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The African diaspora's public participation in policy-making concerning Africa

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This paper examines the involvement of African diaspora organizations in Dutch and European policy-making concerning Africa. It addresses the extent to which their inclusion or exclusion in public policy processes in their destination countries is likely to impact (development) policies relating to their countries of origin. The findings are based on a collaborative research project that involved knowledge institutes and African diaspora organizations in the Netherlands. The data consist of 35 in-depth interviews with members of the African diaspora and 2 workshops on African diaspora issues. The paper moves beyond conceptualisations of diaspora as transnational aid workers and promotes an understanding of the African diaspora's involvement as a form of rights-based civic participation. The research found that the African diaspora can share unique insights to improve the quality of policy, but that representative bodies are needed. If the diaspora are involved in policy-making, it is through passive participation. However, the diaspora do have an aspiration for engagement through self-mobilization, and functional and interactive participation. The study further revealed that the diaspora's dual relationship with home and host countries offers an opportunity for policy-makers to explore mutual benefits for both Europe and the African continent.

Keywords: African diaspora; public participation; policy-making; inclusion and exclusion; the Netherlands; European Union

Introduction

Diaspora engagement (Brinkerhoff 2008; De Haas 2006; Gamlen 2006; Gamlen et al. 2013) remains a significant dimension in the migration–development nexus debate (De Haas 2012; Délano and Gamlen 2014; Faist 2008; Sørensen 2012), but the phenomenon has not received proper attention in the policy arenas of the diaspora's destination countries. Although in practice various destination countries engage with the diaspora at different levels, the nature of this engagement, and the outcomes of the engagement in terms of influencing policies concerning

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the diaspora's home countries remain under-addressed in research and theory development. Based on the findings of collaborative research involving knowledge institutes and diaspora organizations, this paper seeks to demonstrate the imperative to re-examine the role of the African diaspora in Dutch and European policy-making concerning Africa.

The aspiration of the African diaspora to engage in policy discourses hinges on their claim to rights and access to policy spaces. To this effect, a rights-based approach and theories of inclusion and exclusion form the basis of claims made by the diaspora to participate in policy discourses that have a direct bearing on their home countries. Some of the African diaspora aim to amplify these spaces to other policy areas concerning their countries of origin: the recognition of the African diaspora as stakeholders with knowledge and visions about their home countries and the (trans)formation of African diaspora organizations into bodies representing different understandings of the past and future of their countries of origin. These perspectives inform the calls to move beyond conceptualizations of diaspora members as transnational aid workers towards an understanding of their engagement with their countries of origin as a form of civic participation in their countries of settlement (Horst 2013).

The diaspora often tend to influence, and be influenced by, events in their country of origin. They remit funds to family members and raise funds to support developmental projects in health, education, microfinance and other transformative sectors in their country of origin. They negotiate peaceful socio-political environments in their home countries. Through peaceful environments and favourable country-of-origin policy frameworks, the diaspora are able to provide finance, support government programmes, and procure bonds floated on the market; and some personally return home to provide expertise in sectors where their skills are very much needed. Studies about diaspora over the years illuminate their contributions in terms of remittances and other direct poverty reduction-related projects in their home countries (Black and Sward 2009; Newland 2003; Newland and Patrick 2004). However, there is still a lack of research and knowledge regarding the contribution of the diaspora to policy decisions in their destination countries and how those policies directly affect their countries of origin. In recent times, the African diaspora have been seeking a platform on which to contribute to policies that directly affect the African continent. This requires their engagement in the formulation and implementation of bilateral and multilateral trade and developmental policies that directly affect the socio-economic well-being of Africans in the diaspora's home countries.

The main objective of this paper is to examine the role of African diaspora organizations in policy-making concerning Africa and the extent to which their inclusion or exclusion in public policy processes in their destination countries is likely to impact development policies relating to their countries of origin. It does so by addressing why African diaspora organizations should be involved in bilateral policy formulations in host countries, and the extent to which they are currently involved and what initiatives they take in order to be involved in policy formulation. The next section of this paper starts by addressing the concept of diaspora and continues by underpinning the involvement of the diaspora in policy processes, adopting a rights-based approach. After the theoretical embedding of the research is grounded in the areas of public participation and social mobilization, the methodology used for the research is explained and the findings are presented. The final part presents the discussion and overall conclusion.

The diaspora

The term *diaspora* has been used in different contexts depending on the issue of interest. In its generic form, it refers to nationals of a nation or state that live in a country other than their country of origin. In step with this understanding, the term has variously been used to refer to people living overseas. Van Hear, Pieke, and Vertovec (2004) consider the diaspora to embody

populations that are dispersed among places, usually outside their countries of origin, and tend to establish and keep relationships between and among themselves in an inter- and intra-country manner. Sökefeld (2006) perceives the diaspora as an imagination of community that has the capability to link sections of society in different territories.

