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The role of collective remittances  
in community development:  
the case of Hometown Associations

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# The role of collective remittances in community development: the case of Hometown Associations

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## ABSTRACT

Remittances to developing countries exceeded \$438 billions in 2015<sup>1</sup>. This amount is three times larger than overseas development assistance. Those flows have become an important source of money in these countries, playing a key role in the survival strategy of many people. Differently to personal remittance flows spent on household expenditures for consumption purposes, collective remittances are used for investment in social and productive projects in the villages or municipalities of origin. This paper explores the role of Hometown Associations (HTAs) as new actors in transnational funding strategies within collective remittance management. HTAs are involved in various community projects ranging from building of infrastructures to social benefits, with potential beneficial effects on the community of origin. In recent years, different subjects engaged in development issues have shown their interest in working in partnership with HTAs. The strength of the development programmes managed by HTAs derives by several factors, such as their knowledge of local needs and the capabilities of harmonizing local demand with support programmes. In spite of this, there are still some obstacles that need to be overcome to improve their full potential as agents of development. In this framework, both Governments and International organizations can play an important role in supporting HTAs to improve their organizational and technical capabilities.

## KEYWORDS

Collective remittances, local development, Hometown associations, cultural identity, governance

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2016) *Migration and Remittances Factbook*.

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# The role of collective remittances in community development: The case of Hometown Associations

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BARBARA BONCIANI

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, the links between migration and development have received great attention from policy makers, international and civil society organizations and academics.

In this context, the importance of contributions from migrants to development has been highlighted in several documents and studies (Gammage and Alison 2004; Bruyn 2008; Goldring L 2003; Orozco and Rouse 2007). Starting from the end of 1990s, different reports on development have paid great attention to the issue of international migration and remittances in order to explore the impact of the latter on developing countries<sup>1</sup>.

On the contrary, the role of collective remittances is a relatively new phenomenon in the migration literature (Orozco and Rouse 2007).

Hometown associations (HTAs) are associations of migrants coming from the same country, but their role in supporting initiatives in their members' countries of origin is rather understudied. The first Global Forum on Migration and Development, held in Brussels in 2007, explored the link between migrant associations and development. Recommendations focused on the importance of "identify[ing] partners within the diaspora (numbers, locations, skills etc.) and support[ing] diaspora organizations' organizational and representation capacities" (Task Force for the preparation of the GFMD 2007: 11).

Collective remittances through HTAs are an important tool to support development in the countries of origin and a new source of financing for development policies. Recently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has pointed out that it is important to "identify innovative strategies and to evaluate, improve and scale up existing approaches" (IOM 2013: 5).

In addition, the debate on the post-2015 Agenda has examined the impact that migration and remittances might have on development policies. In 2017, the Global Forum on Remittances, Investment and Development<sup>2</sup> promoted global awareness of the contribution of remittances to the well-being of migrant families and communities in the home countries. Considering that

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, three major reports have been published on international migration and remittances: the World Bank's 2006 "Global Economic Prospects" report, the 2005 final report of the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM "Migration in an Interconnected World: New Diaspora for action" and Bimal Ghosh's "Migrants' Remittances and Development: Myths, Rhetoric and Realities". The World Bank has also published the "Migration and Development Brief" on the efforts to be made in order to feature migration and remittances in the Post.-2015 Agenda. Moreover, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has published the "IOM position on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda" stressing the links between migration and development.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Headquarters, New York 15-16 June 2017.

there are more than 251 million international migrants<sup>3</sup>, this paper aims to contribute to the debate on collective remittances as a source of external financing in developing countries. Particularly, it provides a contribution to the debate on the role of HTAs as new subjects in transnational funding strategies.

Most of the literature on HTAs comes from Latin America, as these organizations first developed in the 1990s among the Latin American and Caribbean diaspora in Canada and the United States. Several studies have shown that projects developed by HTAs can have an important direct and indirect impact on community development. Projects targeting the fields of education, healthcare and water and sewage systems help communities improve their quality of life and build their social capital, which is considered one of the key factors in improving self-sustainability processes. Moreover, projects in the electricity and transportation fields facilitate the construction of the infrastructure needed by the private sector (USAID 2004).

Most of the activities of HTAs are carried out in poor rural areas and focus on social welfare and infrastructures, as well as on economic projects. In this context, collective remittances are used for investments in new or existing enterprises with the purpose of contributing to job and income generation in the home communities. HTAs play an important role in providing knowledge on investment opportunities and in collecting money for investments in the countries of origin. HTAs participate in the start-up and consolidation of business activities to facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge in business management, organization, and financial practices. In addition to this, they help new arrivals in the destination countries to maintain links with their communities of origin.

