



# Working in Partnership with Diaspora Organisations

## Authorship

This report was written by Ruth Talbot, diaspora volunteering programme partnership officer – Africa, at VSO UK. VSO is the world's leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers to fight poverty in developing countries. VSO's high-impact approach involves bringing people together to share skills, build capabilities, promote international understanding and action, and change lives to make the world a fairer place for all. The Diaspora Volunteering Programme (DVP) is co-funded by DFID and the Big Lottery Fund and managed by VSO, which supports diaspora organisations to run independent international diaspora volunteering programmes in their countries and continents of heritage.

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## Acronyms

<b>AO</b>	African Organisation
<b>AFS</b>	African Foundation Stone
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DO</b>	Diaspora Organisation
<b>DVA</b>	Diaspora Volunteering Alliance
<b>DVP</b>	Diaspora Volunteering Programme
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MIND</b>	Malawian Initiative for Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>VSO</b>	Voluntary Service Overseas

# Executive summary

## Report background

The role of diaspora in development has become increasingly popular in recent years as seen with the interest of institutions such as the World Bank, DFID and the mainstream British media. Some INGOs have also increased and formalised their engagement with the diaspora. For example, since 2005 Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) has invested money and staff capacity to work with diaspora organisations. The DFID-VSO Diaspora Volunteering Programme (DVP) was initiated in 2008. Through the DVP, VSO has worked in partnership with the Diaspora Volunteering Alliance (DVA) – an independent alliance of diaspora organisations – and more than 20 diaspora organisations to deliver more than 600 diaspora volunteer placements across Africa and Asia (a case study of this programme is included at the end of this report). Diaspora organisations, both country/continent-specific and umbrella groups, have been increasing not only in the UK (for example Connections for Development), but also in Africa (for example The African Diaspora Forum in South Africa).

Despite this increase in acknowledgement of the role diaspora groups play within the development sector, there has been little research into their partnership approach. Given the key role of partnerships within international development, this lack of research represents a missed opportunity to learn from what many claim to be a 'unique' form of development. This report addresses this and provides both contextual understanding and practical recommendations for INGOs, African organisations and diaspora organisations to work together. Whilst the research, and therefore the findings, focuses on the African diaspora, it is considered broadly relevant to working with other diaspora organisations in the UK, and possibly beyond, given the commonality of the issues identified here.

## Diaspora and development context

The size of the African diaspora in the UK has been growing since the 16th century. The 2001 census showed half a million Africans living in the UK ([www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)), with current numbers estimated to be much higher. These numbers represent not only individuals, but also a potential resource for the development of Africa. Many African countries have now become dependent on remittances to survive; for example, Lesotho has a 27 per cent remittances-to-GDP ratio (Ratha *et al*, 2010). Consequently, there has been an increased interest in, and recognition of, the development role the African diaspora play. The influence of diaspora on their home communities is now generally accepted and enthusiasm abounds about their potential. As Akyeamong (2000:214) concludes, “*at the close of the twentieth century, Africa and the African diaspora stand fused in ways that have immense political, economic and social possibilities*”, emphasising both the significant and diverse role the diaspora play.

## “Africa and the African diaspora stand fused in ways that have immense political, economic and social possibilities”

This paper defines diaspora as a self-identified group of people who, in addition to having cultural links with each other, maintain links with a country of heritage. This country of heritage is referred to as ‘home’, while ‘host’ refers to the country where the diaspora are currently living (for the purposes of this report, the UK). The term ‘mainstream’ refers to traditional, non-diaspora development institutions, which can (to an extent) be contrasted with diaspora organisations. While diasporas are a global phenomenon, this research focuses on the African diaspora. The term Africa is used widely in place of specific African countries to ensure the anonymity of participants’ comments. Although generalisations are possible, the term is not intended to remove a sense of diversity between African countries.

## Key findings

This research finds that diaspora organisations (DOs) are primarily motivated by a sense of identity that engenders a responsibility to address poverty and disadvantage amongst Africans in their home and host society, repositioning the geographic focus of development. The link between needs in the home and host societies can create a ‘double impact’ whereby DOs learn from – and share learning from – development activities in both societies.

The partnerships between DOs and African Organisations (AOs) explored here are relatively equal and participatory, addressing issues of resistance from African communities towards the development activities of ‘outsiders’. The ‘here and there’ position of DOs enables them to simultaneously act as a link between Africa and the UK, whilst also challenging the mainstream approach. These unique aspects of DO partnerships offer great potential for INGOs to build on.

However, the power structures between mainstream actors, DOs and AOs remain, undermining the precarious equality of these partnerships. This report identifies issues of trust and power which DOs and INGOs need to be sensitive to if the strengths of DO-AO partnerships are to be replicated and expanded. INGOs need to ensure they do not ‘take over’ within partnerships and skew the power balance in their favour. They also need to ensure that they are not unintentionally supporting or exacerbating power inequalities between existing partners. It is a sensitive path that INGOs need to tread, but one which is necessary to ensure that INGOs are fully inclusive in their approaches to development, and able to ensure the maximum positive impact through more diverse and innovative development programmes.

## Methodology

This report has been produced as an offshoot from a Masters dissertation on diaspora organisations’ partnerships. The research involved a literature review followed by qualitative primary research. The primary research involved interviews with six UK-based African diaspora organisations and eight of their partners in Africa.

# Recommendations

## INGO-DO partnerships

- INGOs and DOs should focus on building and maintaining trust throughout the partnership, and being open and transparent in their expectations and what they can bring to the partnership.
- INGOs should focus their role around being a facilitator of relationships with donors and other influential bodies, rather than taking the lead in programme design and delivery.
- INGOs need to be critically aware of DOs' sensitivities to how the international development sector perceive, and interact, with the diaspora, and the previous lack of collaboration between the two.
- INGOs and DOs need to be aware – and continually critical – of the potential for any partnership between them to lead to an imbalance in power relations due to the political influence and (access to) funds which INGOs often hold.
- INGOs and DOs should be aware of, and sensitive to, the cultural differences between both organisations at a social and organisational level.
- INGOs should increase outreach and connections with diverse diaspora communities across the UK, so that the selection of diaspora partners is sensitive to diaspora community dynamics and the history of both that organisation and that specific diaspora community.
- INGOs should work with established diaspora communities and those organisations that are already operating within the UK, or are part of a network which support the diaspora within the UK. Whilst INGOs can support DOs to move from UK-focused to international work, this should be supported at a natural pace and not rushed. Ideally, DO partners should have been operational for a minimum of three years prior to a partnership with INGOs, so that they have had time to establish their own organisational identity.
- DOs should not be afraid of stepping outside the mainstream development discourse and following their own approaches to development when partnering with INGOs, and INGOs should support this.

