Forum Migration & Development – Short Report
AVP International Conference “Developing Development”
CoMiDe Partnership Fair “Bridging the Gap”
14th and 15th March 2013, Karl-Renner-Institut

The Africa Networking Platform (AVP), the Südwind Agentur, the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) and the Karl-Renner-Institut organised the Forum “Migration & Development” to establish a better understanding between development organisations and Diaspora communities and to promote collaboration in the field of Migration & Development. The Forum which comprised of the International Conference “Developing Development” and the Partnership Fair “Bridging the Gap” gathered 180 experts in the area of Migration & Development. Diaspora experts of the Africa-Europe Platform from 25 different European countries shared their experiences and possibilities for cooperation between Diaspora and development cooperation.

In his welcome remarks Sebastian Schublach, representing the Karl-Renner-Institut, pointed out the potential of Diaspora communities for development cooperation. He criticized that too much knowledge and expertise remain unused and while expressing his hope that the Forum on Migration & Development can contribute to change this.

During the opening session, Hans-Peter Glanzer from the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs emphasized the great importance of the year 2013 for the evolution of the Migration & Development Agenda. The UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development which takes place this year will provide a strong momentum at global level and the Forum Migration and Development addresses the key issues which will also be in the spotlight of the upcoming debate at UN level.

Helmuth Hartmeyer, representing the Austrian Development Agency, identified that asking critical questions is the factor for success of a conference and all participants agreed at the end of the second day that the right critical questions have been asked for a solid base for the manifesto.

William Carlton Eacho, U.S. Ambassador to Austria, highlighted that the USA is a country of immigrants which distinguishes it from other countries in the world. He stressed that migrants’ engagement strengthens the development of the residence countries as well as of the countries of origin. As part of the US approach towards development Diaspora engagement features high on the agenda.

Barbara Prammer, President of the National Council in Austria, identified the need to bridge the gap between Diaspora and other development actors and criticized that many projects are still often done for and rarely with Diaspora associations. The partnership between the VIDC and AVP in the framework of the CoMiDe initiative is one of the very few examples in the Austrian context where the African Diaspora is acknowledged as an equal partner.

“The great attendance at this conference of Diaspora and other development actors convinces me to say that the time for an equal partnership and shared responsibilities between Diaspora, governments and other stakeholders has come”, said Alexis Nshimyimana Neuberg from the AVP in his introductory speech.

Gibril Faal, representing the UK-based African Foundation for Development – AFFORD asked: “Is it effective and is it efficient to include the Diaspora in development?” His answer was yes, due to two reasons: Firstly, Diaspora associations achieved a lot without institutional support which gives one an idea on the potential Diaspora associations still have. And secondly, the involvement of Diaspora associations in
development fosters innovation as they apply new ways of thinking about development. Therefore, cooperation between the Diaspora and other development actors needs to be sought while genuine partnership can make a significant difference in three main areas: employment of Diaspora in development institutions, funding of Diaspora organisations that work for international development and representation of Diaspora institutions in policy formulation.

Brice Monnou from the Forum des Organisations de Solidarité Internationale issues des Migrations – FORIM based in France, called upon governmental development agencies and other development actors to treat the Diaspora as equal partners in development cooperation projects: “Don’t do it for us, do it with us!” She also criticized that the side of the Migration & Development coin where migrants also contribute to the development of their host countries and not only their origin countries is not seen. Thus, a change in the perception of migrants and their contributions is needed. But she also urges Diaspora actors to find creative ways to get heard by ‘traditional’ development actors and governments: “If you knock on a door and it doesn’t open, knock on the window.”

Based on the expert contributions and the recommendations which were identified during four workshops in the course of the conference, a manifesto setting out key principles for how other development actors should work in partnership with the African Diasporas for a sustainable development in Africa and Europe will be developed.

Following the conference, the CoMiDe Partnerships Fair “Bridging the Gap”, under the joint moderation of Téclaire Tam Ngo (Sudwind) and Renate Sova (Twin Solutions), brought together over 80 participants, member of NGOs, international and Diaspora organisations, for a networking opportunity. An unprecedented approach in the Austrian context, that was highly successful. All participants were highly motivated and interested in collaborations, inspired. They delivered joint ideas, drafted joint projects, inspired by the examples of good practice that had been presented to them by Marlene Keusch (VIDC) at the beginning of the fair.

The Partnership Fair resulted in 14 concrete ideas for joint projects. A result perceived by the organisers as contributing to the CoMiDe project objectives which are among others to strengthen cooperation between development NGOs and Diasporas as well as the formulation of coherent migration and development policies. We invite you to visit our CoMiDe website to join our Online Partnership Market, which is an extension of the Fair at http://beta.comide.net/.

Photos from the conference and partnership fair are accessible at the AVP and VIDC website.

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