Thematic Meetings Summary Report

Workshop on "Contribution of Migrants Associations to Development"
Taroudant / Taliouine (Morocco)
20-22 September 2011

Chaired by	:	Government of Morocco (Ministère chargé de la Communauté Résidente à l'Etranger) and Government of France (Ministère de l'intérieur, de l'outre mer, des collectivités territoriales et de l'immigration)
In collaboration with:		Swiss GFMD Chair, ICMPD and Migration et Développement (M&D, French organisation of morrocan migrants),
Supported by (funding):		Governments of Switzerland, France and the Netherlands
Workshop Chair:		Markus Reisle (CH, GFMD Chair)
Workshop Coordinators:		Markus Reisle, (CH, GFMD Chair), Kacim Kellal (F), Mohammed Bernoussi (MOR), Monica Zanette (ICMPD), Jamal Lahoussain (M&D)
Migration expert:		Dr. Giulia Sinatti (Consultant)
Rapporteurs:		Dr. Mohamed Kachani (Université Mohammed V, Rabat), Dr. Hassan Behalima (Université IbnZohr, Agadir), Abderazzak El Hajri (Ministère du Developpement Social de la Famille et de la Solidarité, Rabat)
Note takers:		Sarah Schlaeger (ICMPD), Daria Huss (ICMPD)
Participants:		Governments of Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Cape Verde, China, Comoros, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Haiti, India, Morocco, Niger, Poland, Senegal, Switzerland, Tunisia, UK, USA and Zimbabwe ; Civil society and migrant organisations from Morocco, Switzerland, France, Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Egypt and Algeria; Academia; International organisations
Total number of participants:		65 (+ local participants)

1. Introduction: the Workshop in the GFMD Context

This workshop focused on the contributions that _migrant associations_ can bring to development and falls under Cluster III of the GFMD 2011 Thematic Programme on "Tools for Evidence-based Migration and Development Policies," Sub-theme 2 on "Impact Assessments of Migration and Development Policies." Previous GFMD meetings and the activities of Working Groups on 'Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development' and on 'Policy Coherence, Data and Research' all highlighted the importance of data and information for the definition of evidence-based policies. Migrant associations are understood as _civic actors_ that engage in initiatives that are _collective_ in nature and they figure prominently in many migration and development policies and programmes that offer them capacity building and concrete support for their projects. This workshop therefore aimed at deepening knowledge about key factors impacting on the success of migrant associations' contributions to development, and at analysing how governments respond to their actions in order to identify the most effective forms of cooperation.

Co chaired by the Government of Morocco and the Government of France, and organized in collaboration with the Swiss GFMD Chair, ICMPD and Migration et Développement (M&D),

this workshop brought together different stakeholders to discuss the issues above and identify key findings ahead of the GFMD 2011 Concluding Debate. The event was designed in a highly innovative way that encouraged exchange and discussion among participants on the basis of a case-study approach. During the workshop insight was offered into the activities of various Moroccan migrant associations, including visits to the actual sites of project implementation of M&D, a migrant organisation that has been active in the Atlas mountain region for more than 25 years. The field visits offered concrete examples to animate plenary discussions, during which an agreement was reached on the overall workshop conclusions. This report draws on the oral presentations made during the workshop and on the contents of discussions with all participants. Bringing decision-makers to the field to jointly discuss with migrant associations the key factors of success in their mutual collaboration was an important challenge that this workshop accepted to face and represents its most original achievement. By choosing the actions of migrant associations as a point of departure and examine how these concrete experiences can inform governmental policy-making processes in migration and development (rather than vice-versa), the event adopted a truly bottom-up approach. A state-led and intergovernmental initiative, the GFMD has promoted from the beginning an active involvement also of civil society organisations, a commitment that this event further testifies.

2. Discussion and Key Outcomes of the Workshop

Departing from the specific cases observed locally, the workshop produced outcomes that are nonetheless general in reach. Extracting common lessons across extremely diverse contexts, however, imposes some limitations: rather than reaching a unitary agreement on 'what contributions migrant associations bring to development' and 'which forms of collaboration with government actors are most successful', the workshop identified five generally valid 'core principles' that are illustrated below.

i) Migrant associations bring multiple contributions to / play multiple roles in development.

The contributions of migrant associations distinguish themselves from other migrant contributions to development because they are organised group actions that qualify as *civic* efforts and result in *collective* benefits for local communities. These contributions are extremely diversified across and within national contexts, depending on:

a) What the local development needs are in communities of origin. Contributions of migrant associations to a development agenda are enhanced when also other local actors engage in the promotion of economic growth (e.g. through individual and/or private investment).

b) The capacities of migrant associations to respond to those needs. Migrant associations can play extremely diversified *roles* in promoting development. In some cases, migrant associations may be weak and require mobilising in order for them to actively contribute to homeland development. In other cases, hometown or village associations emerge out of migrant communities that engage spontaneously in the implementation of local small-scale projects. At times, highly professional migrant organisations develop with the ability to act as brokers between home communities and actors at different levels, and to generate spin-off effects by further encouraging the involvement of individual migrants or smaller migrant associations. In addition, network alliances of migrant associations might be established, for instance to give a unitary voice to migrant concerns and/or exchange individual experiences.

