DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORK

AFP FELLOWSHIP IN PHILANTROPHY AND INCLUSION PROJECT

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BACKGROUND/ CONTEXT

Founded in 2011, Beautiful World Canada Foundation (BWCF) is a not for profit organization that provides higher education scholarships to passionate and dedicated girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa, who want to further their studies but lack the finances to do so. Based in Toronto, Canada, BWCF currently has programs in four countries: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

One area in particular that the leadership team at BWCF would like to explore is how to engage and include communities that have ties to the countries we operate in, (in the Global South) in our fundraising work.

The aim of the project therefore was to explore and understand how African diaspora groups engage in international development work, and to identify practical steps that BWCF can take to involve African diaspora groups in its programmes. Although the research was undertaken on behalf of BWCF, the findings are also relevant to other organizations working in international development.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What is the literature on diaspora giving in general and African diaspora giving in particular?

2. How can BWCF and other international development charities leverage this knowledge to improve their outreach and engagement with diaspora communities?

SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The research initially focused only on African diaspora giving. After learning that the literature on the topic was limited, the research scope was broadened to include other diaspora groups. This was done to make the report more robust, and to generate a wider range of insights. To this end, the term "diaspora" will be used when referencing findings on the broader diaspora community. And the term "African diaspora" will be used to reference findings on African diaspora giving or philanthropy.

METHOD/ APPROACH

The research underpinning this paper is qualitative in nature and only secondary sources were used in this research. Desk-based research was employed to explore existing academic and policy literature on diaspora engagement and diaspora giving in development work. The papers used in the research were sourced through the Google Scholar search engine. The search terms used in the search were 'African diaspora giving', 'African diaspora philanthropy', 'diaspora giving' and 'diaspora philanthropy'. The findings of the research are discussed in the next section of the paper.

FINDINGS

Defining Diaspora:

As a first step it is important to note the controversies and the complexities involved with the usage of definitions in research work. While definitions are important in research and can be helpful in ensuring both the reader and the researcher understand the data and the findings in the same way, definitions that are used

to categorize people and groups of people run the risk of making generalizations, perpetuating misleading stereotypes and creating unrealistic expectations (Berry & Chao, 2011).

Secondly, there is rarely a definition that is universally accepted by everyone. The term "diaspora" for example is at times used to refer to exiled communities residing in a country other than their country of origin (Lethlean, 2003). Other times, it is used more broadly to refer to individuals who left their country of ancestry either by choice or necessity to find a new homeland, -- and still maintain close ties with their country of origin (Lethlean, 2003; Newland & Patrick, 2004). Because the word "diaspora" has different meanings to different people, it is useful to clarify that the term is being used in the same way when discussing the group.

Finally, many individuals who are grouped together into categories for the purpose of research and analysis do not identify as a monolithic racial or ethnic group and may not self-identify as a member of the groups and categories assigned to them (Berry & Chao, 2011; Baker & Mascitelli, 2011). Within individual diaspora groups for example, there might be a difference in how the members of the group self-identify (Ionescu, 2006) a difference in how they give, how they conceive themselves as a group and, how they conceive of their culture. It is important therefore, to remember that at the end of the day, individuals are just that - individuals (Berry & Chao, 2011).

For the sake of clarity, for the purpose of this report, diaspora will be defined as individuals living in a new country that still maintain ties to their country of ancestry.

Diaspora Philanthropy

A common misconception about diaspora communities is that they are not philanthropic (Berry & Chao, 2011). This could not be further from the truth: a study conducted by Statistics Canada in 2010, revealed that immigrants (including diaspora) are more likely to give than those born in Canada, even at lower levels of household income (Thomas, 2012).

According to Berry and Chao (2001), the misconception, in part, stems from the narrow definition of philanthropy as 'wealthy individuals giving to charity' (p.10). In their paper on *Engaging diverse communities for and through philanthropy,* authors Berry and Chao (2001) argue for a broadening of the term to include more diverse groups and ways of giving. 'Elite philanthropy', which they define as wealthy individuals making gifts to favored non-profits where they serve as board members or advisors, is only one form of philanthropy (p.10). The act of philanthropy goes beyond money, they point out, and should include giving monetary and in-kind gifts; caring for those in need, and sharing what one has with others. Raymond et al (2012) and Payton and Moody (2008), agree, noting that money is a narrow view of philanthropy and that it can result in a dangerous misrepresentation of the impact philanthropy can have in a society.