## Co-created programmes between AOs, DOs and INGOs

- Emphasise the strengths of AOs, DOs and INGOs throughout programme planning.
- Use a flexible approach to programme planning which engages all three partners to maximise their unique knowledge: for AOs this is their close connections with the beneficiaries, for DOs this is their double impact and understanding of both home and host societies, and for INGOs this is often more experience at managing donor-funded multi-partner programmes.
- Explore how programmes can build on the diaspora 'double impact' so that a more connected global development agenda is created and a long-term support base which capitalises on the deterritorial nature of diaspora is developed and strengthened.
- Be sensitive to the risk that a three-way partnership may push out local voices.
- Jointly source funds for co-created programmes to avoid an imbalance of power within the funding relationship between all three partners.
- Donors should be more open to funding programmes with a transnational impact.

## Capacity building by INGOs

- When supporting the capacity of DOs, ensure that the diaspora approach is not overlooked or lost.
- Emphasise diaspora peer support and mentoring to enable the diaspora approach to be improved and maximised. For example, VSO has supported the DVA, which has in turn provided peer support across African and Asian DOs.
- Consider providing 'Training of Trainers' schemes to DOs to enable them to support their in-country partners with fundraising.

## UK engagement

- INGOs should consult with diaspora umbrella organisations such as the DVA when developing policies/strategies.
- INGOs can learn from the double impact of DOs, and explore links between programmes in the South and development programmes in the North.
- INGOs should support DOs and diaspora umbrella organisations such as the DVA to raise their voices through UK and international advocacy and campaigns work.

## Further research

More detailed research is needed on the following areas:

- How three-way partnerships between AOs, DOs and INGOs have developed; the strengths and challenges within these partnerships; and how to maximise the strengths and address the challenges to maximise impact and reduce poverty.
- How DO-INGO partnerships are affected by the introduction of grants (the DVP experience at VSO would provide a good case study for this).
- How diaspora umbrella organisations can contribute to three-way partnerships (the DVA may provide a good case study for this).
- How the diaspora double impact operates in practice, and how this can be incorporated into a broader global development agenda.



Primary school students at a Nigerian school in Adamawa state that benefited from Development Impact for Nigeria's diaspora volunteering teacher training programme

# 1. Literature review – diaspora, migration and development

Whilst many theorists have identified a lack of clarity in defining diaspora (Clifford, 1994; Dayal, 1996; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002; van Amersfoort, 2004) there are three commonly accepted attributes: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance (Brubaker, 2005). These are crucial to diaspora and development as they affect diaspora identity and motivations.

The increase in migration and diaspora, paired with globalisation, has intensified the migration and development debate (Henry *et al*, 2004; Mercer *et al*, 2008), which reflects both positive and negative views (Ellerman, 2005; Khadria, 2002). Though contentious (see Braziel, 2008 and Sriskandarajah, 2005 for opposing discussions), there is a growing body of research discussing the benefits of diaspora, such as their knowledge, links and unique approach to development (Chikezie and Thakar, 2005; Mercer *et al*, 2008); Khadria refers to diaspora as ‘catalysts for development’ (in Castles and Wise, 2008). Remittances, perhaps due to their size, are central to this debate (Castles and Wise, 2008; de Haas, 2006; Freund and Spatafora, 2005). However, the link between remittances and development remains questionable, given the tendency for remittances to be immediately consumed (Castles and Miller, 1998). Furthermore, this focus overlooks the broader development role of diaspora (Adi, 2002; Mercer *et al*, 2008).

The economic, cultural, social and political capital of diaspora are also critical to development (Castles in Castles and Wise, 2008; Levitt, 1998; Sriskandarajah, 2005; Stalker, 2000). As Portes (1998:16) states, “[*diaspora*] members are at least bilingual, move easily between cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political, and cultural interests that require a simultaneous presence in both.” As Mercer *et al* (2008) hold, diaspora maintain a practical attachment to home beyond a ‘wistful’ desire to return. This attachment and cross-border identity separates DOs from other development actors.

Naru *et al* (2007) hold that DOs approach development differently from international agencies. The cultural activities of DOs highlighted by Mercer *et al* (2009) support this, and data suggests their approach is particularly grassroots and participatory (Murray, 2007; Ndofor-Tah, 2000). In Ndofor-Tah’s (2000:11) study, one DO summarised diaspora strengths as, “*collectiveness, local knowledge of problems, international experience, awareness and the desire by all to succeed where all has failed.*” However, there has been little investigation of the uniqueness of diaspora approaches, and

Chikezie and Thakar (2005) warn against assumptions that hide great diversity. Although research on DOs’ approaches to development is lacking (Attah-Poku, 1996), African governments (Davies, 2007) and donors have engaged the diaspora, as seen with DFID’s Diaspora Volunteering Programme (DVP) and Common Ground Initiative ([www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)). Furthermore, whilst the mainstream is engaging the diaspora, the focus has been on DOs adapting, rather than vice versa (Naru *et al*, 2007). This could undermine their approach, as Porter and Verghese (1999) argue, becoming part of the mainstream removes radical agendas.

Mohan’s (in Robinson, 2002) model of diaspora and development illuminates varied development roles and builds on Al-Ali and Koser’s (1999) claims that the diaspora play a political, economic, social and cultural role in their home and host communities. For Mohan, diaspora engender development in the host society, the host country develops *through* diasporas’ transnational connections, while development is undertaken by diaspora in their home (Mercer *et al*, 2008; Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002). The interdependence of diaspora development roles in their home and host communities is evident from Mohan’s model and, for Mercer *et al* (2008), redefines the nature and scope of development.

Despite the lack of research into DOs’ partnership approaches (Henry *et al*, 2004), key concepts can be inferred from the mainstream literature. While equality is key within partnership discourse (Baaz, 2005), many partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs undermine participation, equality and accountability (Michael, 2004). Wallace *et al* (2006) identify ‘coercion and compliance’ within partnerships, created through financial flows, ideas and concepts, and promoted through aid conditionality, thereby creating the ‘aid chain’.

Cultural imperialism, hegemony and race are important, yet often overlooked, concepts within partnerships (Wallace *et al*, 2006). As BUILD (2007:23) hold, “*the legacy of post-colonial times reflected in the superiority complex of one [partner] militates against partnership.*” Baaz (2005) highlights the centrality of otherness within development workers’ identities and their views of partners. For her, development workers identify themselves as ‘rational’, in opposition to their ‘irrational’ partners. The shared identity of Africans and their diaspora suggests a partnership based on similarities, not otherness. This report will further investigate these concepts within DOs’ partnerships with AOs.

## 2. Research methodology

A qualitative approach was taken to provide an opportunity to DOs and AOs to voice their experiences. The research involved six UK-based DOs and eight AOs which were partners to four of the UK groups. In total, members of 14 organisations were interviewed.

The DOs were selected through purposive, non-probability sampling, using the snowballing approach to ensure representativeness in terms of country of heritage, size, income, age and sector. The four DOs were purposively selected for the Africa research to ensure religious, geographic and ethnic diversity while also being logistically reasonable, given resources. The three countries selected – Kenya, Malawi and Zanzibar – were known to the researcher, enabling good rapport to be built with participants and ensuring a strong contextual understanding.