Usually, diaspora are comprised of migrants; the first, second or several generations who are descendants of migrant parents. This gives the diaspora a distinct position, making the kin in diasporic home countries or countries of origin regard the diaspora partly as distant and separate and at the same time too closely knit in kinship to be utterly ignored. Rouse (1992) made a similar observation in his study of the Mexican communities of Aguilillan (Michoacan) and of Red Wood in California (USA), stating that although kin and friends were many kilometres away from one another, they still felt very close. It is also significant that the perceived distant relation status ascribed to the diaspora does not inhibit the home countries' drive to harness the financial, human capital or political contributions of the diaspora, which are deemed essential for national development purposes.

The diaspora, on the other hand, show their affinity to their home countries by involving themselves in their economic and political affairs. They are perceived as distant nationals, and their continued interest and interaction with their countries of origin have been observed to be grounded in the emotional attachment that they have with these countries. The term diaspora has long been used to refer to Jews in foreign countries, especially in the West with the usual religious and close sense of belongingness and community life that is associated with them. Brubaker (2005) observes that the conceptual homeland notion and connotation of the term refers to Jewish, Armenian and Greek experiences away from the homeland.

In recent times, the notion of the diaspora has been extended to include other nationals aside from its historical ascription to Jews, Armenians and Greeks. The African diaspora appear to have gained some attention, becoming the focus of most diaspora scholarship in the 1950s. However, Patterson and Kelley (2000) hold that the idea of the African diaspora is as old as the diaspora idea itself. Palmer (2000) traces the initial dispersion of Africans to a period not later than 100,000 years ago. He observes five diasporic streams and emphasizes that the fourth and fifth streams, constituted by the Atlantic slave trade in Africans and the movements of Africans in the nineteenth century, account for the modern African diaspora. Sheffer (1986, 3) holds the opinion that 'Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in destination countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands'.

In recent studies, diaspora are considered as an 'ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity' (Clifford 1994, cited in Ghorashi and Boersma 2009, 669). In line with Ghorashi and Boersma (2009), the approach to the diasporic condition taken in this paper is not defined as (up) rootedness in one or other place (either the country of origin or the new country), but as a state in which different places overlap.

The diaspora's involvement in policy processes: a rights-based approach

The diaspora's justification for contributing to policies in host countries concerning their home countries is debated. The argument for the right to involvement is easier to make for diaspora who have the option of retaining dual citizenship, for instance the Turks and the Moroccans in the Netherlands. Although the loyalty of citizens with dual nationality has been questioned, the same critique could be made of diaspora members who have forfeited their nationality to embrace new ones. It is simplistic to conclude that people who forfeit their nationality to obtain a new nationality automatically become fully integrated and acculturated in their

destination countries because of their newly assumed status. It is likewise not straightforward to hold the position that they should cut all links with their countries of origin outright, maintain certain cultures or completely give up all forms of socialization previously acquired. Given this complex position of the diaspora, it is not uncommon to find them negotiating for all forms of inclusion in both home and host countries. The diaspora continue to contribute to the socio-economic well-being of their countries of origin. This is typically reflected in the remittances sent home.

Diaspora community members, who are mostly citizens of their host countries – marginal in numbers, as they often tend to be – are certainly not stripped of the rights that apply to other citizens of that country. Zeleza (2005) notes the magnitude of rights that diaspora have in some countries, specifically citing the Netherlands and Scandinavia as examples. He observes that the diaspora have leveraged certain rights, including the right to vote in local elections. They are, thus, able to vote for policy alternatives proposed by different political parties and choose their preferred political leadership.

Because of the diaspora's home ties, political decisions in their destination countries cannot entirely be dissociated from the diaspora's interest in seeking to promote the welfare of their country of origin through political activity in their destination countries. Examples of such activities can be seen when the diaspora organize themselves to petition, demonstrate or invoke the intervention of destination countries in the affairs of their home countries, especially in times of political turmoil. This by extension implies that the diaspora are not immune either to the destination countries' policies that adversely affect their countries of origin, since such policies would directly impinge on their socio-economic freedom and rights as citizens of their destination countries. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004, 1417) hold that, '... rights are based on legal obligations (and in some cases ethical obligations that have a strong foundation in human dignity even though they are only in the process of being solidified into legal obligations)'. From this viewpoint, the rights of relatives of the diaspora may not be stipulated in the legal provisions or may not be obligatory observations of the destination countries, since they are not citizens of that country. However, the destination countries are ethically obliged to undertake policies that will not adversely affect its citizenry in totality and by extension the diaspora members that legally and socially integrate into the destination countries' society.

Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) again add that a rights-based approach does not overlook, but seeks to make a special illumination of, the severe forms of marginalization or alienation of even the smallest minority in society. Therefore, arguing that the diaspora community accounts for a minority of the population of destination countries would amount to arguing that minority citizens have no entitlement to rights and should not be protected against adverse economic and political decisions. A justification for the African diaspora contributing to policy decisions that affect their home countries emanates from their rights as minority groups whose rights should not be infringed. The rights-based approach requires that resources be shared equally, and the marginalized in addition should be able to exercise their rights regarding such resources. These rights regarding resources can largely be expressed when the diaspora have the leverage to contribute to policy decisions in their destination countries regarding their home countries.

