

# Mapping Study on the Role and Faces of African Diaspora Humanitarianism during COVID-19

## Findings and Recommendations

March 2021

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Addis Ababa, April 2021

Supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH through the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

1st edition, April 2021

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Design Designlabeth, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Developed by: [www.shabaka.org](http://www.shabaka.org)





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# Summary

## What is this research about?

The Mapping Study on the Role and Faces of African Diaspora Humanitarianism during COVID-19 sought to determine how different African diaspora groups engage with their countries of origin, through transnational initiatives that support families and communities in response to COVID-19. In addition, the study also sought to find evidence of how COVID-19 has impacted the transnational humanitarian efforts of African diaspora members and their communities within their countries of settlement. The study, therefore, develops a nuanced understanding of diaspora response to humanitarian crises in countries of origin, including resource mobilisation, skills exchange, knowledge and technology transfer.

## Why has this research been done?

The study was necessary as diaspora humanitarianism amongst Africans has been increasingly on the rise over recent years, with the number of diaspora growing from year to year due to natural disasters, climate change, economic turmoil and political issues on the continent, among other factors. Diaspora groups respond to crises in their countries of origin in support of their governments, communities and families. This has led to their rise as actors in the field of humanitarianism.

## Who took part?

The study put together different actors within diaspora humanitarianism, focusing on diaspora members and organisations, government representatives in the countries of origin, non-governmental organisations and academics with expertise in the field. A total of 17 individuals representing these organisations from Nigeria, Somalia and Zimbabwe took part in the study. Also, secondary data on the Sudanese and DR Congolese diaspora and their engagements was collected.

## Key Findings

### Motivations to participate

- Moral duty based on the African spirit of mutual support and 'leave no-one behind' and an understanding of (and connections to) the situation in the country of origin

### Knowledge exchange

- The pandemic made it difficult for the diaspora to volunteer in person in countries of origin due to travel restrictions
- There was a marked increase in the utilisation of online platforms to share information
- Workshops were held to dispel myths around COVID-19 by health professionals in settlement countries
- Sharing information about best practices

## Resource mobilisation

- Person to person fundraising was affected due to reduced contact with people. This was particularly salient among the older generation
- People had less ability to access personalised networks for resource mobilisation due to lockdowns
- Border closures affected the movement of goods back to the countries of origin
- Some governments offered to aid the process of moving goods by donating
- In some instances, governments played a crucial role in facilitating the distribution of donated goods and funds across the country

## Remittances

- The flow of remittances to families in some countries did not decline
- Some diaspora members were affected by layoffs and furlough due to COVID-19

## Recommendations

- Member states and other humanitarian actors should focus on the humanitarian-development nexus as a core modality of diaspora engagement.
- Diaspora policies by Member States should include a humanitarian action component.
- The African Union should expand diaspora coordination and engagement across African Union institutions.
- Increase public understanding of ongoing diaspora humanitarian initiatives by NGOs, governments and interstate organisations, as well as diaspora groups and organisations themselves.
- The African Union and Member States should map diaspora resource individuals for humanitarian action and to monitor and evaluate diaspora humanitarian initiatives.
- Diaspora groups and organisations should engage in closer collaboration and coordination to also extend beyond their countries of settlement and origin.
- The African Union should support the coordination of inter-continental diaspora and among diaspora groups and organisations.



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	4
<b>Key Terms</b>	8
<b>Acronyms</b>	9
<b>Introduction and Background</b>	11
<b>Methodology</b>	12
<b>Key Findings and Discussion</b>	13
Case study countries	13
DR Congo	13
Nigeria	14
Case study: The Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO)	15
Somalia	16
Sudan	18
Zimbabwe	19
<b>Key trends in African diaspora engagement in humanitarian action</b>	21
Motivations to participate	21
Knowledge exchange	21
Resource Mobilisation (philanthropy)	22
Remittances	22
Volunteering in the Country of Origin	23
Implementation and Coordination	23
Sustainability, Partnerships and Homegrown Solutions	24
Humanitarian-development nexus	24
Trust and Transnational Networks	24
<b>The Road Ahead: Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	26
Short-term	26
Medium to long-term	28
<b>Bibliography</b>	29

## Key Terms

Diaspora	This study adopts the definition of diaspora used by the African Union, which states that the African diaspora “consists of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union” (African Union Executive Council, 2006).
Diaspora Philanthropy	“Money, goods, volunteer labour, knowledge and skills and other assets donated for the social benefit of a community broader than ones’ family members, in a country or region where there is a population with whom the donor(s) have ancestral ties.” Flanigan (2016:3)
Diaspora Humanitarianism	Contributions that diaspora groups make in the forms of social, financial and political remittances in times of humanitarian crises (Ahmed and Asquith, 2020)
Financial Remittances	Monetary transfers that a migrant makes to his or her country of origin (IOM, 2009)
Social Remittances	“The ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flows from receiving- to sending-country communities. They are the north-to-south equivalent of the social and cultural resources that migrants bring with them which ease their transitions from immigrants to ethnics.” Levitt (1998: 927)

# Acronyms

AFFORD	African Foundation for Development
AU	African Union
CDC	Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention
CIDO	The Directorate of Citizens and Diaspora Organizations
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination
DHUM	Diaspora Humanitarianism in Complex Crises
DFID	Department for International Development
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FCO	FZoreign and Commonwealth Office
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GII	Global Innovation Index
GISR	Global Initiative on Somali Refugees
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interviews
NIDCOM	Nigerians in Diaspora Commission
NIDO	Nigerians In Diaspora Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organisation