A major force in poverty reduction, economic growth and development, African diaspora groups have been giving back to their communities of origin long before many of the now existing international development organizations (IDOs) came into being (Ionescu, 2006). African diaspora communities have strong traditions of giving and sharing with those in need (Ademolu, 2018). And many believe and ascribe to the philosophy of *ubuntu* which has no direct English translation but roughly translates to: 'I am because you are'. Which means that if one person's lot in life improves, the life of the community can also improve, but that if one person in the community suffers, the community cannot be whole. Embracing this philosophy, many African diaspora groups feel a deep sense of responsibility to their communities of origin (Bond 2015), and actively look for ways to give back (Horst, 2008; Ademolu, 2018).

Diverse Ways of Giving Back

Diaspora giving is as "extensive and diverse" (Bond, 2015, p.4) as the groups themselves (Lethlean, 2003; Horst, 2008).

Their contributions may be large or small and they may be channelled through money transfer organizations, religious organizations, professional affiliations, ethnic organizations, foundations, or through non-profit associations (Newland, Terraza & Munster, 2010). Some give directly to beneficiaries on the ground, others give to community development projects, and yet still, others may decide to give to both (Berry & Chao, 2001).

But that is not where the diversity in giving ends.

While most commonly known for contributing to development through remittances, diaspora communities also give back to their country of ancestry through foreign direct investment, trade, technological transfers, knowledge sharing, volunteering, tourism and cultural influence (Newland & Patrick, 2004; Ionescu, 2006). And just as there are multiple ways in which they contribute to the development of their countries of origin, there are also multiple factors that affect how diaspora communities view development work, and how they choose to engage with it. As stated by Bond (2015) in their report *What Development Means to Diaspora Communities*, diaspora giving and involvement in development work may be determined by the individual's (or group's): income level, age, identity, connection to the country of residence, and the generation of immigrants to which they belong.

Generational Giving Patterns

Diaspora immigrant communities can be broken down into three main generations and each generation has a different relationship to its country of origin, and consequently, a different way in which it chooses to contribute to its development. Bond's (2015) characterizations of each generation are summarized below. It is important to note that these characterizations are generalizations and are not applicable to all people.

According to Bond (2015), first generation diaspora communities are: closely connected to their country of origin; send remittances home regularly; believe direct aid is the most effective way to create change; and are motivated to give because of their first-hand experience with poverty. This last point is of significant importance to this study because it directly affects how they relate to IDOs like BWCF. Because of their direct exposure to poverty, mainstream debates and arguments from IDOs on giving, and development work, do not resonate with the group which may view the debates and argument from the IDOs as theoretical, superficial or out of touch.

Like their predecessors, second generation communities remain close to their country of origin and feel connected to it. They contribute to development through remittances which they give through their parents or which they give through diaspora led organizations (DDOs). While they are aware of charities and IDOs that work in their country of origin, second generation diaspora are likely to be critical of them and their approach to development. Like the generation before them, second generation diaspora are knowledgeable of their countries of ancestry, and the issues on the ground (Bond, 2015).

Third generation diaspora are less connected to their country of ancestry than the first two generations. However, they do not see their country of origin as hopeless but as a land of opportunity. They view business ventures as one of the most promising ways to develop their countries of ancestry as they have the capability to boost they economy and provide well paying jobs. Being the most tech savvy of the three

generations, they stay abreast on the developments in their country of origin through social media (Bond, 2015).

Given the diverse nature of diaspora communities, understanding the differences and commonalities between the groups can be helpful in relationship building, as they can provide insights on how to engage with them in a way that is effective and respectful. As mentioned earlier it is important to note that the categories above are generalizations, and not everyone falls into one of these categories. Different factions within a particular diaspora group may want to give to different projects and to contribute in different ways (Ionescu, 2006). As well, second and third generation diaspora may identify more with their country of residence and may be drawn to support "any community in need" -- and not just the communities from their country of ancestry (Bond, 2015, p.16).

While helpful, the categories should be viewed as a guide and not as a substitute for getting to know the individual person. Authentic interaction is the only way to truly build bridges and connect and collaborate with others.

Diaspora Partnerships with Development Organizations

When it comes to partnerships, Diaspora Development Organizations (DDOs) are the most trusted organizations for development work, among diaspora groups (Bond, 2015; Newland & Patrick, 2004). Founded by diaspora and led by diaspora, DDOs provide diaspora communities with a catalogue of opportunities for engagement. More specifically, they organize workshops, seminars, fundraisers and exhibitions for their communities (Newland & Patrick, 2004). They host forums that address issues that are of concern to the group and provide avenues for addressing the concerns. And last but not least, they also offer the community an opportunity to connect with each other and with interest groups such as government officials, donors and development agencies (Newland & Patrick, 2004). The primary reason they are considered the organization of choice for development work by many diaspora groups however, is because they are perceived to be more knowledgeable of the work on the ground, more connected to the people contributing (diaspora donors) and more connected to the people on the ground, than IDOs and government organizations (Bond, 2015).