Public participation and social mobilization

The broad use of the term *participation* in social science covers a variety of citizen involvement in public activities (Richards and Dalbey 2006). It is a generally held view that public participation when intensified can bring about improvements in the quality of policies and give legitimacy to decisions taken by public institutions. Public participation also improves the capacities and social capital of participating constituents. Public participation hinges very much on discussions of

social inclusion and social exclusion. Who should be invited to participate, who should not be invited to participate and how should the targeted constituents be invited to participate? What manner of participation is it? For instance, participants may be invited to participate, but with little room for inputs or contribution to affect the discussion. Cornwall (2008) describes this type of participation as passive participation. In other instances, they could be invited to participate in policy discourses for which the agenda has been already set, with an opportunity for them to make inputs, but this input may not transform significantly what is already on the drawing board. Cornwall (2008) describes this as participation by consultation.

In the migration literature, especially in destination countries, attention is paid to diaspora participation (Adamson 2006; Morén-Alegret 2001; Ong'ayo 2014; Van Heelsum 2002). What is not clear, however, is how the application of the term participation in diaspora studies can provide a better understanding of the way in which diaspora activities are undertaken within and beyond nation-state borders and at different levels. Diaspora participation in the public arena involves engagement with a variety of institutions and organizations through either individual or collective action. Participation as a means to achieve predefined goals can involve some contribution from participants to decisions that have already been taken. This type of participation, which Cornwall describes as functional, together with interactive participation, has the tendency to yield mutually beneficial results for all parties involved in negotiations.

This article argues that a combination of both types of participation can be mutually beneficial to the African diaspora and the European Union (EU). Martin (2008) discusses public participation in terms of representation by invoking questions about who comprises an adequate enough or true representation of a given constituency. All these discussions and questions present legitimate concerns when issues of participation in policy discourses emerge, especially about the African diaspora. But how can the African diaspora who are perhaps the closest to the African continent in their destination countries be ignored in policy discourses that affect their home countries? It is possible for host countries to determine issues of who is invited or not, despite the inaccuracy of official data on diaspora. Hajer (2005) points to the fact that the setting of policy discourses has a huge bearing on what is being said and whether what is being said can have any influence. The presence of the African diaspora in destination countries provides a great opportunity and appropriate setting to discuss, first hand, policies, bilateral and multilateral agreements, before 'exporting' them to the diaspora's home countries for implementation. Barnes et al. (2003) observe how processes of inclusion in, and exclusion from, public participation can be based on assumptions and perceptions that centre on issues of constituents' competence and skills.

In comparisons with the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other studies have acknowledged the diaspora and migrant communities as emerging agents of development in their countries of origin (Henry and Mohan 2003; Newland and Patrick 2004). In 2005, remittances to developing countries worldwide amounted to US\$ 118 billion, doubling the amount received by these countries for development assistance. Of the US\$ 118 billion, US\$ 6.5 billion went to sub-Saharan countries. In 2012, remittances worldwide were in excess of US\$ 400 billion, exceeding official aid and virtually equalling the total of foreign direct investment. Acosta, Lartey, and Mandelman (2009) add that remittances exceed foreign direct investments and investments by private persons. It is believed that the amount of remittances could even be higher as the US\$ 400 billion does not include unofficial transfers.

Although the diaspora's contribution to destination countries through self-mobilization is enormous, the diaspora still see opportunities, especially where they can participate in a more functional and interactive manner in policy discourses and bilateral and multilateral agreements that directly affect their home countries. Abels (2007) is of the opinion that citizens are increasingly shifting their involvement in policy discourses from the local community platform to more

national and international stages. At such high levels, the diaspora's participation in bilateral and/or multilateral policies can have even more fruitful results, with far-reaching mutual benefits for the home and the host countries.

In recent times, governments in both origin and destination countries have been trying to reach out to the diaspora through a wide variety of engagement policies that target their participation. These initiatives are influenced by the recognition of the development outcomes of the diaspora's transnational activities. Diaspora collective organizing (Ong'ayo 2014) is analysed from the perspective of self-help groups but not within a framework that provides them with a firm conceptual grounding.

Numerous studies have attempted to equate diaspora organizations with actors within the social movement category (Hooghe 2009; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Moya 2005; Sökefeld 2006). One consideration for including diaspora organizations in the social movement category relates to their formation through mobilization. Social movements, according to Sökefeld (2006), emanate from collective mobilizations that seek to question the existing social and political order. Social movements are often discussed in the context of what is visible, as in open confrontation, protestation or ideological expressions of movements. Chávez (2011), however, suggests a study of counter-publics, since these give an insight beyond what is visibly expressed.