# Introduction and Background

Recent humanitarian crises in Africa such as the advent of the pandemic and the resultant impact of COVID-19 in Africa have made it necessary and essential for different humanitarian efforts to take place on the continent. Different actors take part in these efforts to alleviate the situation in different countries. One such group of actors are members of the diaspora that are spread across different parts of the world. Much of the work diaspora groups do in their countries of origin during crises has earned them the title of diaspora humanitarians. Diaspora humanitarianism amongst Africans has been increasingly on the rise over recent years with diaspora communities, due to natural disasters, climate change, economic turmoil and political developments on the continent, among other factors. As African citizens escape harsh conditions in their countries of origin and move to other continents, they still look back 'home' to support families and communities, particularly in times of crisis.

Therefore, it is imperative to know how different diaspora groups engage with their origin countries through transnational initiatives supporting families and communities and the impact of these engagements. The global pandemic that is COVID-19 offers an opportunity to further understand how the African diaspora responds to various crises in their countries of origin. The diaspora often step in where it is observed that some governments are struggling to provide an official safety net. Additionally, COVID-19 has affected everyone, including members of the African diaspora themselves in their different countries of settlement. It is also essential to determine how they have been impacted and how this affects their humanitarian engagement efforts with their countries of origin.

This study sought to provide a grounding for evidence-based insights into how the African diaspora is affected by and able to respond to humanitarian crises, particularly COVID-19, in origin countries. The following objectives guided the study:

1. Develop a nuanced understanding of diaspora response to humanitarian crises in origin countries, including resource mobilisation, skills exchange and knowledge and technology transfer.
2. Identify mechanisms and adaptations used by the diaspora to manage restrictions imposed by responses to COVID-19, such as border closures and barriers to money transfer of remittances.
3. Improve coordination between the diaspora and 'traditional' humanitarian actors in response to COVID-19 and other humanitarian crises; given the local knowledge that the diaspora possesses about their communities of origin.
4. State how different contexts or types of crises shape the way the diaspora engages with countries of origin, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 pandemic
5. Make recommendations for the AU Member States on how best to engage with their diaspora in humanitarian crises

This report details the findings from the study, focussing on five different case studies. It begins by laying out the methodological framework used for the study, definitions of the key terms and analysis of the case study countries, Nigeria, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Sudan and DR Congo. The second section discusses the findings in more detail, closely relating them to the objectives of the study and lastly, section three outlines a way forward providing recommendations to strengthen future diaspora humanitarian efforts based on the findings.

# Methodology

The Mapping Study on the Role and Faces of African Diaspora Humanitarianism during COVID-19 was launched in December 2020 and the data collection phase took place between January and February 2021. The study used a two-phased mixed-method approach with Phase one, mapping the different stakeholders involved through desk research and Phase two, focusing on data collection from semi-structured and key informant interviews.

The research's initial activities involved desk research in finding relevant data on the target population and information to help develop a profile on the Nigerian, Somali, Zimbabwean, Sudanese and DR Congo diaspora communities. Gaps in secondary data were also identified to guide primary data collection.

The primary data collection focused on Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with expert stakeholders from three countries- Nigeria, Somalia and Zimbabwe. KIIs are qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with people with in-depth knowledge of the project communities or have specific expertise in the project themes. The purpose of key informant interviews was to collect information from a variety of stakeholders with expert knowledge of this topic, including diaspora groups and organisations connected to the different case study countries. A total of 15 individuals representing diaspora organisations, governments, academia and (I) NGOs took part.

## Case Study Countries

The five case studies that form the basis of this study were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, these countries represent Africa's different geographical regions: North, East, South, Central and West. Secondly, these are also countries that nominate a diaspora focal point to represent the country at the Continental Meetings programmatic intervention of the African Union Citizens and Diaspora Organisations Directorate (AU CIDO). Thirdly and importantly, they are still understudied and poorly recorded, despite active engagement by these diaspora communities and the increasing recognition of their roles in various development initiatives, as well as interventions in humanitarian crises in countries of origin and elsewhere.

The case studies show how different contexts and types of crisis shape how the diaspora engages with their countries of origin, whether in response to man-made crises, natural disasters, or complex emergencies.

# Key Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the different case study countries DR Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

## Case study countries

### DR Congo

	<p><i>Diaspora profile: According to World Bank estimations, currently some 570,000 Congolese are living abroad, of whom 120,000 are in Europe and North America. According to the European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) (2020) factsheet on the DR CONGO, the country refers to its diaspora as Congolese abroad (Congolais de l'étranger) although the term diaspora is also sometimes used.</i></p>
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The Congolese diaspora has been working towards improving conditions in their country of origin. In addition to sending vast amounts of money back to the country of origin, they have also been working to harness the diaspora's power for development. In 2019, Congolese diaspora members held the inaugural Congolese Diaspora Impact Summit in New York City. The Summit's mission was to identify practical steps the Congolese diaspora can take to maximise its capital, human and financial contributions and increase their influence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In defining impact, the group states it is also working collaboratively to facilitate brain gain and increased development in the DRC and contributing to the improvement of education and healthcare delivery, activities that could prove useful in the context of COVID-19.