International non-governmental organizations, come in second, but are viewed with some suspicion by diaspora groups (Bond, 2015). The reasons for this distrust are discussed further in the next section.

Government organizations are the least trusted of the three and is often viewed as a trojan horse: packed with hidden agendas and full of false promises (Bond, 2015).

Why Diaspora May Choose not to Partner with IDOs

There are several reasons provided in the literature why diaspora groups may be unwilling or hesitant to partner with IDOs in development work. One reason provided by Bond (2015) is that the IDO is not working in an area or on a programme that resonates with the diaspora community. For example, the IDO might be working on a water sanitation project in community X, while the diaspora community in question has already committed its fundraising efforts to building a teachers college in community Y. Both projects are important and neither should be neglected, but resources are limited. What this means is that if a group is already committed or invested in a certain project, convincing them to take on another project might be difficult. In line with this argument, some diaspora might disagree with the IDOs approach to development.

More specifically, they might believe that there are more impactful ways to develop their country of ancestry (e.g. business ventures) than by giving to international charity organizations (Newland et al, 2010; Bond, 2015; Ionescu, 2006).

Two other reasons why diaspora may choose not to partner with IDOs is because they either do not know or do not trust the partner organization in the country of origin (Newland et al, 2010), and /or they don't see the need for the middle man (the charities), and prefer to work directly with the individuals in need of support (Horst, 2008).

The final reason, and a significant one, why diaspora communities may be hesitant to partner with IDOs on development work, has to do with representation. That is, the way Africans, Africa and blackness is depicted in publications and communications produced by IDOs

Offensive and One-Dimensional Depictions of Blackness and Africa

Studies conducted by Ademolu (2018) and (Bond, 2015) in which they interviewed participants from diaspora communities reveals that representation (that is, how African peoples are portrayed in communications) can play an important role in determining whether or not African diaspora decide to partner with IDOs. According to the studies, diaspora communities are particularly disappointed by: a) the oversimplification of Africa and Africans in IDO communication; b) promotional materials that fail to contextualize poverty; and c) the use of images that sacrifice the dignity of others in order to reach fundraising goals (Bond 2015; Ademolu, 2018).

As one interviewee in Ademolu's (2018) study comments:

"I guess it's the whole 'woe is me' image about black people…, that they [NGOs] are profiting off …, It's like black means poor and poor means black and they [NGOs] are packaging this image up about us with a bow on top to sell around the world. I can't support that …, I can't give my coins to help them profit on racism." (p. 139)"

Adding to this, another participant speculated that the use of degrading and/or one-dimensional images of Africans by IDOs was because "Oyinbo' (White people) were "calling the shots and making the final decisions about how black people should be seen in their campaigns..." (Ademolu, 2018, p.140). "That's why their pictures are always racist against us" the interviewee commented, "because they don't look beyond themselves and their own interests but rely on what they think black Africans are…". "They don't think about the impact on us," the interviewee stated (p.140).

Equally frustrated by the oversimplification of the causes and solutions to poverty reinforced in some IDO communications, another participant stated:

"This is a superficial Africa, an Africa with all the skeleton but no flesh …it's just too simplistic to show a black child or village family pasted in front of a famine background somewhere in Africa and then ask for my coins. So, I'm left grappling over what the hell is going on in Africa, whose responsible for Kwame's missed meals? Give me something to work with other than 'this is Africa, it is starving and will continue to starve without your wallets'. It's more than money it's a political issue, it's decades of history that's caused Kwame to miss meals. It's things like this that piss Africans off, that make them less inclined to support charities because no one is telling us what has caused Africa's problems they just throw it up in the air or assume it's all Africa's fault" (p.132).

Other approaches used by IDOs that are considered offensive by some communities are: a) messaging that portrays the West as "the apex of human progress, civilization and development", and non-western societies as "falling short of these ideals" (Ademolu, 2018, p. 37). And b) messaging that implies that positive change cannot happen without external assistance from Westerners (p. 37).