In this paper, we argue that the African diaspora, although integrated in most of Dutch society, still continue to hold discussions out of the public glare regarding how they can influence socio-political and economic dynamics in their home countries by using destination country institutions. The African diaspora is not only questioning the existing social and political order in host countries, it is actually questioning these in their global form. The task to be accomplished by the diaspora is therefore an arduous one. The African diaspora are seeking to impact the global economic and political order, which has not changed much since the mid-twentieth century. The African diaspora is therefore galvanizing expertise and making use of destination country institutions as well as institutions and individuals in home countries to engender a new change in the global economy and politics. In her study of the Armenian, Albanian and Palestinian diaspora in the UK, Koinova (2014, 1043) found that 'if the foreign policy stance is closed towards the sovereignty goal, but the diaspora positionality is weak, activists are more likely to pursue transnational channels', and 'if the foreign policy stance is open towards the sovereignty goal, but the diaspora positionality is weak, entrepreneurs are likely to engage with both channels'. This implies that 'diaspora mobilisation is jointly affected by conditions in the host-land and original homeland' (Koinova 2014, 1044). In the Netherlands, the diaspora hinges its expectations on the democratic Dutch political system and the openness of the country to have bilateral relations with their home countries back in Africa.

Methodology

This paper is based primarily on 35 in-depth interviews with members of the African diaspora. These interviews were conducted within the framework of a collaborative research project between Wageningen University (the Science Shop and the research group Knowledge, Technology and Innovation) and several diaspora organizations. In addition, the paper builds on data gathered at two workshops that specifically addressed diaspora issues. The whole research was conducted between February 2014 and March 2015.

The first set of 15 interviews comprised a collection of short stories by the African diaspora, of which 11 were published in the booklet *Make Africa Shine. Narratives of African Diaspora on Policy-Making Concerning Africa* (Johannsen, Goris, and Lie 2014). Because of the diversity in the African diaspora, the interviewees varied accordingly and covered the countries of Cameroon, Cape Verde, Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia,

Togo and Uganda. The differentiating characteristics of the interviewees included gender (a fair differentiation between male and female), age (between 20 and 60 years), educational background (from high school to graduate levels), a significant knowledge about raw materials, trade policy debates and city-to-city cooperation. The interviewees were selected from a wide range of professional backgrounds, ranging from legal practitioners, academics, accountants and development NGO workers to persons with artistic backgrounds. Diaspora members who were part of the leadership of organizations such as the African Diaspora Youth Network in Europe (ADYNE), Sankofa Foundation, Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA), politicians, and persons who founded and ran their personal organizations were also interviewed.

The second batch of 11 interviews targeted a different set of informants with more focus on the Ghanaian diaspora – and to a lesser extent the Nigerian diaspora – in the Netherlands. Contacts were made through the umbrella organizations Recogin and Stichting Akasanoma (Ghana), the Nigerian National Association's representatives for Tilburg and Breda, but also through individuals' informal networks. Whereas much of the migration and development research focuses on national level institutions and organizations, the Dutch development organizations also engage in international cooperation through sister-city or twinning relationships with other cities in the global South (Van Ewijk and Baud 2009). One of the sister-city relationships between Almere and Kumasi was examined to identify the role of the diaspora in the decisions leading to partnership.

The third group of 9 interviews was part of a simulation of an EU consultation round on the 2008 EU Raw Materials Initiative. The simulation sought to gather African diaspora knowledge on multilateral policy discourses and what added value the African diaspora could offer. The diaspora who participated were selected on the basis of their involvement, experience and knowledge on raw materials-related policies and general interest in international trade policies. These people also shared their more general views on their role or contribution to development cooperation.

Additional data were collected through participatory observations during two events. The first event was a workshop at *Afrikadag* (Africa Day) on 1 November 2014. *Afrikadag* is an annual national meeting on Africa and international cooperation. Thirty participants attended the workshop, and various issues of concern to the African diaspora were discussed. The second event was a workshop organized at a consultation meeting on Migration and Development by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 12 December 2014. Twenty-five participants attended a workshop on the involvement of experts in the development of countries of origin.

Findings

Unique insights within the African diaspora

The African diaspora have explicit and tacit knowledge. Participants' comments at the consultation meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attest to the explicit and tacit knowledge of the diaspora. They lack in some cases specific explicit knowledge, but they are able to facilitate the interpretation and implementation of explicit knowledge. They possess organization-specific knowledge and recognize the knowledge of others. Participants stated, 'We know how to communicate' and 'how to adjust knowledge to the context'. When it comes to participating via lobbying, participants indicated that they had the knowledge, the facts, and the explicit knowledge. As noted by one participant, 'We should engage with strong lobby organizations. They need facts. We have this experience' and 'We have to cooperate with civil society organizations and provide them with knowledge on our countries of origin'. The added value of the diaspora was also alluded to by an interviewee from Ethiopia in the short stories compiled, when she observed that the 'African diaspora are the right partners to mediate as they are familiar with both contexts and have the relevant

knowledge and financial resource'. Her use of the phrase 'familiar with both contexts' exemplifies what the diaspora can add to policy discourses.