Recent studies on HTAs are descriptive, because collecting data on these associations is a difficult task, considering both their small size and informal nature. Much remains to be done to evaluate and thoroughly explore their social and economic impact as agents of development, so as to bridge the current knowledge gap.

This paper is organized as follows. First of all, we explore the nature of HTAs and their role as agents of development. Indeed, these associations do not merely donate money, but play a relevant active role in planning, implementing and monitoring their projects too. They also exchange human capital, knowledge and culture between the diaspora and the communities of origin. This helps people to gain new capabilities, to be more active in developing processes and to improve self-sustainability processes in the home countries.

Secondly, we use data to understand the opportunities that HTAs generate for donors and governments in development strategies, as in recent years they have started to collaborate with different stakeholders to promote their development projects. Existing evidence shows different ways in which these associations collaborate with governments, foundations, and non-profit and private sector organizations.

Finally, we focus on the strengths and weaknesses of HTAs and suggest some policies to boost their abilities in achieving development goals.

## 2 THE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE OF HOMETOWN ASSOCIATIONS

Remittances have emerged as a major source of external financing in development policies. According to recent World Bank data, remittance flows remain a key resource for developing countries, exceeding both official development assistance and private debt, as well as portfolio equity.

Developing countries received remittances for over \$438 billion in 2015 and this trend is expected to continue growing (World Bank 2016). Indeed, remittances represent a substantial source of revenue for many poor states (World Bank 2016), accounting in some cases for as much as one third of their GDP (Ifad 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> According to World Bank data, more than 247 million people live outside their country of birth and the number of international migrants has risen from 175 million in 2000 to more than 251 million in 2015 (World Bank 2016).

While individual remittances are often used for the primary needs of families, such as food, clothing and debt payment, collective remittances from HTAs are usually spent in the home countries for the purpose of community development, for instance on infrastructural or social projects.

Some diaspora communities have set up HTAs in order to allow immigrants from the same city or region to maintain strong ties with their place of origin, and migrant associations are active in most major migrant destinations, such as the United States, Europe, Africa and East Asia. In the United States, there are around 3,000 Mexican HTAs, Filipino groups amount to 1,000 units, and there are about 500 Ghanaian organizations (Bonciani 2018, 2017; Alarcón 2002; Orozco and Rouse 2007). Naturally, new HTAs are set up in new destination countries, as a result of recent immigration flows.

Although the total number of these associations changes every year and remains difficult to quantify, according to existing data, their engagement in community development projects is becoming increasingly relevant.

Surveys have shown that the percentage of migrants who send remittances through HTAs varies across countries. The amount of money for community initiatives is generally relatively small, usually less than \$10,000 and never above \$20,000 for each initiative (Orozco and Rouse, 2007). On average, 9% of remittance senders in the United State belong to an HTA: 9% of these are from Latin America, 29% from Guyana and 16% from Jamaica. Instead, among African migrants, 16% are from Nigeria and 15% from Ghana. In the case of Ghanaians, this figure is relatively higher among migrants living in Europe (Orozco and Rouse, 2007).

Most of these organizations are completely voluntary and do not have an official non-profit status. Those that achieve a higher level of institutional maturity are more likely to adopt a formal non-profit status and receive funds from third-party organizations and governments. They normally start out as informal associations, created through the efforts of migrants from the same hometown, in order to establish informal bonds and preserve cultural traditions. While in the destination countries HTAs mainly support their members by finding housing and employment and by providing small loans, in the home countries they contribute to community development through specific projects.

In order to better understand the role of HTAs, it is crucial to take into account two main aspects: their ability to establish links between migrants and development efforts in their home countries, and the part that they play in facilitating migrant integration into the society of the destination country.

Migrants need to stay connected to family and friends, whom they have left behind, and to maintain their cultural identity abroad. HTAs can indeed create a sense of community among recent immigrants with similar backgrounds. They act as catalysts for new migrants that need advice on employment, housing and other issues and wish to maintain their cultural practices in the destination countries. The integration services offered by the associations are vital for migrants and greatly affect their quality of life.

In the home countries, the work of HTAs generally targets the most vulnerable portions of the population, sometimes overlapping with local development policies. Many of their initiatives are implemented in rural areas and have a large development impact on recipient communities, providing significant benefits. Migrant associations often offer aid in communities where the capacity of the local government has fallen short. The significance of these projects lies in their potential to promote social justice, an important component of any development philosophy. The primary activity of HTAs is fundraising for ongoing programmes or special needs, such as natural disasters, but their focus is mainly on the promotion of health and educational activities.