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used to allow free discussion around complex topics such as identity and partnership. After familiarisation with the data, key concepts – including bridging, identity and trust – were identified through inductive open coding. Memos of the concepts were developed and a framework analysis approach used to synthesise the data. Through axial coding and mind-mapping, the relationships between these concepts were analysed. Throughout the process, relevant theories were applied to provide analytical understanding to the concepts and emerging themes.



Community development practitioners discuss local needs at a programme planning workshop led by the African Community Development Foundation in Jinja, Uganda

### 3. African diaspora organisations' development activities

This section discusses the structure, activities and motivations of the DOs researched. Diasporic identity creates a responsibility within the diaspora, motivating people to support home. This emphasises a focus on 'people not place', reflecting the deterritorialisation of diaspora and challenging the traditional position of development.

Diaspora organisation	Annual income	Geographic focus	Sector focus	Year established	African activities	UK activities
African Development Foundation (AFFORD)	£200,000+	Ghana and Sierra Leone	Enterprise development	1994	Business centres Volunteers	Development awareness Fundraising Project management
African Foundation Stone (AFS)	£100,000+	Cameroon and Congo	Gender and secure livelihoods	2000	Advocacy Technical support Volunteers	Cultural activities Development awareness Fundraising Project management Training
Malawian Initiative for National Development (MIND)	£40,000	Malawi	Health, education and secure livelihoods	2008	Volunteers	Development awareness Fundraising Project management
Widows and Orphans International (WOI)	£1.5 million+	Kenya	Education, training, and HIV and AIDS	1998	Exchanges Funding Technical support	Advice and support Advocacy Fundraising Project management Training
Zanzibar Welfare Association (ZAWA)	Approx. £10,000	Zanzibar	Poverty alleviation	1995	Funding Goods International marketing	Advice and support Cultural activities Fundraising/partner marketing
Zanzibar Outreach Program (ZOP UK)	Approx. £5,000	Zanzibar	Health	2006	Funding Goods	Development awareness Fundraising

**Table 1** UK diaspora organisations

## DO structure

Table 1 demonstrates the activities, focus and income of DOs, from supporting business centres in Sierra Leone (AFFORD) to sending diaspora health volunteers (MIND). This reflects the diversity recorded elsewhere (Zack-Williams and Mohan, 2002), making generalisations about diaspora connections with home difficult (Davies, 2007; Kalra *et al*, 2005). Discussions of remittances were noticeably absent from interviews, which was surprising given their prominence in the literature (see de Haas, 2006; Freund and Spatafora, 2005). This supports the claim that remittances are an individual commodity (Castles and Miller, 1998; Stalker, 2000). AFFORD's new RemitPlus project, linking individual remittances with financial literacy and enterprise development ([www.remitplus.org](http://www.remitplus.org)), suggests this is changing. However, this falls outside the scope of this research. The age of the DOs, four of which are over ten years old, undermines Banjoko's (2010) claim that they normally survive only five years. Age appears not to reflect income, as one of the oldest groups has one of the smallest incomes, and the youngest a middle income. The majority of the DOs largely relied on volunteers for their operations in the UK and Africa.

**“[i]t's not an academic or spectator sport, it's your family”**

## DOs' motivations

A sense of African identity engendered responsibility amongst the DOs, motivating them to support African development. Most DOs' members interviewed described themselves as 'African' and some referred to Africa as their 'homeland'. One stated, “[w]e have a moral duty... I feel a sense of obligation.” Another emphasised the personal element: “[i]t's not an academic or spectator sport, it's your family.” This sense of responsibility also arose from an awareness of the opportunities that life in the diaspora provided: “we see the opportunities we've got actually.” Furthermore, this commitment was considered lifelong – as a member of one DO stated, “I'm an advocate by virtue of my heritage and I will be an advocate till I die.” This is supported by Portes'

(1999) analysis of the Latin American diaspora in the USA, who remain despite harsh conditions because they prioritise supporting home over returning. Although such commitment is not universal amongst diaspora communities (Davies, 2010), communities who have established organisations appear strongly influenced by this.

**“I'm an advocate by virtue of my heritage and I will be an advocate till I die”**

Other factors, aside from identity, were also considered to be motivators for the diaspora. These included a sense of failure of INGOs and African governments, supporting Ndofor-Tah's (2000) findings. One DO perceived INGOs as focusing on their own interests, while another felt that the staff of INGOs gained more than the intended beneficiaries through their wages and benefits. This is supported by a study conducted by Connections for Development, which highlighted that only three per cent of DOs thought British aid was channelled appropriately (Sharif, 2009). Another DO felt that poverty was not reflective of the resources and potential of Africa; one member stated, “[p]overty is not the destiny of Africa. Africa is endowed.” This encouraged a sense of urgency.

## DOs' activities

Four out of the six DOs undertake formal development activities, challenging claims that diaspora communities tend to undertake 'ad hoc projects' (COMPAS, 2004:6). Although the relatively large incomes of the DOs suggest that this is not broadly representative, even smaller DOs providing intermittent support did so around specific times. One DO described how they gave donations during 'famines and festivities'; “when there are famines... we organise events, do fundraising and send some donations... during the festivals we also send our contributions.” This provided limited reliability to communities in terms of when they could expect to receive support.

The cultural activities undertaken by many DOs were evident throughout the interviews. In the UK, this was predominantly to 'maintain and advance' their culture. In Africa, some of the DOs aimed to challenge the dominant culture. One DO stated, "*we send volunteers who are going to be involved in talking to certain groups or communities to change certain cultural practices.*" This links to the social remittance transfers Levitt (1998) refers to, which include the transfer of cultural practices. Although negative feedback was not raised by the AOs, this is a sensitive area for both DOs and INGOs to engage in; if people – diaspora or non-diaspora – are seen to be changing cultural traditions, accusations of colonial approaches could be raised. However, the DOs studied here appeared to do this successfully, and the findings from studies such as Levitt's (*ibid*) suggest that the diaspora approach to cultural change is acceptable to home communities, not least because the diaspora often have personal experiences of the benefits and problems with both cultural approaches.

## "everywhere you are, you want to improve the environment and the condition of yourself or your people"

The tendency for DOs to operate in both Africa and the UK reflects the dual identity of diaspora, which was mentioned in almost all DO interviews. One DO described its aim as, "*to reduce the impact of poverty on vulnerable populations from and in Africa.*" For the diaspora, identity is more important than geography; one DO stated, "*everywhere you are, you want to improve the environment and the condition of yourself or your people*", in the UK and Africa. This suggests that the diaspora are deterritorialised, as Appadurai (in Braziel and Mannur, 2003) claims. As one AO stated, "*[w]e are fighting for the development [of Africans], and for them, there, it's just the same.*"

The transnational operation of DOs in both the UK and Africa undermines the traditional position of development occurring in the global South. For example, Save the Children, an INGO with one of the most prominent UK poverty programmes, only spends approximately five per cent of its annual budget in the UK (Save the Children, 2009), compared with AFS and WOI, two DOs engaged in formal UK and African development, which both spend 50 per cent in each region. This has created challenges for DOs: "*[w]e couldn't fit in any box and we couldn't answer [the] straightforward [question], where is our work? Is it in UK or is it in Africa?*" This supports Mohan's (2002) model of diaspora and development, highlighting diaspora communities' development role in their home and host countries. Partnering with DOs who operate in both the UK and overseas represents a key opportunity for INGOs to expand their global influence and draw greater connections between the global North and South.

