

Diaspora return visits for knowledge transfer and capacity development

Citation for published version (APA):

Müller, C. (2023). Diaspora return visits for knowledge transfer and capacity development: a case study of IOM's connecting diaspora for development project in Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Somaliland. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20230615cm>

Document status and date:

Published: 15/06/2023

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20230615cm](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20230615cm)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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IMPACT PARAGRAPH

This thesis has explored how diaspora members who conduct return visits contribute to knowledge transfer and capacity development in their country of origin within the context of a diaspora return programme. It examined the extent to which three processes of knowledge transfer and capacity development – information transmission, knowledge creation and contributions to organisational capacity development – occur, the enablers and inhibitors of these three processes at the individual, group and contextual level and diaspora members' experiences of returnee stigma and strategies they use to prevent and counteract them. The data used in this thesis were collected as part of the evaluation that UNU-MERIT/Maastricht University conducted for IOM The Netherlands for their project 'Connecting Diaspora for Development' (CD4D).

The thesis has shown that diaspora members can make valuable contributions to knowledge transfer and capacity development as part of a diaspora return programme. Yet, their contributions often do not take place at the most effective level. This study has also shed light on the enablers and inhibitors of knowledge transfer and capacity development and diaspora members' experiences of stigma. Individual-, group- and contextual-level factors enable and inhibit knowledge transfer and capacity development. Diaspora members prepared for potential returnee stigma – the most important being that staff perceived them as a threat to their jobs – and used strategies to counteract or prevent it.

In terms of scientific impact, this thesis makes three main contributions to the literature on return migration and development. First, it proposes a framework for knowledge transfer and capacity development in this context. The conceptual framework proposed in this thesis distinguishes three processes – *information transmission (IT)*, *knowledge creation (KC)* and *contributions to organisational capacity development (COCD)* – across three levels (individual, group and contextual). Distinguishing between these processes and levels reveals insights into diaspora members' contributions to knowledge transfer and capacity development that go beyond that accomplished by previous studies (Kuschminder, 2014a; Kuschminder et al., 2014).

Second, this thesis recognises VKTs as a distinct type of return visit. Recognising this type of return visit as a separate category is important for the literature on return and development, as it has long been a popular tool among practitioners to promote return for development yet has not been theorised by academia.

Third, this thesis provides additional empirical evidence on these VKT to the literature on return and development by providing a more nuanced understanding and new insights into factors that influence knowledge transfer and capacity development. It shows the varying degrees of importance which the three levels of enablers and inhibitors (individual, group, contextual) have for the three processes (IT, KC, COCD), sheds further light on factors previously discussed in the literature – confirming their importance for knowledge transfer and capacity development and determining their role for each of the three processes – and identifying factors not previously included. These latter vary between factors such as diaspora members' previous participation in a short-term diaspora return programme, diaspora members' disseminative capacity, the frequency of interaction between diaspora members and host-institution staff and the role of the complementarity of contributions to organisational capacity development to knowledge transfer.

In addition to its academic value, the research presented in this thesis also has clear social and policy relevance. Increasing the capacity of public organisations in developing countries is an important aspect of development; the importance of knowledge for development is also reflected in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). In addition, the potential of migrants to make positive contributions

to sustainable development has also been acknowledged in the SDGs and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration or GCM (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, 2019). As part of Objective 19, the GCM highlights the need for research on non-financial development contributions by diasporas, such as knowledge transfer; this thesis contributes to increased research in this field.

The findings from this research are relevant to academics within the field of return and development. They are also relevant to policymakers – such as government agencies considering or currently funding diaspora return programmes – and practitioners, such as organisations implementing or thinking of implementing diaspora return programmes. Findings from this research have already been disseminated to these different audiences. The work that forms part of this thesis has been presented at different academic conferences. One of the articles drawn from it has been published in an international peer-reviewed journal.⁸⁰ In addition, two book chapters⁸¹ have been contributed to edited volumes. As data for this thesis were collected as part of an evaluation commissioned by the International Organization for Migration, the results have also been disseminated to policymakers and practitioners. Throughout the evaluation, the findings were shared with IOM The Netherlands and the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs through project reports⁸² – all of which were made available online – and bilateral discussions. The findings were also presented and discussed at bi-annual meetings of the CD4D task force, which included several practitioners in the field of diaspora knowledge transfer and capacity development. In addition, the results have also been made accessible to a broader audience through blog articles.⁸³ Based on the main findings of this thesis, several policy implications can be derived (see Chapter 9.5).

⁸⁰ See Mueller and Kuschminder (2022).

⁸¹ See Mueller (2020, 2022).

⁸² See Mueller and Kuschminder (2018, 2019) and Mueller et al. (2017).

⁸³ See Kuschminder et al. (2021); Mueller (2018, 2019).