Migrants from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa donate school or medical supplies to home institutions or provide basic infrastructures through the construction of clinics, hospitals, classrooms, parks and homes. They also donate money for special occasions or circumstances, such as religious celebrations.

### 3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

As recent data confirm, various subjects engaged in development issues have been interested in linking development priorities to the work of hometown associations. International organizations, governments and the private sector have the potential to team up with HTAs, so that the latter may help them to better implement their strategies.

Previous experiences indicate that there can be different types of partnership between HTAs and other actors aimed at developing projects in the communities of origin. HTAs liaise with local organizations in the home community in order to implement their projects. Yet, the drive to set up partnerships with migrant associations has often come from the governments of the countries of origin, and two of the most successful collaborations between governments and HTAs have taken place in Mexico and in El Salvador.

The “Iniciativa Ciudadana 3 por 1” in Mexico is among the first examples of co-financed community projects, in which the Mexican government combined collective remittances with public funds and private sector contributions. Within the project, each dollar contributed by migrant associations was matched with another dollar from each of the levels of Government (Federal, State and Municipal). The first 3x1 programme was financed in the Mexican State with the strongest and oldest migratory tradition: Zacatecas. In 1960, the Federation of Zacatecan Clubs started to raise funds to develop social and recreational projects in the State. The practice has continued since then and 80% of Mexican hometown associations have approached municipal leaders to discuss their projects, coordinate efforts and distribute resources (Goldring 2003, 2004; Meseguer, Aparicio 2012; Duquette-Rury 2014). In El Salvador, the National Development Agency applied a similar programme called “Unidos por la Solidaridad”, which came about thanks to the participation of municipalities, NGOs and Salvadoran organizations abroad. The programme financed the construction and maintenance of basic community infrastructures, such as schools, communal recreational facilities and healthcare centres, by matching national resources with the funds transferred by HTAs located in the United State and Canada. Between 1999 and 2003 the *Fondo de Inversión Social para el Desarrollo Local* (FISDL) carried out 45 projects with HTAs, local institutions and NGOs in 27 municipalities in El Salvador. A total of \$11.4 million were invested in these projects: \$7 million coming from the FISDL, \$2.3 million from the municipalities and ministries and a further \$2.1 million from the HTAs (Gammage, 2005). The programme is still active and the FISDL collaborates with hometown associations based in California, the Greater Washington DC area, Florida, New York, Texas, Canada and Italy.

In addition to these initiatives, both international and non-profit organizations have formed innovative partnerships with HTAs to promote community development in their home countries, as HTAs are seen as reliable partners. Existing data show different types of involvement and partnerships between these associations and international development agencies. One of the most common initiatives consists in direct funding of HTAs projects by an international development agency. For example, in 2008 the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) funded a pilot programme with Pakistani HTAs based in Norway that contributed to community development in Pakistan. The programme, implemented by Pakistani HTAs and NGO professionals from Norway, was initially funded for four years. NORAD matched the contributions collected by Pakistani-Norwegian civil society organizations, which were able to raise at least \$20,000, and agreed to provide a total of over \$200,000.

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has funded studies to explore various methods through which migrants from developed countries can contribute to economic development in their homelands. Other initiatives focus on making the prospective actions of international development organizations more effective. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Department for International Development funds events that aim to support African HTAs’ development objectives in their countries of origin.

Another type of initiative involves the participation of hometown associations in co-development policies by working in partnership with different stakeholders. In France, the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides 70% of funds for development projects in Mali and Senegal that are carried out and co-funded by HTAs and the communities of origin. Moreover, the French Government oversees a support programme for Migrant Solidarity Organizations that provides technical assistance and co-funding to projects in the original communities. In Italy, HTAs and civil society organizations submitted more than 70 project proposals in a competition sponsored by the Municipality of Milan to sustain co-development projects. The Municipality of Milan, the Region of Lombardy and the Milanese financial community launched a foundation called Alliance for Africa, which allocates 10 million Euros to support microcredit in Africa.

