



Diaspora and development cooperation.

A study about the role of the Antwerp diaspora from Congo, Ghana and Morocco in development cooperation and cooperation with the city of Antwerp. (executive summary)



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A city like Antwerp is not an island. It is part of a global society and was able to grow thanks to its international contacts. The international port of Antwerp has always been a great attraction and gateway to faraway countries and foreign cultures. About 102 399 foreigners live in the city and according to some sources, 167 nationalities have been registered there (City of Antwerp, 2013). 42% of Antwerp residents have roots abroad. Most of them stay in contact with family in their country of origin. They do this not just with visits, emails or phone calls. Every year many migrants send money and goods to their families and friends in their country of origin. In addition to this rather individual form of solidarity, more and more organisations of ethnic minorities are developing small-scale projects abroad to try and support local communities in a more sustainable way. Many of these transnational activities are closely related to development cooperation.

In its governmental agreement for 2007-2012, the city committed itself to examine whether it could use part of its development cooperation resources in countries that have large migrant communities living in Antwerp. The institutional support of twin towns through city-to-city cooperation was replaced with the structural support of educational and healthcare projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and Morocco. In this context, the city brought together organisations of ethnic minorities from these countries, the Antwerp University & College Association, the Institute of Tropical Medicine and other Antwerp organisations in project groups per country. The city of Antwerp chose to take on three roles, acting as a matchmaker within the network, a channel of subsidies and a capacity builder /coach. The actual launch of the projects took place at the end of 2010.

With this survey, we wanted to gain an understanding of the diaspora's role in development cooperation and the city of Antwerp's activities in the South in particular. It is a first attempt to systematically describe the innovative development cooperation policy for the city's collaboration with the major migrant communities in Antwerp. The survey's focus is mainly practical in order to come to policy recommendation. We did not focus on the impact of the development projects in the countries of origin, as our main focal point was the diaspora in Antwerp. This survey contains information about the profile of the people involved, the motivation for their commitment, their activities and the way they experience their cooperation with the city and other actors.

1. The administration has a growing interest in migrants as development actors.

The city of Antwerp is not the only entity that wants to work with migrants as part of its development cooperation. Since the 1990s, policy bodies on an international, national and local level have all shown a growing interest. On the one hand, this was caused by various reports showing that the amount of money and goods sent by migrants to their countries of origin exceeds the money invested in official development aid by Western countries (World Bank, 2011). On the other hand, this interest is the result of new ways of engaging in development cooperation that emphasise the participation of local target groups and governments in the South as well as citizens in the North (Faist, 2008 and Schiller, 2011).

The initiatives of organisations of ethnic minorities are considered fourth-pillar initiatives (Develtere, 2005 and De Bruyn and Huyse, 2009). Fourth-pillar initiatives are usually small-scale and organised by groups of friends, organisations, schools, foundations, companies, etc. that do not belong to the group of traditional development actors. Most of these initiatives involve volunteers, non-structural subsidies and very close individual contact with people in the South (bonds of friendship that originated during a study visit, for example). Organisations of ethnic minorities mainly rely on networks and family ties in the countries of origin. Their knowledge of the local language, social and cultural sensitivities and ways of working increases the chances of success of initiatives organised by these organisations. The migrants are positioned between two worlds: the host country and the country of origin. Because of this, they are seen as key figures. It is easier for them to introduce so-called Western ideas on good governance or gender equality in the South (De Bruyn and Develtere, 2008 and Perrin and Martiniello, 2011 and de Haas, 2006 and Faist, 2008 and Meireman, 2003 and Lacroix, 2009).

Not everyone agrees with this point of view. It is sometimes said that commitment to development cooperation increases migrants' focus on their country of origin and therefore restricts their integration in the host country (Gowricharn, 2010). Some people also doubt the social and cultural expertise migrants can contribute to development cooperation. There is, for example, a growing group of second and further generations of migrants who are not always particularly knowledgeable about the country of origin, with which they no longer have such a close bond. In addition, there is no such thing as the migrant. Every migrant has its own social background and migration story. One migrated for political reasons, the other for economic reasons. One comes from the countryside, the other from the city. One has a modest social background, the other comes from an affluent family. All this has a great impact on migrants' view of the local context and development needs and their social networks.

2. Study

Based on a survey and interviews with key figures and members of organisations of ethnic minorities, we examined:

- the profile of the Congolese, Ghanaian and Moroccan migrants and their organisations in Antwerp who actively contribute to transnational solidarity initiatives, development cooperation and the city of Antwerp's activities in the South
- what migrants consider to be development cooperation. Which type of activities do they organise? Are their initiatives different from other fourth-pillar initiatives? Do they see remittances as development cooperation? Why do they engage in development cooperation?
- the impact of this commitment on the migrants' lives. How do they combine their work and their families and social lives? Does their commitment hinder or promote their integration?
- how migrants evaluate the collaboration with the city of Antwerp.