As an interviewee in Ademolu's study shared:

> *"All they want us to know is that Africa is on bended knee, ravenously hungry and so give unreservedly for their cause. Well that's not happening, there's no pledge of support from me. It's such a stupidly naïve way to present Africa and what's going on there as if everything can miraculously change by pledging two or three pound a month, it's not that simple, many things have caused Africa to be this way." (p 131).*

While the critiques noted above reflect the attitudes of the participants interviewed by Ademolu (2018) for his research, and should not be equated as the attitudes of the African diaspora community as a whole, they provide a starting point for discussion and reflection.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study is the use of secondary data only. Secondary data is limiting in nature as it forces the researcher to make do with what is available. Most of the studies referenced in the paper were not Canadian. And none of the studies specifically interviewed diaspora from the countries BWCF operates in, in sub-Saharan Africa. The research could be strengthened therefore, by including primary data obtained by interviewing participants from diaspora communities BWCF wishes to partner with in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report offers a number of preliminary recommendations based on the research undertaken for this project. The recommendations should be understood to represent a minimum list and should be viewed as a starting point for professionals in the IDO sector to consider when developing their fundraising strategies.

In order to increase diaspora engagement in their programs, international development professionals are encouraged to do the following:

Invest time in getting to know the communities

- Learn as much as you can about the community, their philanthropic values, activities and practices. This can be done by reading, interviewing members of the community and forging relationships with diaspora communities (Bond 2015; Berry & Chao 2001).
- Review your formal and informal relationships with individuals from the diaspora community, and diaspora community organizations and associations. How in-depth are they? (Berry & Chao, 2001).
- Remember that the key to building any relationship is building trust and credibility with the group you wish to engage with. When reaching out to a new group that has not been engaged with in the

past, the leadership team of an organization must make it a personal and organizational priority (Berry & Chao, 2001)

Promote Diversity and Awareness in your Organization

- If you are part of the leadership team, lead by example: attend at least one diversity and inclusion training in your career and encourage staff and board members to do the same. Understand that working in a charity that serves people from a different community than the one you belong to, doesn't automatically mean that your practices are inclusive
- Educate yourself on different cultures and how one's cultural background affects how they view other cultures (Nakoneshny, 2011)
- Pinpoint your own biases and how they might affect the ways you view other cultures and relate to them

Outreach

- Invite the community to your events so they can learn more about what you are doing and your organization's mission, programs and services. Events can include house parties, galas, receptions hosted by board members or other close volunteers (Bond 2015; Berry & Chao, 2001)
- At the event, ensure that the guests feel welcomed and valued. The event is likely to be more appealing if the host of the event represents the diverse community you want to engage (Berry & Chao, 2001)
- Join forces and collaborate with diaspora groups and organize a joint event (Bond, 2015)

Review Marketing and Communications Strategies with an Inclusion Lens;

- Review your existing communications and promotional material in regard to how inclusive you are in your language (Berry & Chao, 2001)
- Actively work to dismantle the negative stereotypes inherent in development narratives, and use fundraising campaigns to educate rather than reinforce negative stereotypes about Africa (Ademolu, 2018; Berry & Chao 2001; Bond, 2015)
- Understand that each generation might respond differently to communications. Messaging that appeals to first generation diaspora might not resonate with third generation diaspora (Bond, 2015)
- Develop a variety of content that appeals to different audience segments but ensure that all messaging regardless of the group (diaspora or non-diaspora) is respectful to the beneficiaries and upholds their privacy and their dignity

Invite communities to participate in the work

- Create avenues for diaspora communities to get involved with the work, beyond contributing financially. Invite members of African diaspora communities to participate as board members, volunteers, staff or as part of an advisory board (Berry & Chao, 2001; Nakoneshny, 2011). When inviting diaspora to participate in your organization's work, it is important to ensure they are not

being included as tokens but because of the vital contributions and the important insights they can bring to the table (Nakoneshny, 2011)
- Develop a communication committee that includes volunteer diaspora members who can review and cross-check messaging and imagery used in marketing and fundraising (Bond, 2015).
- Run a campaign that features how diaspora change-makers view their country of origin as a way to challenge stereotypes and provide a new perspective (Bond, 2015)

CONCLUSION

When asking how to engage diaspora in development work, it is important to realize that they are already involved. Diaspora communities give back to their communities of origin in many different ways and through many different channels. It is also important to resist the temptation to insinuate that giving through international charities is better or more generous and more caring than the direct methods of giving that some diaspora employ. Equating certain types of giving as being better than others is misleading at best and insulting at worst.

While IDOs and diaspora communities are both invested in the same goal: creating positive change in their country of origin, their strategies for acquiring this change is not always the same. Learning about the communities, what their concerns are, and how they prefer to give, therefore, is key. Some of the concerns, and preferred methods of giving have been discussed in this report.

Ultimately, in order to increase diaspora involvement in an organization's work, the organization will need to foster genuine, meaningful relationships with diaspora communities. This will take time and will require commitment and participation at all levels of the organization.

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