' activities and the focus on local anchorage shapes the engagement and funding opportunities for development NGOs more generally, as indicated above. Nevertheless, some parts of the development industry seem to worry particularly about diaspora organisations, especially in relation to their involvement in their countries of origin that takes place outside the professional development sphere and its frequent grounding in local, family and per-

¹¹ The maximum grant size for CISU projects is 5 million DKR (approx. 670.000 Euros) compared with 400.000,- DKR in the DRC Diaspora Programme (approx. 54.000 Euros).

sonal relationships (Horst et al. 2010; Brinkerhoff 2011; Sinatti and Horst 2014). Some development professionals may be anxious that migrants and diaspora groups lack a 'professional distance' to development problems and thereby risk being too emotionally or politically involved in development projects in their homelands. In these cases, the diaspora position as special development agents may appear as an impediment to adequate development engagement.

Worries about lack of professional distance may be further aggravated in relation to diaspora groups who, due to conflict in the country of origin, are fragmented and divided. Development aid agencies may fear that diaspora groups act as long-distance nationalists who fund or spur conflict or political instability in their countries of origin. Donor support to such groups would cause political scandals. As the amount of development aid is much contested in the current political climate in Northwestern Europe, few development aid agencies can afford such scandals. Diaspora organisations may therefore be perceived as a particularly risky recipient group, discouraging some development professionals from engaging with them. Furthermore, political fragmentation may result in a high number of internally competing diaspora organisations, possibly with different political agendas, and proclaimed leaders claiming to represent the diaspora. Such situations may make collaboration with diaspora organisations time consuming and demanding, especially if donors' development ideals are based on notions of professional distance and apolitical involvement (cf. Horst 2013).

Policy Incoherence

Finally, policy incoherence constitutes a serious institutional impediment to diaspora organisation engagement. Policy coherence refers to "the nexus between various policy sub-systems" (Carbone 2008: 324) and how these systems effect or contradict each other. The need for policy coherence in relation to migration and development was pointed out more than a decade ago (Sørensen, van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen

2002), and remains especially relevant in relation to the relationship between migration, development and security where political emphasis and priority of the latter – e.g. the migration-security nexus – overshadows and delimits migration-development efforts (Lavenex and Kunz 2008; Sørensen 2012; Isotalo 2009). Though the migration-development nexus has been celebrated in some policy circles, it tends to be subordinated to security-related aspects of migration, such as migration control and migration management. Furthermore, migration-development initiatives, including diaspora support activities, are rarely accompanied by substantial budgets (Sørensen 2012), perhaps because of their relative low importance in overall political priorities.

Another challenge in relation to policy incoherence is the relationship between diaspora organisations' possible engagement in both development and integration activities. Many diaspora organisations have multiple and simultaneous activities in the country of (ancestral) origin and settlement, and sometimes other locations too (Kleist 2007; Hammond 2013; Lacroix 2013; Cordero-Guzman 2005; Layton-Henry 1990). However, development and integration are usually treated as separate policy realms without relevance to each other. Studies show that the relationship between processes of integration and transnational involvement is complex (Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Erdal 2013) but engagement in both processes can be mutually reinforcing (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002; Portes 2003; Levitt and Schiller 2004). Indeed, the midterm and an earlier internal evaluation of the DRC Diaspora Programme emphasised that participation in the programme can cause feelings of recognition in *Danish* society among some participants (Saggiomo and Ferro 2014) as well as create "a motivational benefit amongst peers and communities in Denmark, Somalia and Afghanistan" (Choudhury 2012: 5). The propensity of dual or multiple engagements in country of residence and origin is one of the areas where diaspora organisations may differ most from other development NGOs, but also constitutes an area with

opportunities for policy development across policy realms.

Concluding Discussion

The examination of European development cooperation activities to support diaspora organisations paints a somewhat ambiguous picture. Diaspora groups are mentioned in a range of policy documents on development, implying that the diaspora rhetoric is still important in European development circles. However, though many European development agencies support matching funds schemes that diaspora organisations can apply to, special support programmes are characterized by relatively low budgets and by being pilot or temporary projects. Diaspora support thus seems to have low political priority, especially after the financial crisis in 2009 when a range of diaspora support initiatives fizzled out and were replaced by emphasis on mainstreaming and network approaches – though there are exceptions, such as the DRC Diaspora Programme. This tendency may also be reinforced by the subordination of development aspects of migration to the securitization of migration on (inter)national political agendas. Diaspora organisations thus seem to be perceived as relatively unimportant development actors in the eyes and institutional setups of development aid agencies; they are considered marginal players, though tensions and disagreements persist within the professional development field.

From the point of view of diaspora proponents, the current state of affairs indicates a huge and unexploited potential for further collaboration with and support of diaspora organisations. Diaspora groups are seen as holding a distinctive and competitive development potential that development aid agencies have not fully realized. This potential both relates to strengthening and ameliorating existing programmes and to develop new approaches and partnerships that take lessons learnt into consideration, not least in relation to policy consultation and overcoming policy incoherence. The relationship between development and integration activities consti-

tutes another area of possible collaboration and policy development, though this may arguably be difficult in the light of current policy incoherence between these two fields. Conversely, diaspora sceptics may argue that the relative lack of attention to diaspora organisations reflects their ambivalent or questionable role as development agents. Furthermore, they may argue that diaspora support initiatives are too expensive, risky or time consuming.

These different perceptions reflect underlying notions of diaspora groups as special kinds of development agents: as either transnational agents of change, long-distance nationalists, or a mix of both. However, they may also illuminate a tension between a perception of diaspora groups as particular agents (whether good or bad) and an ideal in which diaspora organisations do not differ from other development NGOs, and thereby do not deserve or need preferential treatment vis-a-vis to 'native' development NGOs in the country of residence. Any 'special advantage' is only rewarded if it is competitive vis-à-vis other development NGOs and does not require any additional support to be realized. This ideal is central in mainstreaming approaches and is mentioned as an objective in some diaspora support schemes.

The mainstreaming tendency that emphasizes the particularity of diaspora involvement constitutes a risky outlook for diaspora organisations. I have previously suggested that the diaspora category has political resonance for diaspora groups (Kleist 2008a). However, this resonance seems to be quite delimited within European development aid agencies when looking at actual modes of cooperation. This is because development aid agencies tend to perceive diaspora organisations as ambivalent and potentially risky recipient groups and partners, and also because most available diaspora support is based on an underlying ideal that diaspora organisations should become mainstream development agents over time. In this way, opportunities for extending and rethinking the nature of development and of development actors are lost.

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