Furthermore, in Tuscany, two Senegalese Associations (Cheik Ahmadou Bamba Touba Toscana and Florence Senegal Association) co-financed a project to improve health services for children and mothers in the city of Touba, in partnership with the Municipality of Pontedera, five healthcare institutions, three hospitals, non-profit organizations and other local associations. The project was set up thanks to the contribution of territorial institutions and associations previously involved in international cooperation activities in Senegal. The existence of strong 'social capital', based on the existing friendship between the Tuscan community and Senegal, greatly facilitated the initiative. Besides strengthening healthcare, the goal was to raise awareness of the need for prenatal consultations and assisted births and to experiment new ways of free access to healthcare. Additionally, great importance was given to the training of healthcare workers in order to guarantee the sustainability of the project. Cheik Ahmadou Bamba Touba Toscana collected €50,000 to co-finance the initiative, which had a total cost of €180,000.

Another important experience developed in Ghana, thanks to the efforts of the Sankofa Foundation, a Ghanaian diaspora organization based in the Netherlands. The project, which mobilized investments from Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands, provided Ghanaian women with start-up materials and technical training so that they could raise poultry and manage their own businesses, with the ultimate goal of allowing them to become economically independent.

Data show that collaboration between HTAs and international development agencies is more frequent in countries with weak governance structures. In some areas, NGOs have set up capacity building programmes for migrant organizations. In this context, one of the better-known initiatives was carried out by the Dutch development NGO Oxfam Novib, which offered courses to develop the capabilities and skills of HTAs in improving project development. The courses focused on topics such as project cycle management and planning, proposal development and fundraising. Moreover, Oxfam Novid organized different international meetings to enable migrant organizations to learn from each other's experiences.

Finally, the private sector may play an important role in facilitating the work of hometown associations. In 2003, the Salvadoran bank Banco Agrícola set up an important and innovative programme that matched remittance transfers made through the bank with donations to a fund for community projects led by migrant associations. In Mexico, Western Union unveiled its "four for one" programme in 2005, which added an additional tier of funds matched with donations made by Mexican HTAs up to a cap of \$1.25 million.

One last example concerns the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (MIF), one of the first institutions to address the link between remittances and development, which initiated a partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) of the United Nations. The two institutions created a \$7.6 million fund for remittance-related microfinance and investment projects (Otzoco and Fedewa 2006).

#### 4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In order to explore and understand the role of HTAs in aiding development in the countries of origin of their members, it is important to keep in mind that the links between diasporas and home communities do not revolve solely around money transfer. Indeed, there is an exchange of human capital, knowledge and culture. Dialogue between transnational identity and traditional

identity of the home communities might change the way in which local people in the origin countries approach local development, improving the self-sustainability process. The local people have the opportunity to gain new capabilities that might improve their quality of life and facilitate future community development. Potentially, HTAs might transform political culture and aid civil participation, also encouraging transparency and accountability within communities and local governments. However, migrant organizations are confronted with several obstacles that can hinder their efforts. The lack of own financial resources is one of the most important limitations, as they often collect money by organizing cultural activities and other events, but total donations are unfortunately rather small.

In addition to this, the lack of appropriate organizational and technical skills might reduce the effectiveness of their activities. Indeed, most diaspora organizations do not possess the financial and institutional capabilities and means to support community development projects and they often need organizational and technical support to reach their objectives. Finally, the fact that their institutional counterparts often fail to act as effective development partners and the HTAs' own poor experience in project management might limit the efforts

The impact of these associations on development seems to be greater when they are more solidly established and act in partnership with other organizations, such as governments, foundations and the private sector. Moreover, just a few associations have an established organizational structure and strong community counterparts in their origin countries.

Their size influences the ability of HTAs to develop projects in the local communities of origin, to gain a wider network of members and to collect more money for their activities. Moreover, HTA members are usually more committed to donating time and money to long-established associations. Smaller associations usually have more restricted access to social capital and their fundraising potential is more limited. Also, they tend to have less power and legitimacy when participating in the life of their hometown communities (Somerville *at al.* 2008). Indeed, experiences show that, when different individual HTAs unite to form federations, they appear to be more effective in their networking and fundraising activities.

Another challenge faced by HTAs is that they are voluntary organizations and typically do not have the resources needed to undertake expansive projects. Moreover, their members are rarely experts in development processes and methods, and have other jobs and responsibilities in their normal life. Lack of autonomy in developing projects is a further issue. One of the most important problems for them is to coordinate the activities of their members and find the necessary skills within the associations themselves. This is why projects are usually developed in partnership with other participants who can provide technical competences and funds.