There are organisations, such as the Convention of Congolese Abroad (CCE), an international NGO association without specific political, religious or philosophical ties which works to bring together people of Congolese nationality or origin (DRC). There is a realisation here that other diaspora groups are also doing this and therefore, there is a perceived need to create an organisation representing the Congolese abroad and in the country of origin to improve the situation.

## Nigeria



*Diaspora Profile: Nigeria has a net migration rate of -0.3 migrants/1000 population from 2015-2020. In its draft policy on diaspora, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission notes that about 15 – 17 million members of the Nigerian diaspora spread across the world. Many of these people are in advanced countries where they work as professionals in education, medicine, ICT, law, and engineering.*

The Nigerian diaspora has been hard at work during the COVID-19 pandemic, working to help the situation in their country of origin and within the diaspora community. The Nigerian diaspora's positive contributions are well documented; the Nigerian diaspora already sends an enormous volume of money back to Nigeria, with the World Bank estimating that in 2020, remittances to Nigeria accounted for 2.9 percent of the GDP and exceeded Nigeria's annual federal budget in 2019. This pattern of remittance-sending is also based on family links and needs and aims to support those left in the country of origin. Likewise, these same reasons are also used to assist the country of origin in times of crisis. As can be expected during a pandemic, a significant number of Nigerian public health and medical professionals have been involved in various initiatives to assist the Nigerian government's response to COVID-19 and provide different forms of assistance, from personal protective equipment (PPE) to food donations. Funds for these commodities are raised within professional associations, diaspora associations and communities, where once more, people feel the need to support their fellow Nigerians at home.

These various initiatives included partnerships with government organisations like the Nigeria Centre for Diseases Control (Nigeria CDC). Nigerian public health professionals, mainly based in the USA, worked hand in hand with the Nigeria CDC as well as the Ministry of Health to source and donate goods and materials that were used in response to COVID-19. Requests were made to the Nigeria CDC by diaspora members in terms of how they could help. The Nigeria CDC would respond with the different needs they had (usually in the form of a list) and Nigerian diaspora members would then donate what they could find. In response to some of the needs identified by Nigeria CDC, the diaspora donated PPE and ventilators, as well as food items to help feed communities and children. In addition, Nigerians abroad also offered their technical expertise to support and complement the government's efforts. Before travel was restricted, some Nigerian health professionals' networks based in the USA would travel back to Nigeria to offer nurses training at the School of Nursing, with the latest initiative carried out in 2020.

Nigerian diaspora organisations also played their part in dispelling myths about COVID-19 through conversations and workshops with members of the Nigerian community in Nigeria and within the diaspora itself. Professionals working in the public health sector, notably the Joint Association of Nigerian Physicians in America, held various workshops via Zoom, WebEx, and other online platforms to discuss the real dangers of COVID-19 and to combat misinformation that was circulating within Nigerian communities abroad and in Nigeria itself. The Nigerian diaspora has acknowledged this work, and the Diaspora Commission has highlighted examples of diaspora working in collaboration with them to counteract conspiracy theories. Moreover, as movement restrictions came into force globally, the limited ability to travel prompted various forms of 'telemedicine.' There was a strong indication that if the closure of borders had not occurred, many more in-person capacity development initiatives would have been implemented.

### Case study: The Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO)

The Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (NIDO) have operations in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa and was formed to harness Nigerians residents' skills, exposure and expertise outside the country of origin. NIDO has played a significant role in the COVID-19 response in Nigeria in collaboration with the diaspora. For example, it argues that it changed its aims and objectives because "unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures" in response to the pandemic. The organisation is now calling for more financial remittances to complement the success of its initiatives. The organisation's UK South chapter also started the 'Good Neighbours Team' to offer advice and assistance to Nigerians and friends of Nigerians based in the UK affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, on the front line of the 'Good Neighbours Team' are NIDO UK's COVID-19 'Volunteer Force' who have been trained to respond to queries instantly, signpost, refer, or offer a call back to the affected, depending on the complexity of the query.

## Somalia



*Diaspora Profile: The Somali diaspora numbers are well over 1 million with members worldwide, from Southern Africa to Europe, the US and the Arabian Peninsula. The UN estimates close to 2 million Somalis were living outside of its borders.*

Somalia has seen a general decrease in remittances during the COVID-19 pandemic for various reasons, including the economic and social impact that the pandemic has had on its diaspora. According to Dr Yusuf Sheikh Omar, this has also been attributed to other reasons, such as living in large intergenerational households, distrust of authorities to provide them with appropriate care in hospital as well as over representation of Somali diaspora in frontline jobs<sup>1</sup>. Other challenges include barriers to transferring funds to Somalia as a result of increased securitisation, leading diaspora members having to revert to ‘sending suitcases’ of cash. Although there is an emphasis on mobile banking solutions, these are not always accessible.

In addition, respondents argued that restrictions on the hawala system have also reduced the amount one can send at any given time, limiting transfers to an equivalent of \$350 USD per transaction (as there are few places to withdraw the \$USD equivalent in Somalia). Because Somalia does not have a fully functional banking system linked with international financial institutions, Somali Money Transfer Operators (MTOs) use formal business structures and social capital to bring physical cash into the country; this came to a halt when borders closed. This meant a drastic reduction in cash availability in Somalia so that those with the means to send money faced challenges.

