



## **DISCUSSANT NOTE-INTRODUCTION AT THE SEMINAR:**

**“MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: CAN DIASPORA CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN?”, ORGANISED BY FONDAZIONI4AFRICA AT THE EFC WEEK, BRUSSELS, ON 31 MAY 2010**

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Good afternoon and welcome to all participants to this seminar (speakers and public), organized by Fondazioni4Africa Project, a programme of cooperation - or better of co-development with sub-saharian Africa, particularly with Senegal - launched by four major Italian banking Foundations (Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo, Cariparma e Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena). This multi actor programme addressed to Senegalese population, represent an important laboratory of co-development practises and, I think, a good point of departure to tackle the central issue of this seminar: the contribution of diasporas to the development of the country of origin.

As you may know, in the last years, the nexus between migration and development (M&D) has been increasingly the object of interest of scholars, development agencies, international institutions, governments of origin and destination countries of migration. So, after being of marginal interest to development studies and policies for many years, in the past decade migrations has risen to the top of development agenda and we assist to an ongoing search about how maximize the positive effects of migration and of migrant transnational engagement on the development processes. This relevant issue has been more and more debated and analyzed in recent document and meetings at European and international level such as the 2005 Communication of the European Commission on Migration and Development, which explicitly recognized the role of diasporas as development actors, the UN *High-Level Dialogue on*

*International Migration and Development* of 2006 and, more recently, the *Global Fora on International Migration and Development* which have taken place in Brussels in 2007, Manila in 2008 and in Athens in 2009. The next one will be held in Mexico the next November 2010.

So, as I mentioned before, today the potential contribution of migration to development is being claimed by states, multilateral organizations, non governmental organizations and academics. More specifically, a new general attention has been given, all over the world, to the transnational activities and relationships created and nourished by migrants' communities abroad. More intensively than in the past, owing to the facilities in the transport, in technology of communication and transaction and also because of cultural globalization, many contemporary migrants are engaged in promoting multi-stranded social relations across national borders and in sustaining transnational actions and linkages among different places (of origin, of destination but also of residence of other co-nationals).

Transnationalism, therefore, consist in the possibility/capacity for migrants to create and maintain social, affective and instrumental relations with different significant environments and is a multi-dimension phenomenon, sweeping from the social and the political field to the economic and financial one, from cultural and religious to symbolic and emotional one. As a matter of fact, within the circuits opened by the migrants we find traveling economic and financial actions, social and political practices as well as practices of communication and cultural exchange. These transnational spaces are, indeed, crossed by different physical and symbolic resources: people, goods and capitals, images and values, ideas and representations. In this way, through migration, many forms of connection between contexts of origin and contexts of destination have been created.

Some of these connections can become relevant in the wider field of international relations. Among this wide range of transnational exchange and connection put forward/carried out by migrants, some actions have raised an interest at international level in development strategies:

- The financial flows of individual savings to the families: the traditional vision of migrants' remittances being used for 'conspicuous consumption' has been progressively supplanted by analysis which highlights the economic multiplier effects of the money sent home and the positive impact for macro and micro processes of development. Literature has shown how migrants' remittances give significant macro-economic advantages to the receiving country; are fundamental to fight poverty and represent a very important mean for

improving the life' condition of the population as well as their human and physical capital (with this term we can mean all that is related with health care, good nutrition etc.). So, without thinking that remittances automatically generate local development, it appears more and more clear that, when adequately channeled, this financial flow can create real positive socio economical dynamics and spread advantages among the population.

- Investments in productive or generating income activities: We refer to the migrant savings accumulated in the destination country that are converted into capitals in the home country. This investments can imply or not the physical return of the migrant and often are entrusted to familiars and relatives. If usually it's question of small scale and weak activities without a real perspective of growth, sometimes migrants' activities in the sending contexts can create economic development, new commercial relations and transnational advantages.
- Skill circulation and brain gain: Circulation of competencies and temporary return of qualified migrants can improve the technical and scientific level of the country, stimulate the international exchanges and the population capacity of undertaking, and finally to fight back and to curb the brain drain.
- Collective financial support and social initiatives: Communitarian projects carried out by migrants associations often take care of the creation of infrastructures (as wells and watering system, electrification and energy production) or the creation of social services such as schools, health and medical centers, waste collection and cleaning, communitarian centers. But collective remittances are also devoted to start income generating projects which could promote job creation and social benefits, and in that way contribute to the local economic development.

Of course there are other domains in which diasporas can give a potentially positive contribution, such as processes of reconciliation and democratization, process of conflict resolution, activities of international lobbying in favour of the home country and so on. Anyway, even though also this actions can be considered as useful for development purposes in a broader sense, for several and

sometimes obvious reasons, it's more on the socio economical side that we find a grater consensus at the international community level.

Nonetheless, and apart from the rhetorical claims, diverse issues and problems seem connected to the potential and possible role that diasporas can play in the development processes of their countries of origin and in the field of international cooperation. The difficulty towards full incorporation of organised migrants within development cooperation programmes lies both on the side of governments (at the level of government-to-government agreements and at the level of multilateral institutions), as well as migrant organisations. Donors and governments from the recipient countries are still very timid in many circumstances in financing directly migrant associations and networks, showing a net preference for intermediating organisations such as NGOs, national or international institutions, or directly linking with local societies/organisations in third countries. In Italy, for instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs don't have neither a strategy nor a budget devoted to diaspora projects and migrants' associations are not directly eligible as development actors. Instead, the AFD, the French Development Agency, has recently launched a new strategy on migration and development from 2010 to 2013 that stress the importance of collaborating with migrants organizations.

However, despite different programmes exist which aim at targeting migrants as *agents* of development, there is a concrete difficulty to translate these statements into operative terms through an active involvement of diasporas. "Return programmes" have additionally contributed at generating confusion within this line of thinking.

Diasporas on the other hand, face great difficulties in transforming small and spontaneous initiatives, in some cases autonomously undertaken, in more structured and *pluri-actorial* programmes, and are often unable to organise financially and politically, presenting themselves as *accredited actors* involved - at the transnational level - in development cooperation initiatives and for programming development. Other relevant issues concern the adequate preparation/training in delivering development cooperation initiatives by single or migrant groups, real *ownership* over development projects, reliability and organisation of diaspora groups in the receiving societies as well as recognition and collaboration with societies and governments of origin.

So, the matter is very wide and complex and we have to be aware that the involvement of migrants in the international development mechanism is a not a simple and automatic process. Rather, it's a process which require time, mutual understanding and respect and a real

collaboration and convergence of approaches and practices of actors with pronounced differences and sometimes in potential conflict one another: migrants associations, diaspora groups, civil society, NGO, national and local authorities and economic and financial actors of the contexts of destination, international institutions and governments, civil society and population, national and local authorities of the state of origin, all this potential actors and stakeholder in the co-development mechanism, are called to give their own contribution and availability to the experimentation of new forms of cooperation, of intervention and of partnerships.

I think we need a real and a critical engagement of each one of this relevant actors if we want to pass from the fragmented and still incoherent situation of today to a more consolidated and shared frame of practices and relations which could really tackle the problem of unequal distribution of resources and opportunity and give more centrality to migrants needs and requests.

I think that the presentation of the Fondazioni4Africa programme in Senegal can represent a valuable starting point for a broader reflection about the contribution of migrants to the positive transformation of their home country and for discussing of co-development initiatives and involvement of migrants associations.