According to recent studies, the success of their initiatives mainly depends on organizational aspects and involvement of government and non-government actors. As mentioned above, HTAs appear to be more effective as development players when they conduct their work in partnership with other organizations. Partnerships between governments, non-profit or private subjects and HTAs should concentrate on strengthening and complementing the efforts of the latter in achieving their development objectives, and interference with the migrants' decision-making processes should be kept to a minimum.

The role of local counterparts in developing and implementing projects is very important in order to unleash their full potential and, when said counterparts do not have sufficient institutional capabilities to act as development partners, the effectiveness of actions in the home communities is seriously undermined. On the other hand, HTAs often lack coordination capabilities, which might reduce their ability to monitor projects, therefore affecting the transparency of the whole process. Indeed, partnerships with local governments require a high level of transparency to combat corruption. In El Salvador, for example, within the programme *Unidos por la Solidariedad*, only government-approved contractors were entrusted with building and maintain infrastructures, and HTA representatives could do nothing but object to the lack of transparency as well as corruption and inefficiency of these contractors.

Another important element for success is the role that trust and reciprocity play in implementing HTA projects. Starting a project in partnership with transnational communities requires local coordinating agents. However, existing data show that communities that take on

the responsibility of project oversight do so voluntarily and without an established mechanism to influence project implementation. The success of HTAs initiatives depends mainly on the presence of community organizations with which to work in the countries of origin. In this framework, the existence of rich social capital is an essential factor to ensure the success of the initiatives. Networks based on solidarity, reciprocity and trust, which include local leadership, political parties, and religious bodies, are essential platforms for HTAs transnational activities.

According to Gammage, HTAs with little social capital are less able to implement, manage and monitor projects (Gammage 2005). Moreover, recent studies suggest that a higher level of migrant integration in the destination country facilitates their role as development agents in the home countries. Somerville underlines that fully integrated migrants are in the best position to contribute to the development of their communities of origin (Somerville *et al.* 2008).

As mentioned above, most of the literature on HTAs comes from Latin America. By using evidence from Mexico, Orzoco and Welle (2006) identified four criteria to evaluate the role of HTAs as actors in transnational development: ownership, correspondence, sustainability and replicability. They applied these criteria to explore HTAs projects in Mexican rural communities and found that the ability of these associations to achieve development goals largely depends on whether community members are able to participate in decision-making processes and monitor projects after completion. That is what the authors describe as “ownership”. Another important criterion is “correspondence”, which refers to how effective projects are in identifying and meeting the basic needs of the target communities, seen as the main priority in development strategies. “Sustainability” is linked to the ability of a project to have a long cycle, while “replicability” obviously has to do with whether a project can be replicated in other communities. The authors also noted that the size of the HTAs plays a significant role in the development process. In their opinion, the creation of several umbrella federations in the United States has strongly facilitated the collaboration between HTAs and the Mexican government. One last crucial feature is that HTAs must be closely connected to their local community partners in order to learn about development priorities.

## 5 POSSIBLE PROGRAMMATIC OR POLICY INTERVENTIONS

As illustrated above, HTAs have different weaknesses that influence their role as development agents. The lack of technical skills and limited institutional and financial capacity hinder their ability to meet development goals, so it is important to provide them with financial and technical assistance. Since most of them have failed to develop effective organizational structures, training in strategic development capabilities, management skills and decision-making processes might also prove useful to ensure their full participation in developing, implementing and monitoring projects. Strengths maximization and increased cooperation abilities can be achieved by teaching HTAs to build up relationships as well as to improve collaborative planning activities. In addition, it is important to assist their counterparts in the home communities, as the latter need to improve their institutional and technical abilities in order to be effective partners in projects. This will also contribute to increased civic participation in the countries of origin.

Local and national governments should implement initiatives focused on improving coordination among HTAs located in the same region or city in the destination countries. This might help them to be better organized and to create stable networks with other territorial associations, so that they can work together and exchange experiences and practices. Moreover, better coordination might help associations located in the same territory in their efforts to raise funds and look for partners.

To improve their technical skills, HTAs require specific assistance in project lifecycle design and management, as well as in activity planning and implementation. Programmes focused on providing methods to search for partners and strengthen links with local counterparts are desirable too.

Among their weaknesses, hometown associations suffer from a lack of own financial resources, as the amount of money that they manage to collect and then send back to their home communities is quite small. Nonetheless, these funds have a significant impact on poor communities, which generally do not have access to any financial resources. This is why HTAs should be given the appropriate tools to enable them to undertake larger projects with other partners, boosting their ability to collect money and find both calls for projects and actors willing to collaborate. In the case of HTAs or federations involved in productive projects, support should concentrate on business plan drafting and management know-how. The presence of a weak market environment may undermine enterprise sustainability. In this context, hometown associations and their local counterparts must be helped to identify potentially profitable investments by offering them financial and technical assistance.