There is recognition of the importance of diaspora as crucial stakeholders in Somalia at the government level. In 2013, The Office for Diaspora Affairs was formally announced as a Ministry of Foreign Affairs department. The department coordinates the enhancement of diaspora participation across the government. This includes acting as a focal point to signpost diaspora queries to the correct government agencies. The Government of Somalia is developing a diaspora policy to facilitate engagement, investment, and re-integration which is due to be launched at the end of 2021.

In 2020 Somalia was faced with multiple humanitarian crises, including flooding, locust invasions and the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the latter, the Government of Somalia established a coordination committee at the Prime Minister’s Office, which included a representative from the Office for Diaspora Affairs. This has been particularly significant in that despite a decrease in remittances due to the various border closures and similar movement restrictions, the department saw a significant increase in diaspora engagement. In particular, among those who wanted to volunteer their skills, remote/ online volunteering (e.g., telemedicine provision) this has become increasingly popular. However, due to limited capacities, the ability to support diaspora engagement has been inadequate.

There was also increased use of social media and online platforms by the Somali diaspora, particularly health professionals based in Europe who have hosted workshops where they discussed COVID-19 and its impacts. The workshops were also used to share information and

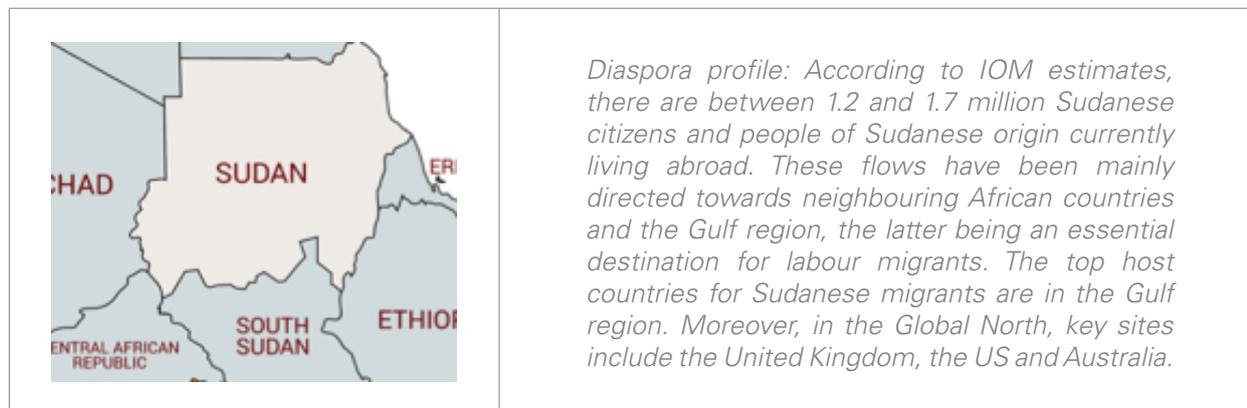
1. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/05/why-is-the-somali-diaspora-so-badly-hit-by-covid-19/>

to debunk and dispel myths and misinformation about the pandemic. In addition, there was also the use of GoFundMe pages to collect donations to be sent to Somalia. Although these were convenient according to respondents, they were not very successful as most of the giving within the Somali diaspora communities is based on trust and is also personalised. Without people meeting in person, it became difficult to maintain or create those important bonds to build trust.

There was a challenge with the older generation of Somali diaspora members who were not confident in using online platforms for philanthropic giving, something that is not an issue for the younger generations. The older generations “prefer more personalised ways of engagement”, and to know to whom they are sending the money and who is going to benefit. Religion also plays a hugely important role in collecting donations around Ramadan, with mosques playing a significant role in this; a method that is not necessarily available at the moment due to restrictions limiting people’s movements and presence in public places in large numbers.

The Somali diaspora however, has been developing several projects. The Global Somali Diaspora (GSD) organisation has organised a series of webinars on ‘COVID 19 and Humanitarian Issues in Somalia’, targeting both the diaspora and stakeholders in Somalia. Himilo Relief and Development Association, based in the Netherlands and in the UK, run essential health services in the Gedo region in Somalia, including the local cold chain for vaccinations, which will be very important for the COVID vaccine roll-out. The Danish Refugee Council also runs a Diaspora Engagement Programme that facilitates, supports, and enhances the role of the diaspora in providing effective humanitarian assistance, recovery, and development agents. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) also finances two programmes catering to the large Somali diaspora in Sweden, making it possible for Swedish Somalis to contribute to Somalia’s reconstruction. SIDA also runs a small grants scheme to support Somali diaspora groups in Sweden to deliver Somalia’s development activities.

