

## Diaspora Learning Network - Concept Note

### Seminar #1: Diaspora Peacebuilding and Reconciliation

This concept note briefly outlines current thinking and practice in relation to diaspora-led peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives, the challenges and opportunities these present and raises questions on how to best support diaspora contributions to peace.

#### What is unique about diaspora contributions towards peace and reconciliation?

Diaspora peacebuilding and reconciliation refers broadly to diaspora initiatives that can foster and support sustainable structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, recurrence, or continuation of violent conflict. These processes address both short-term and long-term objectives, from immediate humanitarian needs, through to longer-term developmental, political, economic and social objectives. The initiatives may be focused on engaging and influencing change both in the host country, with a view to positively influencing conditions in the homeland, and directly influencing conditions in the homeland. There is a wide range of ways that peacebuilders develop roles and activities to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. The approaches taken may be more or less direct, with some projects having a more implicit peacebuilding aim.

As actors, diaspora have invaluable context-specific knowledge because they are deeply-rooted in the socio-cultural norms, relations and networks, and can have greater knowledge of, and sensitivity to, local customs and traditions and the conflict context. Diasporas can influence changes through the transmission of values that work against entrenched socio-political, cultural and economic systems that may perpetuate injustice, inequity, corruption or impunity for example in conflict contexts. Diasporas can also recognise the potential peacebuilding contribution made by modeling other ways of approaching and dealing with conflict constructively. Diaspora-led peacebuilding efforts can coexist with diaspora-led activities that are conflict-sustaining<sup>1</sup> activities and can work in tandem to defuse or mitigate these.

Members of the diaspora often contribute personally by volunteering their professional skills back in the homeland for development and peacebuilding initiatives. Cash remittances – especially south to south are more substantial than imagined, and they dwarf official Overseas Development Assistance. The money meets diverse needs, including clean water, food, shelter, education and business enterprises.

The mobility and connectivity of current diasporic groups sets them apart from earlier waves of migrants. With mass media and social media – the sense of common diasporic identity may be mobilised and harnessed despite geographic separation from the homeland and from other members of the diaspora. The conflict-sustaining nature of these have also led to a range of diaspora-led peacebuilding initiatives that use media to influence pro-peace attitudes. There has also been a range of attempts to support diaspora participation in transnational transitional justice processes.<sup>2</sup>

#### What challenges need to be addressed to open up more space for contributions?

A key challenge is to identify and nurture the political, economic and social space within which diasporas can identify, develop and engage the resources necessary to contribute to building more peaceful societies. Some of the ways that diaspora peacebuilding potential is being enhanced focuses on:

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the literature on diasporas and conflict focuses on their role in fuelling conflict in the home country and as spoilers of peace processes (see PROI, 2010; Cochrane et al. 2009). Less focus has been given to the positive contributions diaspora make towards peace.

<sup>2</sup> Huma Haider (2014) Transnational Transitional Justice and Reconciliation: The Participation of Conflict-generated Diasporas in Addressing the Legacies of Mass Violence. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 27(2):207-233, DOI10.1093/jrs/feu002

**Building knowledge.** Knowledge of who is already working in this space, what their projects are focused on and what learnings and impacts such efforts have is a foundation from which to create initiatives and support existing capacities for peace. A common sentiment is that current levels of knowledge of how to facilitate the participation of diaspora peacebuilding is inadequate.<sup>3</sup>

**Capacity-building.** A key constraint is the lack of capacity-building support coupled with ability to access funding streams. It is common that organisations are run by volunteers. Meeting capacity-building needs, from project development through to peacebuilding training, and ability to access funding is a challenge.

**Networking.** The most beneficial networking arrangements are considered those that foster active exchange of knowledge, opportunities to build capacity and cooperation.

### How can diaspora engagement in peacebuilding be supported?

There is a mutually reinforcing link between development and peacebuilding. Violence impedes development through direct destruction as well as through systems and practices that create injustice, poor management of resources, unequal social and economic conditions - undoing years of development gains. Diasporas are already key stakeholders in Australia's international development assistance program, as development actors and as supports of Australia's development assistance in their countries of origin.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as peacebuilding actors diaspora are an 'untapped' resource, reflecting the wider call for better engagement with local actors and diaspora in conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies by state actors.<sup>5</sup>

Australia is committed to the internationally agreed framework for achieving sustainable peace and prosperity in the world, through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All of which recognise the central importance of peace to sustainable development. Goal 16 recognises the long reaching consequences of conflict for development outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Working with diasporas is also a key way of realising the focus on multi-stakeholder collaboration that is the direction of Goal 17 of the SDGs.<sup>7</sup>

Development and peacebuilding activities in particular can often be political acts. For diasporas who have originated from conflict settings, host country policies may affect engagement. The legal status of asylum seekers, who often have temporary and limited rights in countries of residence, may affect their ability to engage with their country of origin, and their fear of government surveillance or repression may impede their capacity to engage.<sup>8</sup>

Some ways that government actors can facilitate diaspora peacebuilding and engagement is through developing policy frameworks<sup>9</sup>, establishing forums for exchange and interaction<sup>10</sup>, monitoring progress and making sufficient funding available. A key aspect of this is recognising diaspora organisations as key stakeholders and to incorporate them in development, peacebuilding and reconciliation issues and efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> Giulia Sinatti, Cindy Horst, Rojan Ezzati, Matteo Guglielmo Petra Mezzetti, Päivi Pirkkalainen, Valeria Saggiomo & Andrea Warnecke, 2010, *Participation of Diasporas in Peacebuilding and Development: A Handbook for Practitioners and Policymakers*. Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2010:28

<sup>4</sup> Diaspora Learning Network, *Diaspora Learning Network: Foreign Policy White Paper Submission*. February 2017. Accessed from: <http://diasporaaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Diaspora-Learning-Network-Submission-to-the-Foreign-Policy-White-Paper.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Langmore, J., Miletic, T., Martin, A & Shea, N. (2017) *State Support to Peace Processes: A Multi-Country Review*. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Diaspora Action Australia, '*Diaspora Learning Network: Foreign Policy White Paper Submission*', February 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Sinatti, 2010

<sup>9</sup> Sinatti et al., 2010: 42; Langmore, et a; . 2017.

<sup>10</sup> The current seminar series is an example of this as well as the 2017 DFAT-DAA South Sudanese Peacebuilding Dialogue forums. See: <http://diasporaaction.org.au/south-sudan-peacebuilding-dialogue>