

Supported by the Commonwealth Foundation, Birmingham hosted the Commonwealth Symposium in November 2012, which gathered together delegates from three countries in the Commonwealth (India, Jamaica, Nigeria), provided an opportunity to examine how governments and diaspora organisations interacted. The perspectives that were shared highlighted the diverse arrangements and structures that have been created in the three countries to facilitate dialogue. The discussions also demonstrated the challenges that faced organisations and governments: many of these are similar across developing countries. The general outcome is a need to understand the challenges in order to develop effective policy frameworks which can effectively link diaspora organisations and governments. The brief notes reflect some of the discussions which took place in the workshops;

1. Establishing Best Practice

The diaspora is already established and existing so the key issue is how to create an effective and sustainable diaspora body.

Recommendations:

- Resources from home governments – these are especially necessary in the recession
- Commonwealth as an organisation could assist diasporas maintain links with home countries
- The home state is very important and needs to build partnerships with the diasporas
- There needs to be a reciprocal relationship between the high commissions and the diaspora communities
- There needs to be transparency, democracy and accountability in the diaspora organisations.

2. Youth

The main concern is that young people, born outside their country of heritage, do not feel a connection. The diaspora therefore becomes diluted and it won't be there forever – Jamaican diasporas have already been lost in Nicaragua, Panama. There is a real need to find ways to engage young people: it was noted that younger people identify more with the place where they are educated. In addition, the experience of racism in this country made it even more important for young people to have a sense of identity and connection to country of heritage.

Recommendations:

Partnership between government and diaspora to create 'birthright' programmes to engage young people with the homeland
Young people could be encouraged to engage with the homeland through national heroes, the example of Usain Bolt was given in this regard.

3. Gender

Women have a dominant role in migration and diaspora: i.e. in sending remittances, etc.

Recommendations :

- There should be support given to the next generation to help them manage the changes in gender expectations
- There should be male-female partnership contribution to the diaspora
- There should be a focus on gender role models
- There should be research into the consequence of gender migration and social impact in the home country (i.e. barrel children in Jamaica)

4. ICT:

ICT has marketing potential and as a tool for business.

Social media is another way to engage, it can be a tool to enable action and the level of engagement can be very positive. There are different ways in which it can be utilised: for example, through influencing politics. However, ICT can only facilitate engagement if it is strategically targeted engagement. It is important to incorporate it as part of an overall vision and direct its usage. If the purpose of it is not clear, then it is less likely to yield positive results.

5. Trade and Development:

- Incorporate assets, expertise and human capital.
- There are a wide variety of issues related to trade and development:
- Structures:
- Role of Government Ministries and Policy Implementation
- Role of Diaspora Advisory Committees

Recommended Policies:

Developing tax incentives to encourage investment and trade

Removing red tape to facilitate trade and investment

Trade show bilateral agreements

Policies to ease banking and regulations

6. Managing Migration

80% of trained Caribbean people reside outside the region. There is a culture of migration and traditional migration patterns.

Recommendations:

Brain circulation: VISA/work permit regulations could be amended to facilitate people migrating to the region.

- Diaspora could assist: i.e. Indian diasporas in the USA provided work?
- Outsourcing of work could be promoted especially given the use of English language in Commonwealth countries: this would possibly limit migration
- Diaspora bond: the way in which the government invests the money could have an impact on levels of migration.

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