A number of characterising features of the migrant population (un-skilled/skilled individuals, urban/rural origin, critical mass and concentration of significant numbers of people from origin communities in specific places of destination, age and generation of migrants, duration of a migration flow, etc.) are some of the endogenous elements shaping the propensity to establish associations and affecting their strength in undertaking concrete initiatives. In addition to these

elements, two other important factors influence the shape of migrant associations and the role they can ultimately play in development: leadership (often meaning the presence of individuals with outstanding charisma and an ability to mobilise others) and time (as engagement and progress in the actions of migrant associations unfold over considerable periods of time).

ii) Solidarity is the motor of migrant associations' initiatives, making the local scale the most appropriate level for their intervention.

The engagement of migrants towards their country of origin is largely spontaneous and motivated by an emotional attachment with their region of origin. This translates into _solidarity_ bonds and a drive towards _mutual support_, as core values justifying mobilisation. Migrant associations are an expression of collective rather than private action and are therefore in a better position to channel this engagement towards actual development outcomes. They allow to structure individual efforts around concrete communal projects. The emotional nature of migrants' attachment to their countries of origin means it is at its strongest towards families, loved ones and home communities. Many migrant associations are rooted in such local realities: village and hometown associations support their territories of origin by investing in a personal manner. These migrant associations have a strong personal stake in local development. Solidarity links tend to be stronger among first generation migrants, especially when they originate from communities that suffer from particularly disadvantaged conditions. Organising themselves in the form of an association, these migrants are in a position to mobilise other migrants who have weaker links with particular local communities. This is, for instance, the case of second and third generation or of highly skilled migrants who are more likely to engage in development when concrete programmes reach out to them. The above indicates that migration and development should be viewed as a process of solidarity-based development in which migrant associations are one of many actors, with a specific potential to link local realities in countries of origin and of destination. Thanks to a double engagement in both contexts, migrant associations can promote transnational actions by building bridges and allowing the mobilisation of technical and financial resources as well as relevant social networks.

iii) Effective actions of migrant associations must be rooted in local ownership.

Recognising the importance of the local scale of intervention is in line with the broader shift towards a human approach to development, based on the idea of self-development achieved by the actors, for the actors, with the actors. Development is not possible without the direct involvement of the people it concerns and _participatory methodologies_ are being increasingly experimented to enhance local _ownership_, and boost _trust and confidence_ between the parties. Concrete tools may include formal as well as informal consultations with relevant actors, aiming at _shared definitions_ of development needs, priorities and solutions. Being rooted in such dynamics strongly enhances the success of migrant associations' actions and avoids them being received as an external imposition. Alongside civil society and local authorities, migrant associations are increasingly acknowledged as one of the concerned stakeholders in participatory development processes. Thanks to their positioning as both members and outsiders of local communities, migrant associations can play a key role in promoting change, which is an essential ingredient for development. They can bring political capital to alter local situations and make room for innovation; because they are also part of families and communities, people might listen to them more easily. The liveliness of civil society in communities of origin and its capacity to respond to these stimulations can, however, hamper or facilitate the efforts of migrant associations. The views of migrant associations, moreover, may not correspond to those of other local stakeholders. Negotiating shared development goals is not a linear process. In local civil society it requires rupture of existing practices and established interests, which may generate resistance, competition and conflict. Local authorities might even perceive their power as being threatened. Securing the formal support of local institutions, however, can provide local

initiatives with greater legitimacy vis-à-vis non-local actors and might encourage the engagement of external donors in the country of immigration. Many decentralised cooperation partnerships emerge out of similar conditions. In the case of weak migrant associations, local authorities may also take the lead in reaching out to their own migrant communities, stimulating their organisation in the form of associations, channelling otherwise private and scattered contributions of migrants, and inviting migrants to provide access to their overseas networks for the benefit of communal development goals. Participatory methodologies must be adopted not only in countries of origin, but also in countries of destination.

iv) Collaboration and synergy between actors at all levels is required to enhance coherence between local and global.

