

## Diaspora organisations, transnational practices and development: Ghanaians in the Netherlands

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### Importance of the study

This study, which was undertaken in the Netherlands and Ghana, contributes to the migration and development-nexus debate by using a combination of concepts – ‘agency’, ‘policy window’, ‘here and there’ and ‘win-win-win’ – to shed light on the transnational practices and the impact of these activities in the country of residence and origin. Empirically, the study addresses the challenges inherent in diaspora engagement initiatives by policy makers, aimed at harnessing the development potential of migration through remittances. It emphasises the collective dimensions of diaspora development potential by bringing to the fore the transformative role of diaspora organisations, with all their different organisational capacities. The findings of this study show the relevance of diaspora collective organising and their impact from ‘here and there’ and ‘win-win-win’ perspectives.

### Research methods used

The study used a qualitative methodological approach and a multi-sited ethnographic lens to enhance an in-depth examination of the historic, political, socioeconomic context and the social relationships influencing diaspora transnational collective activities at the local and national levels both in the country of residence and origin. Data collection, included in-depth interviews, focus groups discussion, participant observations, process tracing and analysis of secondary sources.

### Key conclusions

- Associational life among diasporas is mainly for the welfare of its members in the host society (‘here’), linked to integration, participation and safety nets against vulnerabilities, ties with the country of origin (‘there’), individual and collective interests to improve the conditions of those left behind. These undertakings in these areas resolve socio-economic and emotional issues that would otherwise constitute political and policy problems for institutions in the country of residence and origin.
- The three main significant categories of diaspora organisations are hometown associations, migrant development NGOs and umbrella organisations. Their activities have a ‘here and there’ orientation focused on public service delivery, have the potential for broad impact, and are relatively inclusive in nature (broad reach – both direct and indirect) within a ‘win-win-win’ framework.
- A combination of political opportunity structures and policy windows in the countries of residence and origin and the dual identity and multiple layers of belonging of members of the diaspora, which are constantly being reconstructed and renegotiated, are central to diaspora transnational collective activities and their transformative potential.
- Agency within diaspora organisations is crucial to how they seek to influence the policy agenda through collective action aimed at various streams (problem, policy and political) with a ‘here and there’ orientation. This also applies to the meanings attached to existing opportunities or emerging policy windows for access to opportunities (resources and space for influencing policy agenda).
- Diaspora transnational collective activities constitute part of the social development processes in multiple contexts and inherently have ‘here and there’ and ‘win-win-win’ orientations in terms of the impact felt at different levels (individual, family, community, local, national and international).

### Key recommendations

- **Create an enabling political, institutional and policy environment:** Conditions (migration regimes) need to be created that open up opportunities for diasporas to return to their country of origin and facilitate circular transfer through transnational collective activities between the country of residence and the country of origin, which requires coherence among the different institutions at the different levels at which diasporas operate.
- **Institutionalise diaspora participation in policy processes in the country of residence and origin:** Inclusive consultation mechanisms can tap into the complementary, bridging and interlocutory role of diasporas and collective organising in its diverse forms within migrant communities.
- **Scale-up innovative and policy relevant diaspora collective initiatives:** A menu of policy options for scaling-up the best practices and embedding them in local policy frameworks for diaspora engagement. This include rethinking of strategies for sustaining diaspora collective initiatives that add value to local policies on immigrant integration and participation and that harness the development potential of migration.
- **Develop policy frameworks that promote reciprocity and ‘win-win-win’ scenarios:** Diaspora contribution to development in their country of residence and their country of origin, can derive from diaspora entrepreneurship and other forms of reverse flows through transnational linkages, facilitated by multiple layers of belonging. This calls for a complementarity framework in which initiatives taken by diaspora organisations are linked to the priorities of government, municipalities and local communities.
- **Extend and enhance diaspora capacities:** Different categories of diaspora organisations as part of civil society possess ideas, skills, expertise, experience and cross-cultural knowledge that, if recognised, could be leveraged innovatively for collaborations and partnerships that enhance development cooperation projects and promote investment in emerging markets. This requires structured institutional support and sustained funding for diaspora initiatives within the framework of public-private partnerships.