



AFRICAN DIASPORA GROUPS AS FACILITATORS OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Workshop held within the framework of the 13th International Metropolis Conference: “Mobility, Integration and Development in a Globalised World”

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From October 27th – 31st 2008, the 13th International Metropolis Conference was held at Bonn, attracting about 800 delegates from all over the world to discuss the complex links between migration, integration and development as well as the resulting challenges in terms of policy coherence and reform. The conference was hosted by the Ministry of Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia, and offered about 100 workshops bringing together researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

Within the framework of this conference, the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) organized a workshop entitled “*African diaspora groups as facilitators of peace and development*”. This workshop discussed in what ways African diaspora groups in Europe get involved in peace processes in their countries of origin as well as the scope of cooperation with European NGOs and development agencies.

The potential of diaspora groups to facilitate peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin through individual projects, financial and social remittances is nowadays hardly contested. In Europe, many development agencies and NGOs try to build upon diaspora activities and have begun to look into new ways for a more systematic integration of diaspora activities and potentials into their peacebuilding and development efforts. However, little empirical research has so far been undertaken to unearth the actual strengths and limitations of diaspora activities. This not only pertains to the corresponding framework conditions for such activities in the countries of origin and of residence, but especially to the priorities and individual objectives of the various diaspora groups that may indeed differ from those of European state and non-state agencies.

Following an introductory presentation by Dr. Pekka Virtanen (University of Jyväskylä; Coordinator of DIASPEACE research project) on conceptualizations of diaspora as *Agents of Peace or Agents of War*, Dr. Awil Mohamoud of the African Diaspora Policy Centre, Amsterdam, gave a presentation on *African Diaspora Networks in Europe and the Scope for International Cooperation*. Insights into the practical work of diaspora groups were provided by Jean-Louis Bisangwa, who represented Imbuto e.V., an award-winning organization seeking to facilitate peace and



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reconciliation in the Great Lakes region. In addition, Andrea Warnecke (BICC) presented first findings of the DIASPEACE project on the activities of Ethiopian diaspora organizations in Europe. The ensuing discussion focussed on the situation of migrant communities in Europe. Several diaspora representatives stated that a lack of participation in civil society processes and public discourse often limited their activities and networking efforts.

With a view to the research agenda, one of the most prominent issues that repeatedly surfaced during the workshop was the need to further conceptualize actions contributing to peace and reconciliation. The relationships between diaspora groups and authorities in the countries of origin are often very ambiguous, especially in those cases where influential diaspora networks support opposition groups campaigning for human and civic rights, democracy etc. As these forms of engagement may well exacerbate social and political upheavals, the question whether any given diaspora group engages constructively or destructively in political processes is extremely difficult to assess and partly depends on the perspectives and priorities regarding the specific conflict. In the ongoing research, it will thus be vital to develop criteria that help to identify constructive diaspora interventions in a given context.

The session was chaired by Mirjam Gehrke of Deutsche Welle Broadcasting, Bonn.

Further information

BICC website

www.metropolis2008.org

www.metropolis2009.org

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