

Diasporic Communities and Development Aid

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I thank the Stuttgart Forum der Kulturen through Mr. Paulino Miguel who encouraged me to talk about Diaspora and Development Aid tonight. With me are my colleagues in the Evangelische Hochschule Ludwigsburg, Sevgül Aydogdu and Anne Seth. Together we will look at three aspects of Diaspora and Development Aid. I will begin with a reflection on the 11 million diasporic people of the Philippines. Sevgul and Anne will then proceed to talk about examples on how a country like Germany sets up efforts to work with diasporic people, the migrant communities, and their everyday effort to carve a place for themselves in this society. Sevgul leads a project called Migrants in Campus which supports second and third generation diasporic communities. Anne is a colleague- in the IO of the EH. She wrote a scholarly paper on how the children of diasporic communities struggle to find their location in our economic and social life. Both Sevgül and Anne will talk about their experiences on how it is possible to support first and second generation children of diasporic families. And all these have implications on policies for social development.

Let me start with first establishing the relationship of Development Aid and Diaspora.

Diaspora and Social Development

Diaspora means the dispersion of a group of people. This has taken a new meanings and application in the past decades. The dispersion of people has been driven by human desire for survival which is threatened by political persecution, religious intolerance, the violence of war, and in more recent decades, by economic necessity.

Wherever human life is threatened in any part of the world, there is an outflow of diasporic communities looking for a safer, more tolerant, more socially secure places where they and their children can live peacefully and securely. When there is an exodus of people from troubled states, there is an attempt to stem this tide by massive international aid. Geopolitics responds to the needs of troubled states and nations in the form of development aid, which is intended to stabilize the social and political infrastructure of nations in conflict and poverty. Germany, as Europe's richest economy has the state, the church and civic organizations all involved in development aid. Here are a few examples of how much went to development aid in 2008:

EED..... 115,4 Million Euros

Bread for the World53,617,784 Million Euros

World Vision 64,63 Million

We would think that these few examples involves a lot of money. True, a lot of good work has resulted from these financial assistance. But are question often repeated among development aid workers: Is it money from Europe or North America that releases people from poverty? Is there a much better paradigm in social development that aid agencies have to explore? What opportunities do we see before us, after decades of development aid?

In the brief sharing with you this evening, all three of us, would attempt to present how diasporic communities are in fact an untapped resource in development aid:

Let me present an example which is closest to my experience. In the Philippines today, the diaspora amounts to 11 million Filipinos scattered all over the world as overseas workers. This is about 12% of the total Philippine population of 91 million. Filipino diaspora are found working as domestic helpers, nurses, engineers, teachers and practically every profession imaginable in today's world. It is said that they can survive under freezing conditions in fish canning factories in the Laplands to the deserts of Saudi Arabia. How do the Filipino diaspora help the country:

- The latest published figure in 2009 indicate that Filipino diaspora sent to the Philippines a total of 22 billion dollars in remittances.¹
- Compare this amount to the direct foreign investment which is only 2.5 billion US\$
- Compare this amount again to the national budget which is 17.6 billion US\$
- Where the current unemployment rate is at 25%, one out of every 8 employable Filipino is working abroad, part of the diasporic community.
- The dollar remittances of the Filipino diaspora accounts for about 13 to 14% of the country's GDP.

Given these figures, it is no wonder that the government pursues a policy of “warm human bodies” for export as a means of social development. This policy is a double bladed sword. On one hand, the government has relied on its export of warm human bodies to tide itself from one economic crises to the next economic crises. And on the other hand, this policy breaks families apart from long absences of parents working abroad, who are often compelled to work under extremely difficult situations.

The market economy in rich countries had opened immense possibilities for diasporic communities to fill the need for cheap and skilled labour. Demographic changes in countries in Europe has opened employment for care givers, nurses and doctors for the fast aging population. There are always menial low paying, although back breaking work, for diasporic communities to do.

The question I ask myself is how to negotiate the moral necessity of this social phenomenon. As a short term solution to the situation of poverty, indeed diasporic communities do help the immediate problems of the families they leave behind. On the long term, we call for a more equitable global economic order where resources and power can be redistributed in a just and moral way. Yet, the immediate problem of hunger and want stand by the door of many poor families. A Filipino mother may think of caring for the child of one rich Saudi Arabian Sheik while leaving her own child at the care of relatives because she needs the income earned there to support an extended family. Indeed there are moral and emotional dilemmas that diasporic communities face. A country like the Philippines hails diasporic workers as heroes. The government has created packages of program assisting overseas workers and acknowledging their contribution to the nation, and further encouraging many educated young people to work abroad, as a choice of last resort.

Aside from this dilemma, we are also concerned tonight about the role and relevance of international aid agencies in social development. Diasporic communities live and work in societies where development aid originates. It can be said with certainty for instance, that I in the Philippines as in many part of the world, the income remitted by diasporic communities exceeds by far the total amount of development aid that rich countries give in total every year.

Diaspora as Development Aid?

Official development aid to global south countries often come as bilateral government to government agreement. This comes with conditions for open trade and economic investment agreements. Or when development aid comes not from governments, but from the churches or civic organizations, these are often with the connotation of charitable work. In other words, development aid comes with strings attached, often with the moral burden that the recipients of aid have to be grateful for the generosity of givers. It is a big question, if these approaches to social development are empowering at all to the people who need development assistance most.

¹ From estimates of the Overseas Employment Agency, Philippines, 2006, and the Office of the Philippine Ambassador to Saudi Arabia

Yet, we are today witness to the dignity by which diasporic communities, may these be Filipinos, Chinese, Vietnamese, Turks, Nigerians, etc - all bear the responsibility of work in their host countries. There is legitimate pride and dignity by which they earn incomes from their labour and save money to send home. Diasporic workers are neither beholden to market dealings of their governments; nor are they morally beholden to the charitable persuasions of church or civic organizations. The financial assistance they give does not pass through the bureaucracy of governments or church institutions. It is straightforward, effective and instills a sense of empowerment to the giving and receiving communities.

As in the Philippines, diasporic communities have sustained the stability of many nations and states, they have quietly rescued the cohesiveness of troubled states and vulnerable societies. The manner by which diasporic communities have informally organized their ranks and drawn support from each other is an experience in organizational good practice.

As a final note, we may have to challenge development aid agencies to rethink their approach and strategy to development work in the 21 century. Here today, in every development donor country is the presence of strong diasporic communities. These communities in Germany represent about 10 % of the total population. Here is a huge resources to development aid work. Have these resources been used at all? Why is there a hesitation and a lack of rethinking on how to use diasporic communities as resource to development work?

Here are some things to think about:

1. Financial capital, money and investment accumulated abroad is often partially sent back by diasporic communities to the home country which benefits not only families, but entire communities.
2. When diasporic communities establish themselves in their host countries, there is often accumulated knowledge, skills and other forms of human capital that can be useful for development work.
3. Diasporic communities have networks, organizations formal and informal that can link their countries to the host country. Again this is a resource in development work.
4. Governments, civic organizations and NGO's and Church organizations can think of addressing diasporic communities not as problems, but as resources that can be very relevant for development work. New mechanisms and news strategies can be thought out.

This brings us now to the contributions and experiences of Anne and Sevgül.

Thank you very much!