The DOs interviewed tended to undertake African activities only once their diaspora community had established themselves in the UK. One AO recognised the need for diaspora communities to gain strength in the UK before they could 'work together'. This supports Begum's (2003) claim that bonding social capital is a prerequisite for bridging, and Triandafyllidou's (2009) analysis, which shows how a level of integration within the host community is necessary before transnational activities can be undertaken. The two newest organisations (MIND and ZOP UK) did not undertake UK activities prior to operating in Africa. Their UK activities purely aim to garner funds and support for their African activities. This may reflect the recent focus on diaspora in development, or the more conducive globalised environment. However, both these diaspora communities are supported by other DOs, and only since the success of the UK-focused DOs have the communities established these separate, Africa-focused institutions, suggesting that UK diaspora communities do need to consolidate before embarking on more formal development activities back home.

## Summary

DOs represent a diverse group of organisations with different income levels, structures and activities. However, the activities of the DOs studied here are more formalised than might be expected. Despite this diversity, similarities can be identified. Whilst DOs' motivations differed, these were all underpinned by a sense of African identity which established a sense of responsibility. The DOs' activities tended to span borders, emphasising the deterritorial nature of DOs. This is an approach that singles DOs out from the majority of INGOs, but may reflect a more coherent approach given the increase in linkages and interdependencies between the global North and South. For DOs, it also reflects a necessity for new communities to establish a strong grounding in the UK before they deliver more formal development activities in their home communities.

## 4. African diaspora organisations' partnership approaches

This section analyses the DOs' African partnerships. It identifies dual identity, culture and trust as key elements within these partnerships, which foster equality between partners. Paired with the greater resources and power of the AOs in comparison to their diaspora counterparts, the power dynamics of the partnerships studied reflect an inverse aid chain. However, cultural differences threaten to weaken the trust established, and mainstream development norms can further undermine this.

Diaspora organisation	How partnership operates	Partner organisation interviewed	Formal (written agreement)/ informal partnership	AO sectoral focus	AO type of institution	AO preference on level of formality in partnership	DO preference on level of formality in partnership
AFFORD	Partners and African branch	-	Informal	-	-	-	Formal
AFS	Partners	-	Formal	-	-	-	Formal
MIND	Partners and African office	TEVETA	Informal	Education	Parastatal	Formal	Informal
		Light House	Informal	HIV and AIDS	NGO	Formal	
		College of Health Sciences	Informal	Health	Parastatal	Formal	
WOI	Partners	HOVIC	Formal	Street children	NGO	Formal	Formal
		Omega	Formal	HIV and AIDS	NGO	Formal	
		Port Florence Community Hospital	Formal partnership through Omega	Health	NGO	Formal	
ZAWA	Partners	Zanzibar Children Fund	Informal	Education & child welfare	NGO	Informal	Formal
ZOP (UK)	African branch	Zanzibar Outreach Program (ZOP Zanzibar)	Informal	Health	NGO	Informal	Formal

**Table 2** Diaspora organisations' partnerships

## DO operational approaches

As Table 2 shows, the DOs predominately operate through partners, though some also have African branches. This reflects the approach of most INGOs to work with partners. Most DO-AO partnerships were viewed positively, but their infancy meant few had been significantly tested. A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows that where DOs operate in the UK and Africa their areas of work overlap significantly, from HIV-awareness to business support centres.

Most DO partner organisations are African NGOs, reflecting the negative opinion some DOs hold of INGOs and African governments. One stated, *“it’s not easy to access government department[s] because there’s a long bureaucracy... With local NGOs, we have one-to-one contact and easy access. The last user, who is the local person there, gets the benefits on time.”* INGOs that work closely with governments may offer both a complementary and challenging approach to development programmes when working with DOs. However, it appears more common for DOs to work together with governments where the relations between the diaspora and government are positive, for example in Malawi.

**“[the diaspora] understand our culture, they know how we operate... even in terms of the values we uphold”**

## Partnership values

Cultural similarities, previously outlined as a key motivator for DOs, are crucial within the operation of partnerships. Most interviewees emphasised cultural similarities and understanding as key to successful partnerships, ensuring DOs operated appropriately and addressed the ‘real’ needs. One AO stated, *“[the diaspora] understand our culture, they know how we operate... even in terms of the values we uphold.”* Another stated, *“[DOs] have a deeper understanding of the problems, because maybe they grew up in Africa. They sometimes come back and visit Africa and they’re able to be in touch with their near relations.”* This supports much of the literature on the benefit of the dual identity of diaspora (Adi, 2002; Castles and Wise, 2008; Chikezie and Thakar, 2005; Mercer *et al*, 2008; Murray, 2007; Naru *et al*, 2007; Ndofar-Tah, 2000; Portes, 1998; Vertovec, 2003; Zack-Williams and Mohan, 2002). This reflects a key opportunity for INGOs to learn from DOs on how cultural similarities affect partnerships with local organisations, and how programmes are developed through such partnerships.

Cultural differences and clashes between DOs and AOs were also evident. As Hall (in Rutherford, 1990) emphasises, diaspora is a place of difference. One AO stated, *“[i]f the gap is too long it may not be possible [to bridge]... it’s also very important the diaspora just don’t look at the developing countries as corrupt, the developing country as disorganised.”* Only one DO raised this issue, perhaps reflecting a fear that cultural misunderstanding equates to a loss of identity, given the connection between culture and identity. There was a tendency for DOs to consider it almost impossible to forget their culture, referring to it as ‘natural’ and ‘instinctive’. One DO stated, *“[i]f you forget your culture and traditions they will remind you who you are.”* The reality appears different though, as DOs talked of trying to ‘change’ the culture back home. Tensions which stemmed from cultural differences were also evident. One DO described frustration with its partner for its ‘uncommunal’ approach to partnership, which the DO blamed on *“the culture, like, over there”*. This highlights the sensitive approach which INGOs need to take when working with DOs, to ensure they do not exacerbate such cultural clashes by adding a new voice and culture into the partnership.

Trust was identified on three levels within the partnerships, described by one DO as a ‘circle of trust’. Firstly, the DOs’ trust of the AOs to spend donations appropriately; one DO mentioned, *“we trust them to use the money”*. Secondly, DOs observed trust between the community and the AO. For one DO, it was this level of trust that informed their partner selection and was *“a spring-board for formalising our work”*, which they were working towards. The third level of trust concerned the absence of a negative agenda from either party. As a member of one AO stated, *“people [in Africa] are afraid of foreigners coming with hidden agendas.”* He went on to state that, *“[in the West] there is Islamophobia, people are afraid of me... People are afraid of beards, they think they are bomb wires.”* The first two levels of trust were primarily emphasised by the DOs, while the last was highlighted by AOs. However, the AOs did not discuss the trust DOs had in them, implying a potential imbalance in trust. Despite this, the trust between the DOs and AOs appeared to contribute towards equality within the partnerships.