An Ethiopian interviewee was of the opinion that the diaspora, especially the youth, are becoming educated, and this places them in a better position to blend their knowledge acquired in the Dutch system with that coming from associations with kith and kin here in the Netherlands and also in their country of origin. Through their interactions with their destination countries, the diaspora learn or acquire new skills; they become part of society and also repay in the form of rendering services and participating in the economy of their destination countries. Meanwhile, they have interacted and still continue to interact with their countries of origin, sharing with one another valuable information resources that keep them constantly in touch with their countries of origin and in tune with their destination countries. This disposition of the diaspora enables them to learn and acquire values, norms, ethics and social practices that are valuable to both destination and home countries.

The sister-city relationships in the Netherlands revealed also the added value of having the African diaspora involved. The sister-city relationships are political decisions taken to boost international cooperation between the Netherlands and its partners in so-called developing countries. The Ghanaian diaspora were not involved in the decisions that led to the cooperation. However, when implementation started in Ghana and they began to run into difficulties, they found it prudent to include representatives of the diaspora in the programmes. International cooperation has since been smooth, and projects are ongoing as intended, with inputs from the diaspora.

The engagement of a diaspora in Almere, for instance, made an impact on the municipality's international cooperation. This diaspora brought an added value of knowledge in communication practices, which facilitated the bridging of communication gaps between Kumasi and the municipality of Almere. As stated in an interview concerning the difficulties that Almere faced from the onset:

So later they realized that they were not getting the results they wanted. So they brought me in. So I became the chairman of the project organization then. So since I came, I said well, you give us the budget, we make the policy you make the project, we make the decision where it is needed. So what I did was to go in 2007, to go with a delegation to Kumasi, to find out which projects the people themselves want in Ghana. What they needed. Not what we want from here, we bring it there, no. So we went to Ghana and then we talked to all the twelve assemblies in Kumasi.

The result is a project that brings satisfaction to both the supply side and the demand side. As an interviewee from the municipality noted concerning engaging a Ghanaian in the sister-city relationship:

He is very helpful because, ya he's been here for many many years. Of course he is a Ghanaian, but I think some Ghanaians also find him Dutch. He is living here, his children are growing up here, so he is used to the Dutch system. And he can look a little bit more neutral at both sides. He understands the Ghanaian situation; of course that is his homeland.

Because of the diaspora's participation in this relation, results turned out to be mutually beneficial to both the municipality of Almere and also to the Kumasi metropolitan assembly. The shift in the type of public participation from exclusion and passive participation to one of functional and interactive participation yielded the desired results.

A shift from exclusion and passive participation to self-mobilization and an aspiration for functional and interactive participation

The African diaspora holds the view that decision-making by politicians and policy-makers only engages them as passive participants, with little or no consultation with them. They feel they

cannot influence policies at the national level, as political parties and other bodies that are powerful and have interests that subsume those of the diaspora have already determined those policies. Yet, the diaspora are convinced that they can contribute proactively to policy debates. Their ability to self-mobilise into diaspora groups that seek to lobby for the diaspora's interests and to assist one another in diverse aspects of life attest to their valuable position. Examples of such self-mobilised groups include the African Young Pioneers (AYP), Africa in Motion (AIM), African Diaspora Youth Network in Europe (ADYNE), Sankofa Foundation, and a host of others (see Ong'ayo 2014). In one of the short stories compiled from the interviews, a diaspora member recalled how his participation in a policy consultation turned out to be a one-sided event. He was invited to share his ideas, but finally was told what was intended to be done. In his words he recounts:

I remember attending a consultation meeting organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The only thing they did was to present their ideas and plans, which they had already agreed upon. There was no room in the meeting for me to express my opinions. So I was wondering, why are you inviting me?

This and other similar experiences are likely to give the impetus for diaspora mobilization (Ong'ayo 2014) aimed at influencing policy in destination countries.

The diaspora are getting very connected with one another, and organizations are increasingly becoming linked or aware of one another, as this research found out. Engaging diaspora groups passively tends to make them collaborate more and strategize more outside the formal policy processes. Passive participation is one type of participation that most diaspora members tend to experience. They are invited to participate but the agenda is already set in advance. They believe that when the discussion is of more interest to the government, especially issues relating to migration, then the diaspora organizations that are involved in such thematic areas are invited. But even so, the direction of deliberations and the foreseen outcomes have already been decided. There is no obligation whatsoever to incorporate inputs emanating from participants. However, the diaspora are convinced that the absence of Africans from policy discourses pertaining to trade, migration, development projects, inter alia, limits the quality of such decisions and tends not to produce the desired results. What follows is an interviewee's observation that illustrates this point. 'Very few Africans are present in conferences and meetings that affect them directly. You miss the African voice in policymaking. If you would consider the African diaspora more seriously, policies would be more effective'. It is important to mention also the practicality in terms of determining which expertise is to be consulted, the availability of the expert and who pays for the services of the expert, or whether the experts are willing to render their services free of charge.

Ghanaian and Nigerian diaspora members similarly think that issues of bilateral policies are beyond their influence. Generally, the Ghanaian diaspora, when asked about their knowledge and contribution to the debt relief received from the Netherlands and other development partners, indicated that they only heard about it through the media and other platforms. An interviewee stated:

Yea we were aware of it. But we didn't participate in anything. You see? We didn't participate in anything. Yes we hear it from this eh. We have a relationship with the Ministry of Foreign affairs here. We have a relationship with all those organizations. So some of them you get newsletters and news briefs that tell you to a certain extent what is happening.

