

# Diaspora return visits for knowledge transfer and capacity development

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## SUMMARY

The objective of this thesis is to deepen the understanding of diaspora members' contributions to knowledge transfer and capacity development in their country of origin within the context of a short-term diaspora return programme. A popular policy tool, different forms of short-term diaspora return programmes have been used by host- and origin-country governments and international organisations to incentivise and manage diaspora return visits for knowledge transfer and capacity development (VKTs). Thereby, these programmes aim to channel the potential attributed to diaspora members or migrants from developing countries in order to increase local expertise and contribute to capacity development in their countries of origin.

Despite their popularity, these return visits have not been sufficiently researched and theorised. Using data from VKTs conducted as part of the 'Connecting Diaspora for Development' (CD4D) project in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Somaliland, this thesis contributes to the literature on return migration and development by proposing a framework for knowledge transfer and capacity development in this context, theorising return visits for knowledge transfer as a distinct type of return visit and adding empirical evidence on them.

This study proposed a conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) of knowledge transfer and capacity development, differentiating between the three processes of information transmission (IT), knowledge creation (KC) and contributions to organisational capacity development (COCD). IT is the process whereby knowledge senders – in this thesis the diaspora members – share new information and insights with the knowledge receivers, here the host-institution staff. KC is the process whereby the knowledge receivers process and utilise the transmitted information. These two processes together form the knowledge transfer process, with IT being the first stage and KC the second, with the second stage resulting in individual capacity development. The third process is COCD, which is defined as the process whereby the diaspora member makes contributions to the internal structure, policies, procedures and resources of the host institution in which the return visit takes place. Nonetheless, the emphasis here is on the first two processes – IT and KC – with COCD being considered as a complementary process. Distinguishing between these three processes allows the generation of an in-depth understanding of how diaspora members contribute to knowledge transfer and capacity development.

Furthermore, this thesis has distinguished three levels of capacity development (high, medium and low). A placement was considered to have *high capacity development* as long as IT and KC occurred, which may have been accompanied by COCD. Placements with medium capacity development are those with success in IT – which may be accompanied by success in COCD – and *low capacity development* or placements without success in the three processes or only in COCD. Differentiating between these three levels of capacity development allows me to examine the three processes jointly as they build on each other – in the case of IT and KC – or complement each other, in the case of COCD.

The conceptual framework also establishes a basis on which to examine the factors enabling or inhibiting these three processes. Based on a comprehensive review, the framework proposed in this thesis examines three levels: the individual level, comprising the diaspora members and host-institution staff; the group level, which is knowledge transfer methods and knowledge features as well as relationships and interactions; and the contextual level, consisting of return modality and project characteristics, the host institutions and the countries of return. The conceptualisation and examination of factors across all three processes is an approach not previously applied in the context of short-term diaspora return programmes.

Based on the conceptual framework, this thesis then examined perceived knowledge transfer and capacity development (see Chapter 6) which were measured using the methodology of value assignment for the three processes introduced in Chapter 4. The chapter

presented the results for the three processes, IT, KC and COCD. The results show that there is evidence of all three processes, even though to different extents. Information transmission is much more common than COCD and KC. The chapter then proceeded to examine the three levels of capacity development, demonstrating that some form of capacity development occurs during the majority of placements. Of the 33 placements examined for this study, 18 showed *medium capacity development* and eight *high capacity development*. Thus, in addition to showing that diaspora members can make valuable contributions to the host institutions by contributing to at least medium capacity development, this chapter also demonstrated that the capacity development achieved is not at the ideal level, which would be *high capacity development*. Since only eight placements had this latter, only a limited number of placements were successful in knowledge creation in addition to information transmission.

For this reason, Chapter 7 then examined which combination of factors between the diaspora member, host-institution staff and the overall context create the optimal conditions for knowledge transfer and capacity development by examining enablers and inhibitors across the three processes of IT, KC and COCD. For IT, the chapter showed that, at an individual level, the diaspora members' motivations for return visits, previous participation in a diaspora return programme and expertise together with the host-institution staff's motivation to learn from a diaspora member all constitute enablers or inhibitors. At the group level, the type of knowledge transfer method and the occurrence of interaction may enable or inhibit IT. The ease of the relationship between diaspora members and host-institution staff plays a role in the occurrence of interaction. In addition, factors at the contextual level indirectly influence IT, as the project's Terms of Reference and the host institution's learning intent may influence the occurrence of interaction; the stipend provided to diaspora members through the project may also affect their motivations for return visits.

For KC, an individual-level factor that was identified, is the diaspora members' disseminative capacity. In addition, their familiarity with the country-of-origin context and the host institution, their age and gender and the strategies they apply to prevent and counteract returnee stigma, all affect the ease of the relationship between diaspora members and host-institution staff, thereby indirectly playing a role for KC. At the group level, the relevance of the information and insights to host-institution staff, the availability of practical exercises and the frequency of interaction enable or inhibit KC. This frequency depends on the host-institution staff's motivation to learn from a diaspora member, the relevance of the diaspora member's activities to the staff's work, their time for knowledge transfer and capacity development and the ease of the relationship between diaspora members and host-institution staff. At the contextual level, the focus on knowledge transfer, the placement length and the availability of resources play a role in KC, as does returnee stigma, as it determines the strategies which diaspora members employ to counteract or prevent returnee stigma, playing a role in the ease of the relationship. The focus on knowledge transfer is determined by placement Terms of Reference, the host institutions' learning intent and the diaspora members' motivation for return visits.

For COCD, the diaspora members' motivation for return visits, their expertise and their ability to mobilise resources all play a role at the individual level while the complementarity to knowledge transfer and the necessity of organisational capacity were identified as group- and contextual-level factors, respectively. The chapter also showed a number of factors that have not been identified as relevant or could not be examined in detail, such as the diaspora members' level of education and their employment status, the host-institution staff's absorptive capacity, the type of organisation and the organisational structure.

Chapter 8 explored how diaspora members who complete VKTs within a diaspora return programme deal with stigma. Among the types of stigma were that diaspora members might

impose a threat to locals' jobs, lack any understanding of local issues and be supporters of the opposition, together with gender-specific stigma for female returnees. The chapter revealed that diaspora members on VKTs showed a high awareness of potential stigma and employed three types of strategy – *adapting*, *signalling* and *addressing* – to prevent or counteract it.