## Sudan

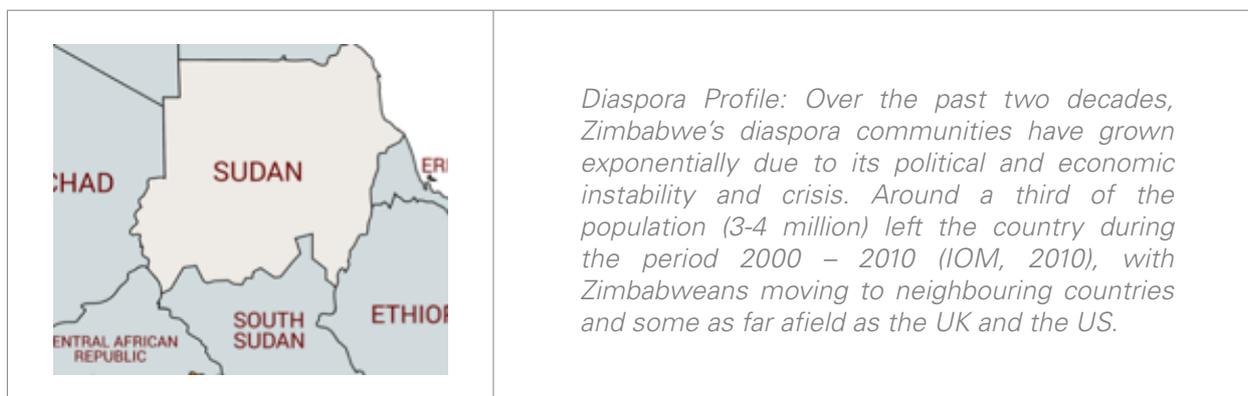


The Sudanese diaspora has been engaged in humanitarian response in the country for many years. Financial remittances to Sudan were estimated at USD 271 million in 2018 by the World Bank. In a recent UNDP report, financial remittances (formal plus informal) to Sudan were estimated at \$2.9 billion for 2017 and 2018 (UNDP, 2020). This shows how much money is often not captured in official data, as most transfers are not made through the traditional banking system, due to lack of trust. Also, Sudan has been previously listed by the US as a “state sponsor of terror” and has limited access to banking services.

However, relations with the previous government were mostly strained, limiting some of these engagements. Since the 2018/2019 revolution, the diaspora has been much more engaged. The Sudanese diaspora groups and networks were involved in advising the popular uprising and the newly formed Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) alliance concerning advocacy, governance, and media outreach.

Sudan has long been engaging with its diaspora through the Secretariat of Sudanese Working Abroad (SSWA). Under new leadership, some changes are already underway, such as outreach consultations with Sudanese diaspora globally and protection for stranded citizens due to COVID-19 border closures (IOM, 2020). It was due to start developing a formal diaspora policy in 2020 and consult with its diaspora worldwide to develop new schemes and incentives to encourage diaspora resource flows, skills transfer, and productive return. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 has lent an added urgency to this outreach. Sudanese health professionals based in Canada, the UK, the US, and the Gulf states have all been active in mobilising medical and other supplies. In particular, medical professionals in the diaspora have been at the forefront of providing support, notably exchange of knowledge, to manage the disease.

## Zimbabwe



As in the case of the Nigerian diaspora, Zimbabweans living abroad have an established profile of providing significant financial contributions, sending a tremendous volume of remittances back to their country of origin. In 2020, the World Bank estimated that Zimbabweans living outside the country sent a total of 9.9 percent of the country's GDP in the form of financial remittances, a considerable proportion of the economy. Similar to Nigerians based abroad, Zimbabweans have also been involved in different initiatives to support efforts at home and amongst the diaspora to respond to COVID-19. One of the groups active in these endeavours include Zimbabwean public health professionals and academics based abroad. These groups have collectively dispelled myths surrounding COVID-19, combatted misinformation and the spread of 'fake news' via social media.

Most argued that those in the country of origin assume that COVID-19 is a Western problem and some people had yet to experience the negative impact of COVID-19 personally. This led to the spread of inaccurate information about the disease, such as its mode of transmission and mortality rates. Zimbabwean health professionals in the diaspora have been using online communication platforms to engage with communities in the diaspora and Zimbabwe. Some of the Zoom-based workshops initially attracted huge numbers, (close to 1000 people in some instances), though the numbers have since been in decline. These workshops are led by health professionals that share information regarding the pandemic and the ways in which to stay safe but also acts as a platform for discussing best practices as a collective.

Along the side-lines, there are also Zimbabwean academics in the UK who have taken the opportunity to collect data during these workshops. These workshops enabled them to analyse the data and produce publications that can then be shared across the general Zimbabwean diaspora and the African diaspora in general including communities in Zimbabwe. These academics stated that the purpose is to share and record Zimbabwean experiences from a Zimbabwean perspective. Zimbabwean diaspora members have also been trying to engage with the government on various fronts, including with embassies in the various countries they have settled in abroad. Some of the respondents highlighted that they leveraged and used their expertise to advise the Zimbabwean Government to implement a national shutdown during the early days of COVID-19, which unfortunately however was not heeded by the government.

Furthermore, diaspora organisations have also been taking part in different initiatives, including attempts to build capacity within Zimbabwe's health sector through training health care workers. Similar to Nigerians, Zimbabweans based abroad have been working on expanding frontline workers' skills and increasing their capacity to deal with COVID-19. In addition, there are other initiatives in which Zimbabweans based abroad are working to support families with goods and food in response to disturbances in the informal economy sector (due to COVID-19), where most

Zimbabweans earn their living. A Zimbabwean organisation in the UK [name omitted] works with unlikely allies such as older adults with caring responsibilities by supporting them and helping them feed their grandchildren; arguing that they remove the middleman and offer assistance directly where it is needed. The organisation also supports child-headed homes during this period and helps them ensure that nutrition-wise, they and their dependants are supported. Such initiatives generate interest in Zimbabwe, with those based in Zimbabwe also supporting these initiatives in cash and kind.