Although participation by the diaspora is sometimes passive or consultative, it does provide them an opportunity to be part of the policy discourse platform. This is especially the situation in municipalities where diaspora groups have a reasonable number and extent of representation, like in Bijlmer Arena and Almere. But, again, the diaspora's contribution to policy discourses

in the municipalities must be framed to meet certain overarching governmental policies. These overarching policies have already been decided and defined by the political leadership. An interviewee in Almere described as an illusion the idea that the diaspora were involved in policy formulation. He noted that everywhere in the world political interests influence the formulation of national and bilateral policies, and it is only persons with knowledge who are brought on board to contribute to such policies. Attempts to find out whether Ghanaians in the municipality of Almere, for instance, contributed to the decisions leading to the sister-city relationship between Almere and Kumasi in Ghana yielded a response to the contrary, as already noted. An official from the municipality responded with the following suggestion: ‘You have to ask central government on this. Ministry of Foreign Affairs I am pretty sure. But Almere did not play a role in it’.

What remains clear is that the municipality realizes the value of the diaspora and engages them, whether passively or by consultation, in policy discourses. For instance, when the Amsterdam Zuid-Oost municipality found a nagging problem of unemployment among Ghanaian youths, it engaged the diaspora organizations in the area to organize workshops and brainstorm to come up with recommendations as to the way forward. In turn, a workshop on youth unemployment was organized by Stichting Akasanoma because the Amsterdam Zuid-Oost municipality had identified youth unemployment among Ghanaians as a rising concern. The situation is thus not entirely one of non-participation of the African diaspora in policy decisions. The diaspora by raising these concerns seek to shift the lobby format from one of passive participation to a more interactive and meaningful participation. In this way, they can adequately bring their knowledge to bear in policy discourses.

A growing aspiration to be engaged in policy domains concerning their home countries beyond the scope of migration, integration and trade

The diaspora are familiar with the impact of certain Dutch and European policies in their home countries. ‘The power of the African diaspora is that they can visualize the consequences of certain Dutch, European policies in their home countries.’ This respondent takes the fishing industry as an example and explains how Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands hear from their families and friends how fishermen in Cape Verde suffer from EU fisheries policy. A growing number of the African diaspora are realizing the importance of tackling these policies here in the Netherlands and in Europe. From the reactions of readers of the booklet *Make Africa Shine, Narratives of African Diaspora on Policy-Making Concerning Africa*, sharing interviews of this research with a wider audience and the workshop on *Afrikadag*, it becomes clear that the African diaspora are interested in influencing policies beyond the scope of migration, integration and trade. The African diaspora indicate other issues of concern, such as extractive industries, raw materials and human rights issues. In relation to trade, they not only foresee or play a role as matchmaker, but also raise questions about unfair trade imbalances. Yet most interviewees stress the need to work on building stronger networks and collaboration among the African diaspora to amplify their voice for change.

The need for representative bodies

The diaspora feel that they need a unified front to make headway with regard to contributing to policy. It was found from the interviews and workshops that people sometimes had ideas, but did not know where to convey them. An interviewee from Cape Verde in the short stories compiled on the diaspora expressed it in these words:

Many African diaspora organisations have no direct links to the government. They have to seek support from big NGOs and it's not easy to get involved in larger organisations. Compounding this is that many members of the African diaspora organizations have a lower educational status and those highly educated tend to focus on their own careers.

But this also raises the question of capacity and expertise. The question is whether the African diaspora have all the expertise required to handle relevant policy issues that arise. And even if they have the capacity, do they have the platform? One of the participants at the consultation meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides a clear summary 'It is about creating space. Who is going to listen to us and why?' Another interviewee from Ghana made a similar observation. He noted, 'also, I recognise here that many Africans here lack professional skills to get into contact with influential organizations or the government'. However, the diaspora do have some capacity and knowledge to offer in certain policy areas. The Director of the African African Diaspora Policy Centre mentioned in an interview their contribution to policy discourses because they had the capacity. But also he stated in a very pragmatic manner:

I should be modest. We are not experts on everything. We are not. So we only focus on limited areas. But some issues, which should have come to me, because I don't know, I cannot add anything. You know what I mean? It's not that we Africans we know all the issues. No! And they shouldn't consult me, they should consult those Africans who know the issue.

Clearly, there is an admission here that one diaspora organization does not have the solution to all policy questions and demands; but how these different organizations are pooling their skills for the benefit of the diaspora is continually raised in interviews and workshops. The diaspora are organizing themselves into a policy influence movement. This movement and what it advocates are evident in interviews and workshops organized by the diaspora. In a workshop on *Afrikadag*, a participant observed:

How can the diaspora influence policies? And I think that is very important. The diaspora is very large. We have very diverse diaspora from Africa. Africa itself is very vast. So then you already ask me, how do you unite the various different organizations that as a collection is called the diaspora and then you have to prioritize on the policies you like to address.