A lack of cultural knowledge – considered by DOs and AOs to be common in INGOs – was perceived to create distrust and community resistance. One DO stated, *“international officers can go to help, but because he/she does not understand the culture or traditions, that aid cannot be accepted. But if I go, I can understand, I know how to approach so it’s easy to get accepted.”* Furthermore, the beneficiaries’ understanding of the development worker was also evident. As one AO stated, *“[the diaspora] are easily understood by people from the country.”* This supports Baaz’s (2005) claims that mainstream development partnerships can suffer from resistance. The cultural similarities between the DOs and AOs suggests their partnerships are able to address such resistance and thus have

greater potential for success, reflecting the positive base on which INGOs can develop in partnership with DOs. DOs could help to strengthen the trust communities have in INGOs and enhance this relationship. However, this needs to be done sensitively, as trust between INGOs and African communities was questioned by the DOs. Such three-way partnerships therefore risk undermining DO-community trust, as well as holding the potential for building on the DOs' strengths.

## “[the DO] involves the indigenous people from the same place; it does not impose ideas”

Many interviewees referred to the partnership as one based on equality, with key decisions made in Africa. One AO stated, “*we make our own decisions because we are the ones on the ground and we normally see what is needed and what should be done.*” Another AO stated that, “*[the DO] involves the indigenous people from the same place; it does not impose ideas.*” This is confirmed by other studies, which emphasise DOs' participatory approach (Murray, 2007; Naru *et al*, 2007; Ndofor-Tah, 2000). Given the weight development places on ownership and participation, the equality between DOs and AOs creates a particularly conducive environment for this, further enhancing partnership and programme development opportunities for other organisations engaging with DOs.

Race was noticeably absent from the discussions, perhaps reflecting the sensitivity of the subject given that the researcher was white. However, one AO emphasised that, “*[given] their [diaspora] culture and the race, no-one would say now Mzungu [European] has come to do this for us [which] they would be bound to resist. They come as an African.*” This illustrates that the diaspora's shared identity and race breaks down resistance.

## Informality within DOs' partnerships

While the AOs were rarely critical of the partnerships, the level of formality, or lack of it, within these partnerships was an area of conflict for some. As shown in Table 2, in three out of the four partnerships studied, the DOs and AOs had contradictory preferences regarding the level of formality within these. One AO stated, “*a formal agreement would really help*”, while their diaspora partner stated, “*[b]eing informal sometimes takes away from the rigid restrictions of officialdom. By keeping it informal it's easier to reach out to people, to get beyond what has been written on a piece of paper... you create an atmosphere where people are at ease.*” Another AO stated, “*we might say bureaucracy is a hindrance, but sometimes there's strength in one way or another.*”

The desired level of formality within the partnerships for DOs and AOs appears related to maximising power; where organisations felt formality would ensure this, they favoured it, where they felt informality would protect their interests, they favoured that; hence the discrepancy between DOs' and AOs' preferences for formal partnerships. One AO felt that having a formal partnership agreement would facilitate future decisions and activities, while another emphasised that informality could bring benefits, and appeared to ensure greater control over the donor: “*[m]emorandum of understanding... we do not like it. The good thing is that many donors accept that we work more on trust rather than on documented agreement... and if we want something we just tell them, and they do it.*” It is clear that while there may be a unique form of partnership between DOs and AOs, it is not one which is immune from unequal power relations.

The level of desired formality also related to development discourse; those with greater mainstream experience were more pro-formality – whether DO or AO – reflecting the mainstream influence in creating the ‘norms’ within which partnerships operate. For example, one DO felt the discussion of informal partnerships was irrelevant, stating, “*I'll have to do a proper approach... we can't avoid taking that route because that is a standard approach. You can't deviate from that.*” Another stated how formal partnership agreements were conditions of UK grants, supporting Utting (2006) who identifies the power of discourse in creating norms. This suggests that despite DO-AO partnerships being different, the extent of this difference is limited by the influence of development discourse and norms. This highlights the need to consider how formal partnership agreements and grant conditions may affect the power dynamics within partnerships – the DFID-VSO DVP example (see end of this report) provides an opportunity to reflect on this.

## Summary

The AOs appeared to be in a dominant power position in many of the partnerships, turning the aid chain on its head (see Wallace *et al* 2006 for aid chain discussion). As discussed earlier, the partnerships tended towards equality, with AOs taking a lead in decision-making. Given that AOs were also generally larger, more experienced and better-funded than the DOs, the power relations were sometimes balanced in their favour. One AO described its partner as, “*relatively new... a smaller organisation*”. A DO also explained how, “*[the AO] is a complete organisation... they don't depend on us.*” For this DO, this sometimes caused frustration because it was unable to challenge its partner's approach, even where it did not approve of it. This supports Evans (in Henry *et al*, 2004) who suggests that transnational networks can be counter-hegemonic; however, this is not unequivocal, as shown in the next section. Involving an influential INGO may risk further imbalance in power relations. Hence there is a need to monitor – critically – the situation to avoid this, and for INGOs to take a facilitative role within any three-way partnership.

## 5. African diaspora organisations' position and power

The unique position of the diaspora between two nations and two cultures enables DOs to link the two. This unique position also enables the DOs to challenge mainstream development approaches. However, development discourse and the power of mainstream development actors can prevent DOs undertaking this linking role successfully.

### DOs' bridging role

Most AOs emphasised the 'bridging' role of DOs between the UK and Africa. These links operate on three levels: increasing mutual understanding in both countries of the needs and cultural approach of the 'other'; transferring knowledge and ideas between countries; and linking donors to AOs.



A participant provides feedback to the group at a workshop discussing the role diaspora volunteers can play in Kisumu, Kenya led by the African Community Development Foundation

Dual identity not only ensures that DOs understand Africa, but also enables them to facilitate understanding of the needs and norms of each country, allowing the DOs to fulfil the linking roles identified in this section. This opens up a great opportunity for INGOs involved in global linking programmes, such as the DFID-funded Global Community Links Programme.<sup>1</sup> One DO described how it encourages understanding of INGOs in Africa: “[w]e inform our people there to understand [that] the objective, the aim, of this international organisation is not to come and rule, it’s to come and help... not in any other political aspects.” An AO felt the location of the DO enabled it to inform donors “exactly what the state of the people here in Africa is.” One DO felt that it was able to ‘satisfy the knowledge codes’ and another described how it shared information in a way that was ‘acceptable’ to both ‘sides’, reflecting the DOs’ ability to bridge the development discourse of the West. AOs also referred to *non-diaspora* organisations promoting understanding of their needs in the UK, but felt the additional trust and understanding they shared with the DOs placed DOs in a stronger position to succeed in this. One DO stated, “[w]e are here [in the UK], we engage with the arena here and we are able to serve as a bridge. We have historical, cultural, emotional affiliations with the beneficiaries.” This supports the claim of Kalra *et al* (2005: 17) that diaspora “literally straddle ‘here and there.’” DOs can also help UK-based INGOs to ensure that their policies and programmes are appropriate – by helping with the ‘cultural translation’ between both countries and approaches without removing the role of local communities and partners in this process.