# Key trends in African diaspora engagement in humanitarian action

## Motivations to participate

Most diaspora respondents are brought up with the “African Spirit”. They have expressed that they feel it is their duty to make sure that the situation in their countries of origin is addressed. Arguments were made about everyone being considered as brothers and sisters, despite coming from different communities and therefore it is a moral duty to help and take care of each other. This was also echoed by participants in countries of origin as well as academics who argued that it is the cultural context, the ‘African way’ to help each other. In particular, this is the case of diaspora that have grown up amidst these cultural contexts, whether in countries of origin or settlement. This is also supported by the circulation of ideas and beliefs between countries of origin and those of settlement. Diaspora experiences of different governance types can potentially be replicated and shared back to the homeland through different interactions and engagement (Boccagni et al., 2016). There was also the acknowledgement of family members’ presence in the country of origin and not wishing them ‘to suffer.’ Those who were born abroad in countries of settlement, argued that they participated in improving the situation in the countries of origin so that they gain acceptance and “are not looked down upon.”

## Knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange, dispelling and combatting the myths around COVID-19 including raising awareness-among diaspora communities and countries of origin, seemed familiar across all case study countries. Most African diaspora members, particularly those working in public health and medicine, have participated in different online workshops to dispel myths around COVID-19. Due to their connectivity, diaspora communities and communities in their respective countries of origin have the possibility to share all kinds of information.

*“The social network capability, Zoom, WebEx and everything else creative made it possible to do something on COVID awareness. Because, as you know, it was novel, but we know what is going on. Most of the information was very scarce, and most people had no idea what the outcome (and the possible outcomes) and the long-term effects were. So, what we did was [to create] an awareness programme where [myself] from the US, a few [others] from the UK and those from Nigeria, [all] came together and spoke in different Nigerian dialects from Igbo to Hausa and all the other languages.*

*We were able to put [together] a short infomercial or whatever; you can call that together. [That] went really viral so that we can inform our people back home that [Covid] is a disease that here is real, it kills people. Please wash your hands. You know, social distancing, wearing a mask and all that.” (Nigerian Academic)*

Border closures stopped opportunities to volunteer in origin countries. These may be viewed as a kind of social remittance to the society (Levitt, 1998), as these are ideas shared and flow back to the countries of origin from diaspora members. The lockdowns also proliferated the use of social media and mobile communication, including other similar platforms for diaspora members and communities in the countries of origin to keep in touch. This made it easier to shift from in-person volunteering to using social media and other online platforms such as Zoom and WebEx to inform communities about COVID-19. There were challenges to this, specifically because not everyone is connected to the internet, particularly in countries of origin. Those vulnerable people who needed to learn more about COVID-19 do not have the access to learn about discussions taking place nor do they possess the necessary equipment or connectivity to join a Zoom discussion.

## **Resource Mobilisation (philanthropy)**

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ability to network and collect goods for donations (some donations were based on in-person collections – through religious organisations – as seen in the Somali case, for example), it has necessitated the collection of resources and funds through online platforms and from person to person. Diaspora groups have come together to send goods such as personal protective equipment (PPE) to healthcare facilities in countries of origin, in addition to sending them directly to families. In some cases, they have utilised personal networks to facilitate the movement of goods from abroad back to home countries. This was done using family members returning home to origin countries (before travel restrictions were introduced) in settlement and origin countries.

The closure of borders restricted these activities, as most the diaspora groups had no way of shipping goods. There were some cases, for example, amongst the Zimbabwean diaspora where they tried to engage with the Zimbabwean Embassy in London to facilitate the transfer of goods and also to ensure no customs duty had to be paid. In addition, the Nigerian government tried to provide guidance to the diaspora on how to avoid customs duties or delays. Resource mobilisation is based on trust and long-term relationships amongst the diaspora members themselves as it usually involves money. Some members were not very welcoming towards new faces and were quite sceptical of initiatives being driven by people they did not know; consequently this impacted the scale and effectiveness on the ground (usually less is typically collected for quick response projects, for example).

## **Remittances**

However, family remittances were maintained, even at reduced levels, by the Congolese and Zimbabwean diaspora. The diaspora communities continued to send money to their families in the countries of origin as they felt compelled to help those at home. However, as mentioned previously, there were challenges with the flow of remittances amongst the Somalian diaspora and Sudanese diaspora also faced challenges in sending money to Sudan; remittances dropped by 1/3 in 2020 (see table below)

This level of remittances being -sent was all the more impressive given the stressful economic circumstances faced by some members of the diaspora in settlement countries. For example, some diaspora members were furloughed, or could not access public funds due to visa restrictions. Diaspora respondents mentioned how colleagues lost their jobs and in some cases, contracted COVID-19, both of which had a negative impact on their immediate ability to be able to send financial support to their families in their country of origin.

The table below presents the levels of remittances (through formal channels) for 2019 and 2020 for the five countries covered by this study. This table illustrates a significant drop due to covid-19 pandemic restrictions in 2020.

Country	Value (US \$ million) October 2019	Value (US \$ million) October 2020	% variance
Nigeria	25,368	20,971	-17%
Somalia	No data available	No data available	N/A
Zimbabwe	1,773	1,730	-2%
Sudan	555	370	-33%
DR Congo	1,945	1,931	-1%

Total remittances inflows (Source: World Bank 2019 and 2020)

## Volunteering in the Country of Origin

As previously alluded to, diaspora members could not visit their countries of origin to volunteer or offer their skills in person, due to border closures and national lockdowns in most countries of settlement. However, in the case of Nigerian physicians based in the USA, some were able to visit Nigeria at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, before most countries instituted lockdowns and travel bans. As discussed above, the travel bans and lockdowns that followed the pandemic's spread, then eventually presented a barrier to those who would have normally given their time. Consequently, much of diaspora volunteerism was adapted (as much as possible) by moving online. Most respondents reported that this was why they shifted over to using social media and other online platforms as a way to share their knowledge and expertise.