So here the diaspora recognize their own diversity and the challenge they face from working in a polycentric manner. They are now beginning to advocate a unified front. Not just a unified front that would champion their interests in policy issues, but also a unified front that would help them prioritize the many fragmented policy interests of the diverse diaspora and to choose which ones to address at which times.

Although the diaspora are faced with issues of some members having limited education, the educated ones tend to go about their own business, carry out their engagements with the government in a fragmented manner or may not have the skills required to engage in lobbying or engaging in policy discourses, but they do need to pool these differences. So certainly, not all the African diaspora will contribute to policy deliberations. Also, they are not seeking to engage in all policy discourses. The African diaspora's request, reflected differently in different interviews, amounts to one thing – how can they have an impact on policies that have a direct bearing on their home countries in Africa?

Participants in the consultation meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested different strategies to incorporate the diaspora in policy discourses. Some proposed diaspora lobby groups, whereas others suggested working with existing lobby organizations. Participants saw lobbying as a skill with which some of them were not familiar. They recognized the need for diaspora

training and experience in lobbying. One participant noted how it took 18 years to achieve a budget-line for immigrants within the EU. Similar propositions were made by interviewees who often expressed the need for a unified front that would galvanize them into being a more potent lobby force.

A complex dual relationship between the home country and the host country

The diaspora show ambivalent feelings about not being part of Dutch society: 'alienated', so to say; and other times they sound as though they are fully Dutch. An interviewee in explaining how he felt about being alienated expressed it in these words 'you are a citizen, but you cannot be treated like a citizen'. This interviewee had difficulty securing a job after he had worked for a couple of private firms for some years. He had been in the Netherlands for the previous 24 years, furthered his education here but then had difficulty securing a job. He believes that policies are continuously being revised to keep the diaspora from getting a share of the pie. This interviewee is engaged in agriculture in his country of origin, with about 450 hectares of organic farmland in three regions of Ghana, namely, the Volta, Brong Ahafo and Ashanti regions.

Another interviewee expressed his views on unequal opportunities for the diaspora in this manner, referring to the preference given to Dutch people over the diaspora in certain job placements: 'we have been telling them that there are enough qualified people here, Ghanaians here, with Dutch citizenship who are qualified enough even to be ambassadors in Ghana. You get me? But they always take their own people there'.

Here, the distinction is made in the phrase, 'their own people', separating the Ghanaians (we) from the Dutch (them), thereby bringing in the issue of social inclusion and exclusion. Another observation from this interviewee was a feeling of segregation back in the country of origin when he expressed frustration about how he was all of a sudden treated differently once he got back to his country of origin. He said that such segregation was not just systemic, but individually driven.

For instance if I go into the customs office, there are people sitting there, you get me? They even handle other foreigners better than they handle us. So it is not the system at all. It is the people. They will rather handle another white man with more respect than they will handle us.

This duality of position has implications for the socio-economic lives of the diaspora here in the Netherlands. First, they have to integrate 'properly' in their destination countries, and they also try not to lose long-established contacts with kith and kin back in their countries of origin. They also have to support the economic situations of their kin back in their countries of origin and yet have to earn enough to be economically and socially stable in their destination countries. This puts the diaspora in a stressful economic position, with implications in their daily lives for the upbringing of their children and general family life. They work hard in their destination country to make a decent life, and still have to remit funds to their country of origin so as to gain some acceptability in the local communities from which they migrated. The home communities are very dependent on the diaspora almost to the point of irresponsibility, probably because of limited economic opportunities there. In a workshop in Bijlmer Arena, a participant lamented how the diaspora squeezed their earnings to invest back in the countries of origin: building houses and taking care of kin to the detriment of their own biological children.

Remittances play an important role in the lives of many diaspora members. Most of them need to take two jobs or more to be able to earn more and send money back home. Taking many jobs also implies stressing out more. This tends to affect their health and their own and their family's well-being in their destination countries, although not all the African diaspora frame it as a dual relationship. As one interviewee states:

Pushing individuals to ethnical backgrounds is not the objective of individual sovereignty. I didn't choose to be from Togo. I therefore don't need to be 'Togolese' property for the rest of my life, well after this political identity had been coupled to my person and at a time that I was inapt to choose it for myself.

This approach to diasporic positioning is in line with Ghorashi and Boersma's (2009, 669) 'aim to show how diaspora positioning is not about choosing territories but about newly created spaces in which territories overlap'.

Various constraints faced by the African diaspora

Diaspora organizations face financial constraints, especially from the Dutch government side, in relation to implementing programmes. Given this constraint, their ability to mobilize becomes less efficient because they have ideas and projects that they could execute but are unable to do so because of limited funds. It is hard for diaspora organizations to take the lead in programmes because of the required turnover and track record, but also because of development organizations' lack of interest in alliances with diaspora organizations.