“We engage with the arena here and we are able to serve as a bridge. We have historical, cultural, emotional affiliations with the beneficiaries”

1. Global Community Links increases understanding of global issues in the UK through links between community groups in the UK and developing countries. It is funded by UKaid from DFID and delivered by a Consortium of the British Council, iCoCo, The Interfaith Network for the UK and VSO.

The position of the DOs allows them to establish trust with mainstream development actors. One DO described how its 'battle' for the recognition of the role of the diaspora within development had been 'won now'. Another DO candidly acknowledged, *"because we are a UK registered charity, donors and funders here in the UK will be more comfortable to have us supervise those programmes because we are accountable to the Charity Commission... we are legitimate in the UK."* However, DOs felt that they are not always fully trusted by the mainstream and continue to face discrimination in accessing funding and operating in partnership with INGOs. One DO stated that, when it initiated its programme in an African country, an INGO it was collaborating with claimed that the DO was 'duplicating' its work and wasn't required. Another DO described how it faced problems in accessing UK government funds, supporting Murray (2007) and Sharif's (2009) findings. Despite these challenges, the combination of the trust DOs have established with AOs, and the (limited) trust from the mainstream has been crucial in strengthening DOs' linking roles. Trust therefore represents both a challenge and an opportunity for INGOs working in partnership with DOs. In terms of the trust engendered between DOs and AOs (as discussed in Section 4), INGOs can link in to this. However, INGOs also need to be sensitive to the fragility of the trust they have built with DOs, and to the risk of misunderstandings when working in partnership, given the historical context.

**"Most of the diasporians would have worked [in Africa] before and then worked here [in the UK], so they have got the additional perspective of looking at both ways of working"**

The diaspora's knowledge of both countries provides a unique base from which to exchange information and ideas. One DO stated, *"[m]ost of the diasporians would have worked [in Africa] before and then worked here [in the UK], so they have got the additional perspective of looking at both ways of working... learning from both."* The combination of DOs' experiences in both Africa and the UK creates a unique viewpoint when transferring knowledge and ideas. One AO emphasised how the DOs were able to 'integrate' African knowledge with Western ideas, which was considered extremely useful. The differences between the DOs and AOs were considered by one DO to produce a 'creative tension' that was the catalyst for new ideas. Where such creative tensions exist in relative equality, the ability for DOs and AOs to discuss their ideas on an equal footing enables real participation, minimising the risk of unsustainable or inappropriate projects.



## Case Study:

### Double impact

Africa Foundation Stone (AFS) works with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Cameroon and the UK. In the UK, they work directly with young people, whilst in Cameroon they support the work of their local partner, ASED (*Association Sportive de l'Estuaire de Douala*). Across both countries, they have used football – particularly talented football players, who function as role models and mentors – to engage young people and encourage a greater sense of ambition.

Through working with young people in both countries, AFS have learnt things in each country that they have been able to apply to their work in the other. For example, in Cameroon they established a 'Training of Trainers' programme for football coaches that used similar approaches to those they use in the UK. The programme has been very successful and has enabled them to tackle issues around low motivation levels amongst young people.

Meanwhile, AFS's experience in Cameroon has given them an understanding of the issues around street children and gangs there, which has informed their understanding of young people in gangs in the UK. AFS have identified similarities between the two countries, especially around the lack of emotional links young people have with their families and a lack of positive role models. Both Cameroonian and UK gangs have provided young people in such situations with a sense of identity.

Although differences are evident, especially around access to financial resources for young people in the two countries, the problems and consequences – such as petty crime and drugs – are similar. In Cameroon, AFS have been able to work successfully with young people to develop strategies that help them reconcile with their families. AFS are currently sourcing funding to enable them to implement a similar programme in the UK. Through building on their learning in Cameroon and their experiences with young people in the UK, AFS aim to have a truly double impact.

**Photo: African Foundation Stone staff and volunteers celebrate their success at an event in their London offices with the local mayor Anna Mbachu**

## Double impact

The similarity of the work of the DOs and their partners, identified in Section 4, enables knowledge and ideas to flow between the UK and Africa. This creates a double impact from activities in both countries, emphasising the value of shared agendas of the African diaspora and development organisations in Africa. This supports Mohan and Zack-Williams' (2002) claim that the development of the diaspora and Africa are interconnected. One DO stated, *"we wanted organisations that were duplicating our work... Because it was our area of specialism; we didn't want to start from scratch because we had five years building experience and skills in that area."* The same DO explained, *"[in the UK] we've got a problem... but if through our experience in education and street kids we can bring a model here that can help tackle the problem, you can see the difference and the benefit."*

***"[the diaspora] are out there where technology has gone really far and they bring something that we really lack in terms of knowledge and expertise"***

This reciprocal flow of knowledge and ideas challenges the traditional North-controlled development discourse. However, the continued emphasis on North-South flows reinforces the influence of mainstream development discourse as identified by Utting (2006) and demonstrated by one AO: *"[the diaspora] are out there where technology has gone really far and they bring something that we really lack in terms of knowledge and expertise."* The existence of this double impact, even if limited, challenges Ackah's (1999) claims of a serious disconnection between the African diaspora and homeland development, and suggests that the operation of DOs in both countries can have far-reaching benefits. This represents an opportunity for INGOs to create greater links between the global North and South through the diaspora. This could also help to strengthen INGOs' global education and linking activities. Furthermore, this double impact provides an opportunity for reciprocal programmes, such as VSO and the British Council's Global Xchange programme, to strengthen both their UK and overseas impact through partnering with DOs. This reciprocal approach appears much more appropriate in the context of mass globalisation, global economic challenges and the links of diaspora communities.

## DOs' connections

Some AOs were only formalised through the transfer of knowledge and approaches from the UK. One DO explained how it had influenced its home communities in Africa to establish formal organisations. This supports Mohamoud's (2003) findings of the African diaspora in the Netherlands who have supported the establishment of groups in Africa. This suggests that DOs' understanding of the UK voluntary sector and international funding can assist African communities in accessing resources from the West. However, this risks recreating the aid chain dynamics as DOs become key actors in facilitating access to resources. Therefore INGOs need to be sensitive to the history of the DOs they are partnering with to avoid supporting such dynamics.