## Implementation and Coordination

There seemed to be a plethora of fragmented initiatives happening in response to crises. This is something that diaspora groups themselves acknowledge. Diaspora respondents were quite vocal about the need for better coordination mechanisms amongst themselves, their countries of origin, and the African Union. They also suggested that their countries of origin and the African Union could help facilitate this. One respondent gave the following example about how this could be achieved:

*[W]e have got to have what I call the Green Zone. When you look at Syria, you look at a fragile country [...] when you look at these conflict environments where you have conflicts, what humanitarians do is create a Green Zone, and a Green Zone is basically where, you know, humanitarians like me operate. And we go in there and give you groceries. You don't care who or what party that person supports. You just support that [you are] providing material support in a time of need. You provide your awareness, and that is the end of it. We need to create some green avenues [...] so that the diaspora can just freely give..." (Zimbabwean diaspora)*

The suggestion here, is that in some countries where governments do not really seem to trust their diaspora politically, governments could develop ways in which partisanship is neutralised or removed entirely by creating spaces in which the diaspora can operate. Essentially, reemphasising the importance of a neutral space where diaspora are not just focusing on the needs of their communities they are also free from worry that they might be at risk because they are assisting.

## Sustainability, Partnerships and Homegrown Solutions

There is also a need to create sustainable solutions to the challenges facing countries of origin by focussing on additional longer-term responses, as one diaspora member noted:

*You know homegrown solutions tend to be, I think, the more sustainable ones...it's time for us to take stock of our own destiny in our own hands, to find homegrown solutions to our problems, because we know what the problems are... best of all, we know the context, we know the particularities. And the sooner we get to that point, the better. It might not be in our lifetimes we know. Who knows? But I'm optimistic that the journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.*

The above quote shows that diaspora members understand that they have the tools and knowledge of the contexts in their respective countries of origin. They are also willing to leverage; supporting those at home to ensure that solutions to crises are found in the origin country. Diaspora are already driving forward the localisation agenda set out in the Grand Bargain at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

This can be hard to achieve but can be founded on good relationships between diaspora groups and international agencies. One could argue that this takes away ownership and could slow down response times by the diaspora. However, it also gives them the ability to influence humanitarian response by international agencies headquartered in their countries of settlement. In this instance, since diaspora groups are aware of the context, international agencies can then create informed strategies by 'locals' and this could lead to more sustainable solutions.

## Humanitarian-development nexus

The existing humanitarian architecture, challenges diaspora engagement, mostly because it is focused on short-term assistance to people facing emergency crises. However, humanitarian crises can last for many years, if not decades, when there are complex emergencies. For example, Sudan has had internally displaced populations for over a decade (Assal, 2008; Gamal Eldin, 2020). Furthermore, long-term resilience building and development initiatives are often put on hold, even though it is critical to address the underlying socio-economic and other factors, that have led to a crisis. Thus, instead of 'helicoptering' in humanitarian actors to providing short-term assistance for months and years, there is a need to always think of a transition to development, regardless of the nature of the humanitarian crisis.

What is clear from the discussions and previous work on diaspora humanitarianism is that diaspora communities operate seamlessly across development and humanitarian initiatives, making the distinction at times irrelevant (Ahmed and Asquith, 2020; DEMAC, 2016). In turn, diaspora engagement needs to consider that they do not necessarily distinguish between development and humanitarian actions. This may be more conducive when there are increased needs to respond to crises and to prepare and build resilience.

## Trust and Transnational Networks

Trust was a major feature amongst diaspora respondents. This is not limited to trust between the government and the diaspora. It also extended to trust amongst the diaspora groups themselves and with implementing partners and communities on the ground. As previously mentioned, diaspora members argued that it was difficult in some cases to raise funds, since personalised networks had been removed due to lockdowns and people did not want to work with individuals they did not know.

One way to combat this would be by creating consortiums that would work directly with different smaller or large organisations that could act as the link between the various diaspora organisations. An example of this is the Zimbabwe Diaspora Nation Building Initiative (ZDNBI). This global diaspora organisation seeks to unite and coalesce the Zimbabwean diaspora regardless of their location. ZDNBI invites the other organisations' chairpersons under their umbrella to be part of their executive committee to help drive the organisation's agenda. This could help manage trust issues and galvanise diaspora groups.

In addition, there is also the importance of informal and transnational trust networks that diaspora groups use to combat mistrust. Many organisations are based around alumni of particular schools or universities and in some cases, returnees who used to live abroad. It was argued that using returnees, increased trust; they know each other personally, understand the nature of life abroad and some of the hardships that diaspora communities encounter. Creating such transnational networks could also help to reduce issues with mistrust/distrust in the different diaspora engagements.

# The Road Ahead: Conclusion and Recommendations

There are numerous opportunities for collaboration and potential synergies between governments, national and international organisations, the private sector and diaspora communities to enhance humanitarian response. There are also opportunities to magnify the diaspora's human capital and financial resources contribution to addressing humanitarian crises. However, these opportunities currently appear to be missing and there is a great need to listen to diaspora voices.