Finally, it is important to pressure financial institutions to leverage the relationship between financial intermediation and remittance transfers. Indeed, the cost of transferring money from the destination countries to the origin communities is very high and represents a major source of concern for immigrants and their associations. Although progress has been made, transaction costs remain far above the Sustainable Development Goal of 10c: “by 2030 reduce to less than 3% the costs of migrant remittances”. The average cost of sending remittances is now 7.45%, a sizeable decrease from 9.8% in 2008<sup>4</sup>. This is a serious issue as it takes money away from the world’s poorest and limits the efforts of HTAs in their activities (Bonciani, 2018). In some cases, migrants still pay transfer fees equal to 20% of the amount that they send. The problem is particularly severe in Africa, where the World Bank’s Send Money Africa database shows that the cost of transferring remittances averaged 14.6% in 2015 (IFAD, 2016). Transaction costs have remained essentially flat over the past few years and unacceptably high in many low-volume corridors. Higher transaction costs are most common in the poorest countries and in rural areas, which often lack adequate remittance infrastructures (IFAD, 2016, Bonciani, 2018). In order to reduce said costs, it is imperative to open up the market to other operators and create additional competition.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The potential value of HTAs projects for development goals has been recognized by governments, civil society organizations, and academics. The table below describes different types of partnerships between HTAs and other actors involved in implementing development projects in the communities of origin.

Table 1. HTA partnership and governance structures

Country of origin	HTA Destination country	Partnership	HTA Governance
Senegal	Italy	HTAs, Government (Municipal), Healthcare institutions, Hospitals, NGOs	Individual
Ghana	Netherlands	HTAs	Federation
Mexico	United States	HTAs, Government (Federal, State and Municipal) / Private	Federation
Mali	France	HTAs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Individual
Pakistan	Norway	HTAs, NGOs	Individual

Source: Author’s own processing of data.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank 2017.

The Senegal project highlights the engagement of HTAs in partnerships with the Government, Healthcare institutions, Hospitals and NGOs. The two Italian HTAs involved were relatively small and that is why they needed to act within a broad partnership to achieve their development goals. The second experience shown in the table is a successful example of how a federation of HTAs managed to mobilize investments from Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands to promote development projects in their home country. Regarding government initiatives in the country of origin, two of the most successful collaborations with HTAs took place in Mexico. In these co-financial projects, the Mexican government combined collective remittances with public funds and private sector contributions. Another governmental experience reported in the table is the case of Mali, where the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided funds for development projects co-funded by HTAs. In addition to these initiatives, non-profit organizations have formed innovative partnerships with HTAs to promote community development in the countries of origin, exemplified by the Pakistani project initiated from Norway.

Evidence confirms that the involvement of these associations in cooperation projects helps to address social and economic problems in their communities of origin. Nevertheless, several obstacles still need to be overcome to fully exploit the potential of HTAs as development agents, such as their institutional and financial weaknesses and the lack of technical skills among their members. All these factors limit the scale and impact of their projects.

Although collecting data on these associations is a difficult task, considering their small size and informal nature, new approaches should be pursued to facilitate the exploration of the social and economic impact of their actions. A first step could be collaborative data collection, to be carried out by local governments in partnership with NGOs, migrant communities and academics, in order to identify the hometown associations existing in the destination countries. This might help academics to carry out research and government agencies, NGOs and hometown associations themselves to strengthen their links with donors and potential partners.

Moreover, developing a policy-relevant research agenda on HTAs and their role in local community development will be important to evaluate outcomes, exchange good practices and, where possible, replicate the most successful activities in other communities. Indeed, some HTAs have a longer tradition of implementing projects by matching funds with collective remittances in partnership with local governments and other stakeholders, and it is their valuable experience that should be shared with equivalent associations worldwide.

In order to support diaspora associations from an organizational point of view and strengthen their technical and coordination capabilities, international and local stakeholders might put in place different strategies starting, mainly by mapping HTAs operating in specific territories and establishing links among them. Strong territorial cooperation will promote deeper understanding between local governments and HTAs in the destination countries. Territorial governments must create a coordination environment in which these organizations can move, establishing new links and networks with different stakeholders. These activities might contribute to meeting the goals of the post-2015 development agenda and boosting the impact that migration and remittances have in the achievement of development goals.

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