The potential of DOs to connect AOs to donors was stressed by the majority of participants, supporting Ostergaard-Nielson's (2003) claim that DOs' links with international organisations strengthen their activities. For the partners of a well-established DO, this was a reality: *"[we] are very distant from the donors... African organisations in diaspora are important to us because they quickly notice if there is a grant to be applied for and they inform us and we develop."* Another stated how, *"[a]part from raising resources, the second thing is, in case there is a potential donor... [the DO] acts as a bridge."* However, for many AOs, this was more of an aspiration given the relative newness of partnerships and small size of the DOs. The AOs did not universally feel that their DO partners were the only, or necessarily the best, partners to provide these links. One stated, *"[t]hey are given money and trust... so it's okay, whether they are from Africa or not."* However, given that the data also suggests trust is greater between DOs and AOs, and the emphasis the individual quoted above placed on trust, it appears that the DOs are in a unique position to facilitate these links. This reflects what the same interviewee described as the DOs' 'deeper understanding', again emphasising the importance of the position of the DO to create positive links between the countries due to their cultural understanding and the resulting trust. This opens up the potential for INGOs to provide fundraising support to DOs, which can then transfer this knowledge to AOs through a Training of Trainers scheme. One DO which had gained capacity-building support from an INGO programme in the UK had begun to use its fundraising skills in this manner, and had successfully supported one of its partner AOs to raise funds in-country.

## Inequalities with partnerships

DOs are taking on the role of Northern funding-brokers, despite the increase in direct funding to African NGOs (Hearne, 2007). The funding links facilitated operate in one direction – North to South – creating the potential for inequalities to develop within the partnerships. One DO, aware of its power, termed this its “*comparative advantage*”, that is, “*power over them [partners] but, given the fact that we are here and they are there, and the funders talk to us, there will [inevitably] be some sort of power differential between us.*” Another described how it has to ‘enforce compliance’ for the donors, going on to state that “*ultimately the funding partner decides*”, and described how the DOs’ access to funding can “*perpetuate poverty through that power inequality*”. Ostergaard-Neilson’s (2003) analysis of DOs’ links to international institutions overlooks how these links are entrenched in the power dynamics of the aid chain. As one DO openly described, it had caught itself “*sometimes going against our commitments to the partnership, to mutual respect and equality... issuing directives out of our passion to see something happen quickly*”. It went on to state that “*sometimes we find ourselves holding back money because we feel like, ‘no, you didn’t do it right’*.” Two DOs also mentioned how their activities changed due to donors’ preferences. In one case, this involved changing the country of operation. Another mentioned, “*you must tick the right boxes*”, describing the donors as ‘regulators’. As Henry *et al* (2004) hold, networks can be hierarchical because of power issues, and this appears to be exacerbated by funding. This supports Foucault’s (in Hall, 2001) analysis of power as all-pervading and shows how donors’ power within the aid chain can influence DOs’ partnerships, and create a power imbalance within them. This could represent a risk to partnerships between a DO, AO and an INGO if the INGO acts as the funding body, because its comparative advantage in this area could skew the power dynamics.

**“Sometimes we find ourselves holding back money because we feel like, ‘no, you didn’t do it right’.”**

The inequality that can develop between DOs and AOs appeared greater where larger institutional funding was involved, due to the pressure from donors. Many AOs considered accountability primarily to their funders; one AO described itself as ‘just on the receiving end’ of a DO-managed project funded by an international institution. This DO stated that it had not engaged with the beneficiaries because the funder had not requested this information, illustrating the funder’s influence. The tendency for DOs receiving institutionalised funding to feel pressurised into focusing on

upwards accountability, while those without such funding felt accountable primarily to their UK and Africa members, supports the aid chain literature which claims funding encourages upwards accountability (Lister, 2000; Wallace *et al*, 2006). This poses a threat to downwards accountability by removing the voice of the communities that the DOs and AOs are trying to assist – and risks the reassertion of the aid chain.

## Summary

Despite the evidence to suggest that diaspora are deterritorial, their practical presence in the global North can and does provide them with power within their partnerships with Southern organisations. However, the location of DOs in the North provides the geographical and mental space for them to challenge the dominant discourse and postcolonial attitudes of an inferior ‘other’. As Arneil (2006) states, when groups have a greater awareness of the inequalities they face within relationships, levels of trust can decrease. This appears to have occurred with the DOs, many of which have become more questioning of the Northern approach to development since being in the UK. One DO described how it tried to convince its partner of their rights: “*they think because [the donors] give to [the AO] we have to praise them. We have to give them, to put them ahead of us...It’s just like they [the AO] don’t believe in themselves that they can do things.*” On other occasions, DOs have refused to use donor-imposed technical tools. For example, one DO funded by a well-known donor rejected the logical framework planning tool. This suggests that, while DOs are increasingly joining the mainstream, this does not always remove alternative approaches as Porter and Verghese (1999) fear. For Harriss (2001:10), linking social capital ‘takes no real account of the context of power’. While the data here suggests Harriss is correct to portray power as crucial, acknowledging the benefits of linking social capital is not equivalent to accepting the inequalities it can perpetuate, as Harriss (2001) implies. Linking social capital can, in the right context, challenge power dynamics. However, as Woolcock (in Begum, 2003) holds, structural constraints can minimise DOs’ ability to utilise their linking social capital. One AO described DOs as ‘seedlings’, lacking the strength or ability to significantly support AOs; this highlights the need for greater understanding from AOs of the potential that DOs represent. Another DO described how INGOs “*use their prominence to dominate the resource pot*”. Thus, while DOs are in a good position to challenge the mainstream by virtue of their being on ‘the edge’, this also places them in a precarious situation. Finding a balance between these positions will be a crucial and sensitive area moving forward for both DOs and INGOs. However, the benefits of diaspora partnerships, as outlined within this report, underline the importance of the critical role DOs can play within the mainstream. This role needs to be supported so that the benefits of the diaspora can be fully realised.

## 6. Conclusion

This report has given an insight into the types of African DOs that operate from the UK, and their global development activities. It suggests that the intrinsic identity of diaspora underpins DOs' motivation and influences their activities and approach to partnership. The cultural (and racial) similarities encourage equality within the partnerships they establish back home. The position of the diaspora culturally, geographically and psychologically, enables them both to bridge the gaps between the two countries and advocate for Africa, challenging mainstream development approaches in the process. Furthermore, the potential for a 'double impact' from DOs' activities in both countries suggests a new way of approaching development from which the mainstream could learn, and demonstrates strengths which DOs could bring to partnerships with other development actors, including INGOs.

This paper does not suggest that the findings here are reflective of all DOs' partnerships, but key concepts have been highlighted from which we can learn. Furthermore, the primary nature of this research provides a voice to both the diaspora and their African partners, which has previously been lacking.

The optimistic picture painted above, however, is challenged by the power of mainstream development actors and development discourse. Both these factors threaten to undermine the equality between the DOs and AOs: development norms perpetuate accepted approaches, while the power of external actors and the power gained by DOs through acting as a funding conduit threaten to reinstate the traditional dynamics of the aid chain. While the diaspora remain on the edge of the mainstream, their potential to challenge and advocate is retained. However, where large funding agreements exist, fissures are already showing within the partnerships, and the potential for this to be further undermined through greater mainstream engagement is evident. Issues of trust and power cannot be overemphasised when developing relationships and working in partnership between DOs and INGOs, not least because of the disparity in resources, and hence influence, which is generally found. It is these challenges which INGOs need to be sensitive to and tackle when developing partnerships. The recommendations produced within this report are intended to be the start of a process which will strengthen trust and understanding between INGOs and DOs. This in turn will enable a valuable and dynamic stakeholder in the global fight against poverty – the diaspora – to engage with and contribute to the mainstream.