3. Methodology

We distributed a survey via the Congolese, Ghanaian and Moroccan organisations. This survey was completed by 113 people. About half (55) of the 113 survey participants belong to the Moroccan community, 46 to the Congolese community and 12 to the Ghanaian community. 24 respondents were born in Belgium and 4 respondents were born in a country other than their country of origin. Many respondents from the Moroccan community were not born in Morocco (25). Slightly over half are now between 40 and 60 years of age. Almost one fifth of respondents are between 18 and 24. The age distribution is similar in all three communities, with the exception of the 18-to-24 age category, which is relatively larger for respondents from Moroccan origin.

We also interviewed five key figures and 20 members of organisations of ethnic minorities. The members are all involved in the city of Antwerp's activities in the South or other projects in their country of origin through different channels. We interviewed 4, 7 and 9 members from the Ghanaian, Congolese and Moroccan communities respectively. There were 18 men and 2 women.

4. Results

4.1. Migrant solidarity across borders: an overview

4.1.1. Remittances

The survey shows that considerable sums of money and many goods are sent to Congo, Ghana and Morocco. In 2011, the survey participants transferred more than € 170 000 in goods and money.

TABLE 10. AMOUNT OF MONEY AND GOODS SENT IN 2011

	Number (N = 113)	Min (€)	Max(€)	Total (€)	Average (€)
Money transfers 2011	76	40	3 600	83 741	1 102
Goods transfers 2011	59	50	15 000	87 235	1 479
Total value of transfers	82	40	17 000	171 676	2 094

Remarkably, there is not always a connection between the level of income and the amount that is sent to the country of origin. As De Bruyn and Develtere (2008: 8) put it: “*Someone’s payslip determines what he gives, not whether he gives.*” Our interviews also show that people with low incomes send considerable amounts to their country of origin. One of the Ghanaian interviewees explains this phenomenon as follows:

“Suppose someone earns € 900 or € 1 000. When the rent has been paid, there is about € 500 to € 600 left. If the individual can get by on € 200 to € 300, he will try and spend as little as possible and send € 300 to his family. That is why a lot of money is sent there.”

In general, goods and money are sent frequently to the country of origin. About half the respondents send money regularly. 40% of respondents send goods at least once a year. Remarkably, a large group of Moroccan respondents states never to send any remittances. These are younger migrants, many of who are still studying and living with their parents. Money and goods are primarily sent at the request of family in the country of origin. They are used to meet immediate requirements there: basic needs, medical costs and education. About two thirds of respondents say that a visit to the country of origin is often the reason for sending money and goods. About one third of respondents of Congolese origin say that they send goods at the request of friends. This is less the case for the Ghanaian and Moroccan respondents.

4.1.2. Development cooperation

But is this development cooperation? Almost all interviewees feel that sending money and goods is not development cooperation. Remittances are sent to help family and friends, but are not a long-term solution and do not support the wider public. According to the surveyed migrants, development cooperation supports a greater cause. A Congolese migrant explains:

“You send money to your family to help your family, but development cooperation is bigger than that. Supporting a school, for example, has nothing to do with family. That is really for the population.”

Here the interviewees distinguish between less planned, more individual initiatives on the one hand and projects of a more structural, long-term character on the other hand. The latter projects involve the cooperation and participation of the local population.

However, we see that not everyone is active in development cooperation in the same way.

TABLE 13: COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION ACCORDING TO ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Commitment to development cooperation	Congolese (n = 46)	Ghanaian (n = 12)	Moroccan (n = 55)	Total (N = 113)
Yes	35	7	29	71
No	11	5	26	42

According to the survey, only two thirds of all members of organisations of ethnic minorities actively involved in development cooperation effectively say that they are committed to development cooperation. This is true for over half the Moroccan respondents and more than three quarters of the Congolese respondents. One reason for this is that the various respondents have different ideas of what development cooperation is. Solidarity or funding actions in the North are not always seen as contributions to development cooperation. According to one of the leaders of a Congolese society, this is because some people occasionally contribute to activities, but do not see their actions as being a commitment to development cooperation:

“Development cooperation within an organisation is like a train. You have the train engine and the carriages. [...] Most survey participants are volunteers. They are carriages rather than engines. We also need the carriages. To work together. [...] For example, there are people who say: ‘Look, we will join this activity.’ [...] But they will not stay and think and plan, because that also takes time. These people have to go to work and have their own lives to live. That is not always easy.”