Migrant associations' actions and local development efforts do not take place in isolation from the broader context around them, which is essential in framing what can and cannot be accomplished. Civil society mobilisation alone is not sufficient, but needs to be acknowledged and recognised by institutional actors. Through their public policies, governments in home and host countries play an important and necessary role in emplacing conducive environments: they can support the actions of migrant associations through institutional and policy frameworks both at local and at national level. Local authorities can boost the development potential of migrant associations' contributions when these are channelled into institutionalised processes, for instance through the signing of conventions that commit both parties to the pursuit of shared goals, or by creating favourable legal and administrative conditions for the interventions of migrant associations. Central governments can also enhance migrant contributions for development by emplacing decentralised policy frameworks that identify general development aims and priorities whilst also encouraging bottom-up initiatives to emerge. Legal and bureaucratic procedures required for the establishment of associations also influence the degree of active engagement among civil society. Through these and other measures, authorities can facilitate the alignment of locally rooted migrant initiatives with regional and national development needs and efforts. Attempts to gear migrant associations' contributions towards broader development goals set at the regional and national level must not force migrants' initiatives into rigid formats, or this will come at the cost of losing local ownership. Achieving genuine *complementarity* between bottom-up and national initiatives in a *holistic and integrative approach*, however, requires a high degree of day-to-day *coordination and synergy* between actors at all levels. This is not a trivial pursuit and a catalyst is needed that can encourage dialogue between the actors rooted in particular localities and of key development players at the regional, national and international level. There is no 'one model fits all' as to who can and should play this facilitating role, which can only be assessed on a case-to-case basis according to the strengths and weaknesses of the various actors on the scene.

v) Migrant associations ensure long-term commitment, which is necessary for development to produce an impact.

While inscribing local development efforts supported by migrant associations into a larger picture of regional and national policies and programmes is essential, it is still not sufficient to guarantee positive impacts. Development is a lengthy process that requires modifying existing systems in order to produce positive changes in the lives of people (e.g. empowering women, boosting economic sectors, etc.). This is unlikely to be achieved within the time-constrained logics of policies and programmes. Migrants engage spontaneously towards their country of origin and for as long as there is migration this commitment will remain. Their emotional attachment translates into a *life-long dedication* to homeland development that ensures continuity of efforts in the long-term. This is fundamental in order to: allow the necessary time for processes of change to take effect as responses of local authorities and communities may not be immediate; build trustful relations between relevant actors that emerge through continuity of interaction; facilitate follow

up and sustainability of single interventions. By engaging in the promotion of homeland development over considerable periods of time, migrant associations are also important knowledge producers. Many migrant associations are unaware of this, whilst others make knowledge sharing a part of their mission, in order to replicate positive experiences elsewhere.

vi) Conclusion

A number of general recommendations derive from the discussion and key outcomes of the workshop. Migrants engage spontaneously towards their home countries and their associations are a privileged actor that can help channel individual and collective engagements for the benefit of local development. Governments have an important responsibility in setting the framework that can enable the efforts of migrant associations to contribute to a broader development agenda in their countries of origin. To this aim:

- Central governments and local authorities in countries of origin must actively regard migration as one of the pillars of their formal development policies. Given the locally rooted nature of migrants' spontaneous engagement towards their home communities, this is best achieved through decentralised development mechanisms in which migrants are acknowledged as one of the key actors to be consulted and engaged in local development initiatives. Decentralised development enhances local ownership, however it also requires measures to ensure that the contributions of migrant associations feed coherently into regional/national development plans.

- Development is not possible without the direct involvement of the people it concerns and participatory methodologies are key policies to be experimented to enhance local *ownership*, and boost *trust and confidence* between the parties. Concrete actions may include formal as well as informal consultations with relevant actors, aiming at *shared definitions* of development needs, priorities and solutions.

- The pursuit of an involvement of migrant associations in development must not become a goal per se, detached from development. Migrant associations may be linked to countries and areas that do not present the highest development priorities. Putting the action of migrant associations at the service of development requires identifying where a match exists between diaspora activism and local development needs, and making choices of contexts in which to ensure in depth, full and continuous support.

- Home and host governments must acknowledge the fact that migrant associations have extremely diverse capacities and aims and respond to this by emplacing flexible schemes for collaboration. This may range from encouraging the establishment of migrant associations where they are weak, providing direct support to the small-scale actions of existing migrant associations, engaging in dialogue with larger migrant structures such as networks and umbrella organisations.

- For large institutional actors such as home and host governments collaborating with migrant associations often poses a challenge. Whenever possible, they prefer to identify migrant associations with technical and political potential to grow into professional actors, with whom they engage in long-term collaboration regarding them more as 'partners' than 'recipients'. The support of central and local governments at both ends of the migration trail is fundamental in allowing certain associations to establish themselves as professional actors, a process that needs considerable time to develop as it requires building trust between institutional actors and migrant associations. Governments' concern to collaborate with larger interlocutors is legitimate, however it requires the definition of clear, sound and transparent criteria for the selection of certain migrant associations over others. These selection criteria must also allow to visualise how professionalization affects the migrant-initiated nature of the

organisation (e.g. how linkages with local realities are affected, effects of a geographic expansion of intervention areas to localities that are not only those of migrant origin, etc.).

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