



International development: challenges for a world in transition

Internationally Organised AFFORD

Narrator:

Yenkin and Henrietta have built lives for themselves in Liverpool. While at the same time continuing to have a strong commitment to Sierra Leone. But what about the involvement of the Diaspora beyond local and family level. The African Foundation for Development or AFFORD, is a non profit organisation based in London. It's mission is to expand and enhance the contribution that Africans in the Diaspora make to Africa's development.

Male: We're mainly concerned that Africans are essentially marginalised from the development process. So what you tend to see on television or in terms of experts, is western agencies giving their own thoughts and views on Africa. So it appears as if there are no Africans involved or interested or skilled or able to make any contributions. And this of course is far from the case.

Narrator: Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, Director of AFFORD.

C-EC : AFFORD engage in a range of activities. One area of activities are to support UK based African organisations. So we give advice. We network. We engage in research. We help them to be more effective in the work that they seek to do. And because the African organisations are so fragmented and isolated. One of the important things that we do, is actually to introduce each organisation to others, who may have similar interest and be facing similar sorts of problems.

Another broad area of our work, is to build linkages between Africans in the UK, and Africans on the continent in Africa itself. So for example we have a project called 'Hello Africa'. which is aimed to facilitate linkages between Ghanaians, Sierra Leoneans and Nigerians in this country. And counterparts in those three countries. Because we have a lot of organisations, the people may have left for some time. They may not necessarily have the direct links now to know where to start, in terms of making contribution. So this is where we come in as an infra structural organisation to support that.

A third area of our work, is to try to build linkages between so called mainstream development. Which is the likes of the Oxfam's, the Department for International Development. So what we've been looking at, is building bridges between these two groups. And looking at where the sources of misunderstanding exist. And where we can as I say, build those sorts of bridges.

So we engage generally in a lot of action research. Because we feel that the area of the diasporan development is generally under developed. There are very few academics looking at the issue. So we've had to ask the questions and develop our own understanding. So we contribute to debates around policy. We work with a range of different agencies from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, to the smaller community based organisations. All in the interests of making sure that the African in the Diaspora can more effectively contribute to Africa's development.

Narrator:

Some Diaspora's like the Chinese, are extremely well organised and highly developed. Why then is the Africa Diaspora not as developed as others in the UK?

C-EC :

Perhaps the conditions in Africa are not quite right at the moment. There isn't enough information about investment opportunities. There isn't enough trust among the different players. The potential investor that would need to work together. The regulatory authorities in whatever form that would make people feel confident that whatever investment they do engage in, that they would see a return on that investment. That there wouldn't be interference and so on. These sorts of things. There probably isn't the level of education particular for certain types of investment and certain types of business activity in many parts of Africa.

Narrator:

Fundamental issues need to be addressed to create the right conditions for greater development with the Africa Diaspora. How does the African community, currently organise development for the Diaspora in the UK?

C-EC :

The nature of Africans organising for development in the Diaspora in the UK specifically varies by a number of factors. Partly the identity, the traditions and the culture of the people. Take for example Nigerians, particularly from the east. There is a very strong tradition of home town associations. And the people supporting their home town.

Take for example the Ogidi Women's Association from one particular part of Nigeria. Now they are a UK based organisation with links with this home region. And Ogeedi is an area where the hospital is very deprived. In fact they have one generator, which they have to alternate between actually doing theatre operations, and cooling the drugs. So when they're doing operations, the drugs are not being cooled. So they have raised money to actually get a generator to the region. And they've also embarked in some building projects and so on. So they raise money through fundraising activities and through contributions. And they put a lot of their own time into this sort of work. So actually when you see the money that they've raised. That is not the full story. Because you've actually five or six very committed people, who may in fact have flown two or three times to Nigeria, to oversee this project. And that sort of thing.

And other people might say well what we need in our local region is a library, or a water well. So they're very often small scale community based initiatives. And in the ideal setting, these projects are evolved through negotiation and communication between perhaps the elders in the particular region. And those who articulate a particular need. And they would be in touch with the community here in London. But that also might involve people in Canada, in the United States. In some of global project. You also have a lunar associations. Because what we notice among Africans in particular is the strong sense and bonds of identity. So people who went to a particular school often find that as the useful basis of organising. And they will raise money through a range of activities to support the rebuilding of a school.

I can think of a school in Sierra Leone where there are major rebuilding works. A school that's well over 100 years old, and it's in quite a severe state of dilapidation. And they're pretty much dependant on people in this country raising money. People in the United States, all students, raising money for this sort of school. Perhaps sending books, sending materials for the students. Offering scholarships. So that's another tier of activity that you've got.

You also have professional associations. People who perhaps are engineers, or architects or doctors or lawyers. Who organise on that basis and they find some means of engaging with a particular country, or a particular region. And that's one of the most exciting areas. Because as we move into the so called information age, and globalisation. It's important that we don't just raise money, or send money. But look at issues of skills and knowledge and how we can tap into the knowledge of Diaspora's outside of Africa. and what they know and what they understand about the global context. And how that can help policy makers, researchers. All sorts of people back in Africa. So it's a much less tangible form of organising, or at least of transfer. But it's a very very important one, an increasing important one.

Narrator:

This all sounds well intention with lots of ideas about how the African Diaspora can organise itself a network globally. But have there been any really successful development initiative through Diasporic networks?

C-EC :

Let's look at the development of the University Hargeisa in Somaliland. I think that brings together a number of the factors that perhaps make for an ideal sort of project. There has had the Somali's in the United Kingdom who effectively initiated this project, in conjunction with counterparts in Somaliland itself. But you also had people in Kuwait, in Sweden, in the United States. All working together jointly on this project. Which was actually to establish the university. The rationale for the university partly was that a lot of the students in Somaliland were having to leave the country to go to the Middle East, or elsewhere. Or actually go without a further education. Even though the country is just coming out of conflict and is trying to develop. There was a clear need for higher education. And what we saw with the University of Hargeisa was that there was coordination on a global scale between the UK with these different places. So you saw the chairs for example for the University coming from Kuwait. You saw the books coming from Sweden. Significantly you also saw a transfer of skills. So you had people in the UK who had a lot of project management in voluntary sector experience bringing that knowledge to the table. And they were able to bring for example other people involved in the UK University sector to be on the Steering Committee to advise on this project.

Local business in Somaliland donated money and workers to clean the premises that the government had donated. So it was a really quite a coordinated activity, between the Diaspora. They're actually displaced or collocated around the world and counterparts back home. What was significant was their use of the internet. So they had these forums on the internet, where they discussed issues. They debated issues and came to a collective decision and moved forwards.