Some also expressed the opinion that projects that the diaspora had executed with far-reaching impacts received little or no media attention at all. One interviewee was of the opinion that 'money can be an issue. We have a lot of ideas and are able to organise ourselves, but we still need some funding and media attention'. Another interviewee observed that

one of the biggest challenges I see is that projects from the African diaspora always depend on funding from Dutch or European institutions. This funding is often of low level and limited to a short time frame, which makes it difficult to plan long-term activities that might have a greater impact.

Here, the diaspora are not denying that they receive some funding from the Dutch government. What they seek to communicate is that the funding is not adequate to enable them to execute projects of long durations, which are more likely to have an impact on beneficiaries and transform their lives.

A free-lance consultant for instance stated how he won the first prize for a programme for African entrepreneurs. The programme was organized by Oxfam with EU funding. Although this consultant won the first prize, he was of the opinion that he could not implement his ideas because he received no funding to bring them to reality. Another interviewee was of the opinion that generally the African diaspora may not be able to write good proposals to secure funding for projects. However, when given the opportunity, they tend to be better at implementing the projects than those who come up with good proposals. She stated:

there are funding opportunities for matchmaking between Dutch and African entrepreneurs via the Netherlands Enterprise Agency, ROV.nl, but these arrangements are not very accessible. In my experience, many African diaspora generally lack the education needed to write these proposals, but are, in practice, often better able to perform the tasks required than those who write good proposals.

She gives only one reason why funds are not accessible, that is, that most African diaspora members lack education. However, her observation that the funds are not very accessible could also imply other constraints besides the challenge faced by the diaspora in writing good proposals. This throws light on the need for interactive and functional forms of participation by the diaspora. This interviewee also added that challenging European policies such as taxes on imports and exports of agricultural products make it difficult to engage in 'fair trade'. This observation was

re-echoed by another interviewee who indicated that his efforts are geared towards an outcome where Africa can say that it does not need development aid.

Discussion and conclusion

This study sought to investigate the added value of the African diaspora's contribution to policy discourses in the Netherlands, and by extension in Europe. This perspective on diaspora participation derives from observations that the African diaspora are hardly consulted regarding policies such as the EU policy on raw materials and other multilateral agreements. Diaspora organizations consider this situation as unfair, because the diaspora play a crucial role in the socio-economic and political landscapes of the African continent. Any backlash in terms of bilateral or multilateral policies has a boomeranging effect on the diaspora, who are already under enough stress making remittance transfers to their home countries. We argue that it would be mutually beneficial to the EU and Africa for the African diaspora to be involved in matters of policy at the multilateral level. This thinking is in line with the theory of public participation, which suggests that the involvement of the citizenry in policy discourses is essential to ensure that outcomes are reflective of citizens' positions. Citizen participation in policy discourses and implementation would also absolve policy-makers of accusations of unfairness, the rationale being that citizens would have been duly engaged in the process.

That Africa does not need aid is what most scholars have in recent times sought to put forward. What Africa needs are fair trade policies that would steer the international relations and multilateral agreements to the benefit of all parties. 'Africans do not want aid', as one interviewee puts it, 'Africans are not beggars'. Kimber (2005) shows that aid payments have reduced drastically in the twenty-first century relative to the 1960s. The diaspora's claim to have an input into policy seems to justify Kimber's observations since aid will eventually have failed to produce its intended impact if developed countries fail to meet their commitments in terms of amount of aid pledged. The way forward is to help the continent to be less reliant on aid.

Africans want equal opportunities on the world market. They want to be able to influence relations to the mutual benefit of the global North and the global South. However, the diaspora will only be able to influence policies on the international scale if they are given the opportunity to influence policies in their destination countries. The diaspora are not seeking to dismiss the contribution of aid to the African continent. Aid has been beneficial to many countries. However, the diaspora envisages an Africa in which jobs will be created, where kith and kin would have the opportunity to secure decent living conditions. The effect would be a reduction in pressure on the diaspora.

The African diaspora are not just concerned about trade, migration or development policies. They also perceive themselves as the bridge between the global North and the global South and are rightly positioning themselves for that role. Formation of diasporic associations such as the ADYNE and their interconnectedness express a zeal that cannot be overemphasized. The concept of the developed North working with the African diaspora also fosters trust from the home countries. Africans are willing to disclose information more to the diaspora than they are to any other party.

The diaspora are engaged in policy discourses in the municipalities. Especially where they are numerous and are recognized as contact bodies, the engagement is strong. However, these policy discourses must fit into a larger policy framework in which they have no influence. This is akin to Cornwall's (2008, 272) view of participation by consultation category, which states that

People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information-gathering processes and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede

any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.

The diaspora's double engagement in countries of destination and origin makes them equally interested in the socio-economic fortunes of both countries. 'The power of the African diaspora is that they can visualize the consequences of Dutch, European policies in their home countries. They know the impact of agreements' (Johannsen, Goris, and Lie 2014, 9). Increasingly, many African diaspora segments are calling for opportunities to add realistic voices to policy discourse. They are so used to the type of participation in which they are invited or consulted and want to play a more functional or interactive participatory role. They want to have their voices heard in a fundamental and integrated way and see their inputs translated into action.

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