There are key trends in diaspora humanitarianism that can assist in articulating some of these messages. As everyone is adjusting to the new normal resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian action and how it is implemented are being scrutinised. The architecture of global humanitarian responses face numerous challenges, such as reduced funding, increased needs and demand and the rise in complex crises.

The Black Lives Matters movement is another layer which initiated essential discussions in the UN and INGO sector on racism and privilege, mostly in the Global North. Moreover, this also raises the question of how the current system reflects and retains (neo-)colonial power dynamics of 'us' and 'them'. This is a critical opportunity for the AU Member States to look at the use and allocation of humanitarian response resources. This includes diaspora contributions and establishes mechanisms for improved coordination between diaspora and institutional humanitarian actors.

Continuing business as usual in crises response, notably inadequate coordination with other humanitarian actors, can lead to inappropriate or wasteful interventions or duplication of efforts. Furthermore, this is a critical area in which African Union institutions can play a crucial role in facilitating diaspora humanitarian response, which may not only be directed to origin countries but also crises in other countries.

We present below the following recommendations that can support increased and impactful diaspora humanitarian responses in Africa:

## Short-term

### **The AU Member States and other humanitarian actors to focus on the humanitarian-development nexus as a core modality of diaspora engagement**

*Governments should look at their diaspora communities as financial investors and development partners and consider their roles in the humanitarian-development nexus. This is a less explored strategy by most governments, which can help leverage and engage the diaspora for both crises and general development outcomes.*

### **Diaspora policies to include a humanitarian action component**

*It is critical to view the diaspora as more than just investors. This can be facilitated by focussing on the humanitarian-development nexus to leverage the diaspora for both crises and general development outcomes. Currently, most policies primarily focus on diaspora engagement in development initiatives. However, little is done*

to support the effective implementation of humanitarian activities that often have their specific challenges based on the need to effectively deploy diaspora actors and resources in an emergency context.

Also, policies should include a component on protecting vulnerable migrant and diaspora communities; this has become much more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who lost their livelihoods and got stuck in different countries as borders closed. The assistance provided should be based on the specific communities' needs, such as legal aid and repatriation. Furthermore, this is an opportunity for Member States and AU institutions to negotiate policies and agreements that ensures better protection for migrants and the diaspora.

## **Expand diaspora coordination and engagement across African Union institutions**

Coordination is required to coalesce all the diaspora groups' efforts from the same country of origin to increase impact. This is already taking place and can be developed at the Member State level to address their specific context and priorities.

There is also an opportunity to develop an overarching framework to guide African Union institutions and by extension, to support the Member States to ensure strengthened humanitarian action through closer coordination. A joint framework of action should be developed to structure coordination between agencies, such as AU-CIDO and the Africa CDC. It can be utilised for future planning purposes, such as public health workforce development and deployment during health crises.

## **Raising awareness among NGOs, governments, and interstate organisations of diaspora humanitarian initiatives**

While there is great enthusiasm to engage and support humanitarian initiatives by the African diaspora, support activities are often unclear. Diaspora NGOs, government agencies and interstate organisations (such as the AU) should all have clear entry points of engagement on their website, signpost where they can donate, or provide mechanisms for engagement and other forms of support.

## **Recognition of the diversity among diaspora**

All actors, including diaspora organisations themselves, need to recognise that different diaspora groups have different needs. Modalities of diaspora engagement also need to cater for different target audiences, e.g., older generations that may require a dedicated focal point as a trusted intermediary, versus online crowdfunding platforms for the younger generations. Also, gender and socio-economic backgrounds are important factors, such as those who may be in precarious employment and at risk of being more vulnerable to crises, as seen with the impact of COVID-19.

## Medium to longer-term

### Map diaspora resource persons for humanitarian action

*Diaspora individuals and organisations cover various disciplines, contributing their time, skills and knowledge for humanitarian response. Information should be collated by the African Union CIDO Directorate on those individuals and organisations and documented in a database so that they can be readily mobilised to support humanitarian responses at the point of need and deployed across the continent.*

### Monitor and evaluate diaspora humanitarian initiatives

*Efforts should be made to collate monitoring and evaluation data to understand the nature of activities being implemented; people who were reached and the impact of these interventions. This then facilitates the sharing of good practice and the roll-out of successful interventions across countries on the continent.*

### Support inter-continental diaspora coordination

*Respondents in this study cited various examples of engaging in activities that extended beyond their home countries. Provision should also be made for people of African descent (African Caribbean and African Americans) to better engage with the continent and North-South cooperation. Coordination can also be achieved through working with governments in countries of origin and regional bodies like the African Union.*

### Strengthen coordination among diaspora groups and organisations

*There is a critical need to support intra diaspora coordination, which can be based around thematic areas, such as those responding to climate challenges. Thus, diaspora organisations should increase their efforts to work collaboratively or coordinate their activities with other diaspora groups. They should also seek to collaborate and coordinate beyond networks in origin and settlement countries- the exchange of knowledge and experience is critical for an effective diaspora humanitarian action.*

*In addition, such work could benefit from top-down coordination to an extent (achieved maybe through CIDO) or through the governments of the countries of origin. Additionally, there is the need for improving transnational networks between diaspora members and communities, including governments in the countries of origin.*

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