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## Call for abstracts

# Agents of Change

International workshop on the new governing of diasporas through development  
Hornbækhus, Denmark, 10-12 February, 2010

The research programme [Mobilising African Diasporas as Agents of Change](#): A Comparative study of the encounter between African states and their diasporas' at [the Danish Institute for International Studies](#) will be organising a three day workshop for a small group of engaged researchers (about 20-25 participants) in pleasant surrounding north of Copenhagen at [Hornbækhus](#). Participants will present new, original research, and we are planning to publish an edited volume with a renowned publisher.

**Deadline for abstracts: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009.** Due to limited space, we will select the most relevant abstracts, that relate to the themes below. Travel and living costs of participants will be covered by the programme.

Committee decision: 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009  
Deadline for papers: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010

### **Background**

While the term diaspora had limited use just a few decades ago, every migrant group today seems to claim to be a diaspora – just as states increasingly are reaching out to their diasporas. They have ministers of the diaspora, special rights for people of such and such an origin, diaspora conferences both 'at home' and 'in the diaspora'. In the words of Roger Waldinger, diaspora 'is a strategy or a project undertaken by a broad range of actors interested in what the people ready to think of themselves as members of a diaspora might be willing to do.' Governments of sending and receiving countries, as well as international development institutions are currently in a process of discursively and practically involving migrants and migrant associations in development processes in their countries of origin. The emergence of the diaspora as a new and powerful position within the international development field represents a reconfiguration of development thinking and practice that has not been adequately explored. Likewise it represents a reconfiguration of the relationship between states and citizens beyond national boundaries.

### **Themes**

#### *1 Governing diasporas*

Diasporas seem in other words to be the lost sons or the heroes of development and nation building. Perceiving the diaspora as a resource, sending states are perceiving members of the diaspora as belonging to the nation – as citizens in one way or another – and therefore also as objects of

governance. With 'development' being the central mantra, the state may be attempting to create a particular kind of citizenry out of its diaspora; a diaspora that is there for the good of 'the nation' and 'the people', leaving behind its antagonisms and differences. The workshop will explore these processes of governing the diaspora, including the questions of what kind of citizenship and what kind of governance is at play. We will explore the 'developmentalisation' of the diaspora and how this affects the political space. And we will examine the historical precedents to these tendencies, as top-down attempts to 'develop' Africans have shifted from the national to the local to the transnational level. Especially intriguing in this context is the role of brokers – between the local and the global and between the traditional and the modern – in other words agents of change that are supposed to bridge the gap in the standardized dichotomous readings of Africa and development.

### *2 Emergence of diasporas as agents of change*

Another important set of questions concern who is constructing the African diaspora as agents of change. Sending states are central actors but other institutions and actors play equally important roles. The World Bank has emphasized again and again the developmental potential of African diasporas – in particular in terms of remittances – and recently host countries – more or less reluctantly – are taking on ideas of 'co-developpement' and other ways to approach the 'migration-development nexus'. These states in Europe and North American are also among the main donors in African migrant sending countries. We may ask, therefore, where the concepts of diaspora and development come from. How do they travel? And what happens when they travel? How do they relate to and interact with other key concepts in donor language such as good governance? Do they reinforce one another in discourse and practice – or do they pull in different directions?

### *3 Diasporic effects*

Finally, we must openly investigate the interface between diasporas and the state and ask ourselves what the effects are of this reorientation towards diasporas as motors of development and agents of change, giving migrants recognition but also bringing them within the realm of government control. While home town associations and other transnational developing activities are blossoming, what are their relations to the states who are reaching out for them? Do we witness diasporas that are picking up the concept and identifying themselves as agents of change? What happens to those who do not want to become 'agents of change' and who have chosen migration as an exit strategy? What about those who want another kind of change – a change of political regime? We explore the various ways in which migrant groups pick up the language of diasporas as agents for change and the often unintended consequences of their actions.

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