4.2. Development cooperation initiatives of organisations of ethnic minorities

4.2.1. Themes

Organisations of ethnic minorities are mainly active in healthcare and education, which are also the themes of the city of Antwerp's activities in the South. Other fourth-pillar initiatives also see healthcare and education as their main themes. Themes such as human rights, women's rights, the environment and good governance are often not included in fourth-pillar initiatives. Organisations of ethnic minorities are finding it very hard to work on certain themes, as they put their local position and credibility under pressure. One of the key figures emphasises the following:

"You know that for certain topics, it is better not to work with organisations of ethnic minorities, because it will become problematic for that group, even if they want to do it. It is not easy on location. It may create a distance between them and the local target group. [...] Migrants are not always regarded as locals. It depends on the period they have been away. That is sometimes underestimated here. [...] Young adults return to their country of origin. Here they are always told: 'You're Congolese, Congolese, Congolese.' and there they hear: 'Hé, les Belges.' [...] For example, when I go into a village with a very innovative project, they will tell me: 'Ha, you've changed. You want us to change with you. You have been brainwashed.'"

It is noteworthy that, unlike the Congolese and Ghanaian organisations, the Moroccan organisations primarily focus on socio-economic development. They do this with cooperatives for olives, goats, sheep, cheese and hens. The return of these cooperatives then finances healthcare and educational projects. This is inspired by the search for a sustainable solution to fund initiatives and improve the situation in Morocco. The Moroccan government also supports the establishment of these agricultural cooperatives. One of the interviewees of Moroccan origin explains:

"Initially, the city of Antwerp's focus was on education and healthcare rather than cooperatives or work. At the time we said: 'We want to work with the city of Antwerp and the colleges. We want to develop an education and health project, but how are we going to finance this?' [...] 'And what about after 2012 [a local elections year in Antwerp]? What will happen then?' Those questions remained. We did not want to put our energy in a two-year project, so we established cooperatives right from the start."

4.2.2. Cooperation: approach and follow-up

The initiatives are mainly located in the places where the respondents were born and the regions where their family members live. They involve strong participation of the members in Antwerp and the local partners in the South. The Congolese and Ghanaian organisations mainly work with social organisations in the country of origin. The main local partners of the Moroccan organisations are family members. Usually, the organisations of ethnic minorities do not like working with political institutions in the countries of origin, as they seem to slow down transnational initiatives and sometimes even make them impossible. Organisations of ethnic minorities feel that it is a great advantage that the city of Antwerp's activities in the South focus on organisations of ethnic minorities working with communities at grassroots level.

Although the local population's participation in the planning and implementation of projects is seen as indispensable, the organisations of ethnic minorities in the North still bear final responsibility. They are liable to the other partners in the network and the sponsors. The follow-up of projects is an intense task. In many cases, it involves daily phone calls to the partners in the country of origin. Geographical proximity seems to be an important factor in the follow-up of projects in the field. Organisations of ethnic minorities also often struggle with the bureaucratic procedures and project requirements imposed by the city of Antwerp. Most have little experience in setting up files to apply for subsidies and justify projects. Gathering invoices and documents from local partners is also time consuming. This is partly compensated by their knowledge of local customs and contacts. They know how to approach things locally and they have the necessary "*manipulative intelligence*". However, it is often precisely this expertise that sometimes jeopardises the transparency and participation requirements promoted by the city.

In the North, organisations of ethnic minorities are in contact with other social and cultural organisations, research institutes, individuals, NGOs, umbrella organisations, international organisations and forums. Their contacts often focus on the acquisition of subsidies, the joint organisation of projects or the cooperation with NGOs to provide tax certificates to donors. Generally, people are very satisfied with the network developed by the city of Antwerp for its activities in the South with the Antwerp University and College Association and the Institute of Tropical Medicine, because of the network's advisory and integrating role. It allows everyone to get more familiar with each other and to appreciate each other more. Direct collaboration between the various organisations of ethnic minorities themselves also offers a forum for exchanging experiences and setting up partnerships in the South.

Nevertheless, the respondents emphasise that the establishment and follow-up of initiatives and the commitment to various networks take a lot of time, energy and money. The city needs to take into account that the commitment of most active members is on a voluntary basis. The leader of a Moroccan organisation explains the tension between voluntary commitment and professional partners as follows:

“I work in my own business all day. How many times do we need to attend meetings with the city? With the people of the university and the colleges? To them, these meetings are part of their jobs, but to us they aren’t. We are volunteers. It requires so much work. Is there anybody who can take over some of the burden we carry? [...] Drafting a file for subsidies is our biggest obstacle. [...] Why do I have to be present all the time? I am just a volunteer. Now, for example: I made time for you, but normally I should be at work.”