Teacher and students at a Nigerian primary school in Lagos state that benefited from Development Impact for Nigeria's diaspora volunteering teacher training programme

## Case study:

# INGO-DO collaboration – The VSO example

## Current VSO-Diaspora partnerships and programmes

VSO first began to formally engage with the diaspora in 2005 when it undertook research to develop a diaspora volunteering programme in the UK, and ran a small-scale pilot with three organisations, sending 176 diaspora volunteers to Africa and Asia. After extensive lobbying of DFID, a fund was made available for diaspora volunteering. Following consultation with African and Asian diaspora organisations in the UK, VSO was selected as the grant manager for the DFID-VSO Diaspora Volunteering Programme (DVP). Through the DVP, VSO supported 14 diaspora organisations to run independent volunteering programmes in their countries and continents of heritage between 2008 and 2011. More than 600 volunteer placements were completed, supporting more than 16,000 beneficiaries in areas spanning the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Supported with funds from the Big Lottery, VSO provided capacity-building support in programme development, volunteer management systems, fundraising, and monitoring and evaluation to enable these placements, as well as undertaking the grant management duties.

The DVP received positive feedback from independent reviews of the programme. The DFID annual review in 2010 gave the DVP a top score in terms of the development outcomes. It stated that:

There is evidence of measurable development outcomes at community level, linked to MDGs. Robust M&E [monitoring and evaluation] systems are in place and capturing data... case studies provided suggest that diaspora volunteers settled in quickly to their host communities, dealt better with local businesses, realistic expectations of living conditions kept costs down, and that volunteers were able to talk freely with communities with fewer cultural misunderstandings.

The Big Lottery review found:

[the DVP] has developed a successful model for engaging both Diaspora organisations and members of Diaspora communities in the UK in international volunteering. Indeed the critical factor has been the provision of financial and capacity building resources to Diaspora organisations to enable them to develop their own international volunteering programmes... The programme has created opportunities for Diaspora individuals to access and participate in international volunteering. It has highlighted the unique contribution that Diaspora communities in the UK can make to community and economic development in their countries (and continents) of heritage. In so doing the programme is challenging inequality and the 'brain drain' from the global South to the global North. (Egan, 2010:3)

However, the challenges and sensitivities highlighted within this report concerning INGO and DO collaboration have also been seen within the DVP. The Big Lottery review found that:

With the funding from DFID coming to an end, the key challenge facing the Diaspora organisations, the DVA [Diaspora Volunteering Alliance] and VSO is sustaining and growing the capacity to provide international volunteering programmes. Much of what has been achieved has been done without any significant or long-term increase in the staffing of the partner Diaspora organisations. In many cases there have been remarkable contributions by one or two individuals who have sought to become specialists in all aspects of organisational development and international volunteering programme management. In the longer term Diaspora organisations require increased resources to employ specialist staff in the areas of leadership, strategic management, finance, fundraising, communications and programme delivery. (Egan, 2010:3)

In the face of funding cuts across the voluntary sector, it is crucial that the gains VSO and DOs have made through the DVP are not lost.

## Strategic level diaspora engagement

VSO has aimed to include the diaspora element throughout its strategic thinking. Its new strategy documents *People First* and *Vision 2018* both emphasise diaspora as a key element of VSO's international and national work, and highlight its aim to grow diaspora work to constitute five per cent of its work globally. VSO is also currently developing a position paper to guide strategic planning on diaspora work. This is essential to ensure that the diaspora element is not a 'add on' to existing programmes but becomes an integral part of the organisation's thinking.

Throughout the life of the DVP, VSO has worked alongside the DVA, an independent umbrella organisation representing diaspora organisations working within the international volunteering and development sector. The DVA initially formed from the DVP partners' network; it has since expanded to include a broader base of diaspora organisations, and has recently become an independent registered charity. DVA engagement and collaboration has been key in ensuring that VSO is able to coherently engage with the diaspora – a large and diverse group – and to strengthen the diaspora voice within joint discussions, which might be weaker if the diaspora organisations were engaged only as individual actors.

## Moving forward

The DO approach highlighted within this report is complementary to VSO's development approach, given the emphasis on partnership and supporting local initiatives. The cultural similarities and lack of resistance between the diaspora and their home communities presents opportunities for VSO to expand schemes such as the DVP, to utilise the acceptance diaspora volunteers gain when volunteering in their home communities. The findings within this report back up much of what has been seen from evaluations of current DVP programmes. For example, DIFN's (Development Impact for Nigeria) diaspora volunteering education programme received high commendations from in-country Nigerian partners and beneficiaries. Great emphasis was placed on the strengths of volunteers due to their shared cultural and racial background with the participants, as well as their ability to give an 'outsider' perspective (Talbot, 2011).

The double impact identified within many of the DOs' activities in this report also represents an opportunity for VSO to create greater links between the global North and South in its global education and linking activities. Furthermore, there is potential for Global Xchange<sup>2</sup> – and any future UK programmes which have a UK development element – to strengthen both its UK and overseas impact through partnering with DOs.

In the current funding environment, with the increased challenges around securing funding, there is a risk that the focus on diaspora engagement and raising funds to support diaspora activities will become a lower priority. It is clear from this research that the trust between DOs and INGOs (VSO included) is fragile and that funding to back up rhetoric is essential – not only to allow the diaspora strengths to be supported and developed, but also to ensure trust is maintained.

Building on the recommendations within this report, in its diaspora partnership work, VSO should:

- Build on the potential for working with key fragile states through engaging with diaspora, as has been shown with the pilot programme in Pakistan with the DO Hamara.<sup>3</sup>
- Take a flexible approach to programming to enable a compromise between organisational priorities – in line with the new VSO strategy – building on DO partners' and VSO's strengths.
- Whilst utilising the cost effectiveness of diaspora volunteering, ensure that DOs do not feel exploited in the process as this could undermine trust. For example, the DIFN programme evaluation identified the strong value-for-money aspect of the programme; however, partnerships which over-emphasise this may create feelings of exploitation amongst the diaspora.
- Explore joint funding applications with DOs.
- Pilot a 'diaspora Global Xchange' – linking to VSO's 'Theory of Change' – to reengage young people in development. This could also build on the double impact of the diaspora and reciprocal nature of Global Xchange, which are closely connected.
- Continue to engage the diaspora in community linking activities.

2. Global Xchange is VSO's youth programme, run in partnership with the British Council. Two programmes currently run under Global Xchange: Youth Xchange involves groups of volunteers from the UK and a developing country volunteering in both countries for six months; and Youth Action involves groups of young UK volunteers volunteering overseas for three months. For more information see [www.globalxchange.org.uk](http://www.globalxchange.org.uk)

3. Hamara is a London-based diaspora organisation that, together with VSO, has been working on a pilot programme linking youth groups in the UK and Pakistan through online communications and community projects.

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Carlton House, 27A Carlton Drive,  
Putney, London, SW15 2BS, UK.

+44 (0) 20 8780 7500  
[www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk)

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