4.3. Profile and motivation of the initiators

The interviews with representatives show that most migrants (the younger second- and third-generation migrants to a lesser extent) are committed to some form of transnational solidarity. Below we try to provide a profile of the people involved in remittances and development cooperation initiatives based on our findings. We also examine the motives for their commitment. The results generally correspond to the results of a different study (De Bruyn and Develtere, 2008 and Perrin and Martiniello, 2011 and Lacroix, 2009).

4.3.1. Gender

The study confirms that fewer women are active in transnational activities than men. First, fewer women completed the survey. Second, we see that women send money very rarely, whereas men send money regularly. We also see that about half the female respondents state that they are active in development cooperation, compared to about two thirds of the men. The Congolese group is an exception in this respect, as it shows an equal amount of men and women who are active in development cooperation. However, based on the interviews, we need to qualify these figures, as Ghanaian and Moroccan women clearly do take initiatives. Some organisations of ethnic minorities develop women’s projects in the North and in the South and other activities of these organisations are performed by both women and men. The initiatives taken by women are not always equally visible and do not always have the same structural character as the initiatives by male migrants.

4.3.2. Age

The survey shows that remittances are sent primarily by older, mostly first-generation migrants. Sending money and goods is seen as a kind of unwritten moral obligation to pay off the social debt on the home front. The low number of remittances sent by younger generations is partly because a large group of young people still live at home and are studying. Another reason is young people’s weakening social and emotional bond with family members in the country of origin. Direct family members pass away or emigrate. During several interviews, a visit to the country of origin is referred to as an important motivational factor to start or continue one’s commitment to transnational solidarity:

“Many people don’t take their children with them when they travel. The children simply grow up here and lose all their ties with Ghana. They don’t see what sort of problems exist there. They have simply become Belgians. [...] Then we have to try and help them forge a connection from a young age. Some do, but it isn’t easy. It costs a lot of money.”

The majority of the younger survey participants say not to be committed to development cooperation. However, this does not mean that young people are not engaged in any activities. The interviews demonstrate that they show considerable commitment, but are not always the driving force behind initiatives. They help their parents, promote initiatives or organise fundraising activities for the organisations they are a member of. However, they do not always consider this as active commitment to development cooperation.

4.3.3. Education

If we look at the educational level, we see that it is not always the highly educated who commit to transnational activities. Within the group claiming to be committed to development cooperation within the Moroccan community, the majority has a certificate of vocational or technical secondary school. Only in the Congolese community do we see a great deal of highly educated people committed to development cooperation.

4.3.4. Family, social and economic lives

Committed migrants often prove to have well-established family, social and economic lives. The survey shows that the majority are married or are living together with children. It is mainly working people who state to be active in initiatives. The interviews show that many leaders of organisations of ethnic minorities have an occupation that allows a great deal of flexibility with respect to their commitment to volunteering work. It also appears that the most active members combine their commitment to development cooperation with other commitments to social and cultural organisations, trade unions, umbrella organisations, NGOs ... This helps them to develop a social network to find funding. It also allows them to reinforce their social position in the migrant community, which in turn enables them to strengthen the support for development cooperation.

Still it is not easy for migrants to combine their commitment to development cooperation and their family, economic and social lives, as explained by an interviewee of Congolese origin:

“For example, I won’t say I can’t make it because I have no child care for my son. I will take him with me. We go, because I feel it is too important and I also feel my son is important. We try to find the right balance, which is not always easy.”

4.3.5. Frustration about remittances

To some interviewees, their growing frustration about the high number of remittances sent at the request of family is the driving force behind the establishment of more structural and sustainable development initiatives. However, the survey shows that the establishment of development initiatives does not really replace the remittances. Particularly young people sometimes get frustrated about the large sums their parents send to family as the cost of living in Belgium continues to rise and they are faced with problems at school or work-related difficulties. This is underlined by a young leader of a Moroccan organisation:

“Especially now with people trying to survive the economic crisis. [...] Young people see it, they calculate it in bags of crisps or loaves of bread. They see a big box leaving every few months, while they could really use it here as well. That is also the reason why we start these projects. The second or third generation will say: ‘Let them drop dead. If they can’t stand on their own two feet after all those years of financial help, they can drop dead as far as I am concerned.’ [...] The project kills two birds with one stone. It gives the people there an income and you don’t need to send money all the time. [...] That is the actual purpose: to make people as independent as possible from family members and other people abroad.”

4.4. Commitment to development cooperation versus integration?

A previous study links migrants’ integration to their commitment to transnational solidarity and development cooperation in both a positive and a negative sense (Gowricharn, 2010 & Perrin and Martiniello, 2011 & Lacroix, 2010 and Lacroix, 2009). Our study shows a positive connection between integration and commitment to development cooperation. Migrants who are highly committed to development cooperation turn out to be highly integrated in the community. They identify themselves as being from Antwerp, Flanders or Belgium. They have well-established social and economic lives and a positive relationship with public services. One of the key figures rejects the argument that migrants’ integration is hindered by encouraging them to focus on transnational activities in their country of origin:

“These are people who are extremely well integrated: you arrive in a country, you integrate economically and socially, you know the system very well and you can enter into a partnership with the local institutions yourself. If you can do all that, surely you have to be very well integrated. ... The migrant who responds to the city’s offer and is a driving force behind it even. The migrant who pursues the city’s policy in his country of origin. How integrated is that?”

Participation in activities in the South also allows migrants to get to know the city of Antwerp's services in a different way. It gives them the opportunity to become familiar with other actors in the network of activities in the South. Some leaders of organisations of ethnic minorities also indicate that their commitment boosts their self-confidence. They feel recognised because of their transnational identity. They know the contacts, the language and the social and cultural context and they can therefore act as a bridge between the partners in the country of origin and the authorities and social organisations in Belgium. This role is a strong motivation. Most respondents feel that their knowledge of the local customs is necessary for the city of Antwerp's projects in the South. Although many were already committed to development cooperation before the city of Antwerp's activities in the South, the city's invitation to play an active part in its activities there provided them with the necessary support. It gives financial support to achieve ideas and moral support by listening to organisations of ethnic minorities. A Ghanaian migrant puts it as follows:

"The grant from the city of Antwerp is small, but it motivated me. It showed me that the city of Antwerp was behind me. That those people are saying: 'Do something in your country of origin.'"

5. Conclusion

Cooperation between the city and the organisations of ethnic minorities through a network of educational and research institutions such as the Antwerp University and College Association and the Institute of Tropical Medicine clearly has many positive results.

First, the change in policy in 2007 clearly recognised organisations of ethnic minorities, their specific expertise in the country of origin and their bridging role between the North and the South. We also see that the collaboration between the organisations of ethnic minorities and the city of Antwerp's development cooperation department has a positive effect on the relationships between the city and these organisations.

Second, the new policy led to the professionalisation of the projects and the broadening of the network of organisations of ethnic minorities. The organisations of ethnic minorities do not necessarily have the expertise, competencies and terminology that the official development cooperation circuit has and this makes them feel inferior to the other (professional) actors. In this context, the organisations of ethnic minorities involved see the city of Antwerp's activities in the South as beneficial and supportive of their own activities.

Third, the benefits of this collaboration reach beyond the organisations of ethnic minorities and the city of Antwerp's direct development cooperation. Student work experiences or student exchanges with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and Morocco organised within the network of activities in the South give educational institutions the opportunity to offer their students work experiences in a different social and cultural context. This way, schools can make their courses respond to the service problems of a city that is home to 167 nationalities.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that organisations of ethnic minorities often rely on the efforts of volunteers. Although these volunteers are often highly motivated, the city of Antwerp will have to take into account the limits of voluntary commitment in the further expansion of its activities in the South. The city will also have to look for strategies to consolidate the latent support of development cooperation provided by young people and female migrants. During some interviews, the city of Antwerp was asked to consider the potential of responding to social issues with young people in its activities in the South in order to broaden support for the existing initiatives in the long term.

We conclude this summary with a number of recommendations in order to improve the current cooperation between the city and the organisations of ethnic minorities.

- The city of Antwerp's collaboration with organisations of ethnic minorities for its activities in the South has clearly led to the professionalisation of projects and a broadening of the network of organisations of ethnic minorities. However, a consensus will have to be reached with the organisations about the extent to which their activities are professionalised further or kept voluntary.
- Due to the heterogeneous profile of the migrants committed to development cooperation and to extend support to younger and female migrants, the existing link between social, youth and integration policies on the one hand and the activities in the South on the other hand should be developed further.
- As the current activities in the South are still very recent, we have to be careful when broadening their content, themes and partners. Without extra expertise, human resources and finances, the further expansion of the results achieved so far will come under threat. It is better to consolidate and reinforce the current activities with the current partners than to expand. Nevertheless, fadeout scenarios, in which the city can also play an active part, must be put in place. These involve not just the provision of information about other financing channels from other governments, foundations, NGOs or the business world, but also the provision of guidance to organisations of ethnic minorities and the development of their capacity to work with these other actors.

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