DENMARK HOSTS A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF REFUGEES FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, MANY OF THEM CONSTITUTING SO-CALLED DIASPORA COMMUNITIES. IN 2010, DRC DECIDED TO WORK WITH THE SOMALI AND AFGHAN DIASPORAS, TWO OF THE LARGEST DIASPORA-GROUPS IN DENMARK, SEEKING TO FACILITATE THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN. THIS EVALUATION AND LEARNING BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL’S DIASPORA PROGRAMME, SEEKING TO SHARE EXPERIENCES THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE PROGRAMMING.

INTRODUCTION
Since 1992 the Danish Refugee Council has been providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations, refugees, internally displaced people and host communities in the conflict areas of the world. In Denmark, DRC is committed to support the process of integration and to offer protection, counselling and advice to migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. This commitment towards assisting migrants and displaced persons in both Denmark and elsewhere in conflict affected countries inspired the Danish Refugee Council to initiate the Diaspora Programme, promoting an active role of diaspora organisations towards the development of their countries of origin. The Diaspora Programme works with a co-development approach, based on the transnational role of migrants, recognizing the positive and mutually reinforcing impacts that diaspora initiatives have in both origin and destination country. To DRC, this aspect is a valuable match to its own transnational approach. The Diaspora Programme thus represents a natural continuation of DRC’s work with conflict-affected and displaced populations, facilitating yesterday’s beneficiaries to become today’s actors of development.

DRC EXPERIENCE WITH SUPPORT TO DIASPORAS
DRC’s first attempts to engage diasporas for joint development initiatives date back to the early 2000, when the collaboration with a Somali diaspora organisation was formalised to rehabilitate the city infrastructures in Burao, Somaliland. DRC issued a support project to facilitate recruitment and secondments of Somali diaspora into DRC and partner organisations. Besides these first approaches, the first structured diaspora pilot project started in September 2010, in collaboration with the Danish organisation CISU (Civil Society in Development). It entailed the management of the Fund for Diaspora Involvement in Rehabilitation and Development in former Home Countries, whose aim was to support diaspora organisations in implementing humanitarian and development projects in their countries of origin.

The current Diaspora Programme (2012-2015) is based on lessons learned from the pilot phase and is funded by DANIDA with the overall objective of improving the impact of relief, rehabilitation and development activities by strengthening the role of diasporas as development actors.

LESSONS LEARNED ON HOW TO BEST DESIGN PROGRAMMES IN SUPPORT OF DIASPORA-LED DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES.
Communities in Somalia perceive the diaspora as an important actor for the development of their countries of origin. This is partly due to the fact that the diaspora often is the only actor that actively and continuously supports a specific community.

Today, two years into the Diaspora Programme, DRC has granted 5 million DKK to 21 projects in Somalia and Afghanistan. An external midterm evaluation conducted in 2014 (Saggiomo & Ferro, 2014) ascertained that the majority of projects funded under DRC Diaspora Programme have a positive impact.

The following lessons learned draw on findings from the midterm evaluation and other research conducted in cooperation with the Programme, and aim at providing guiding principles for future programming.

**WHY SUPPORT DIASPORAS?**

- **Migrants as Brokers of Change**
  Research conducted as part of the Diaspora Programme’s midterm evaluation has shown that beneficiary communities in Somalia perceive the diaspora as an important actor for the development of their countries of origin. This is partly due to the fact that the diaspora often is the only actor that actively and continuously supports a specific community, and partly because the contribution that the diaspora offers to local communities often is a response to locally expressed demands and needs. Migrants and beneficiaries share common origins, language and culture, which also contributes to a positive perception of diasporas as development actors among local communities. Additionally, the diaspora uses project implementation modalities that are more in line with the local culture being them based on trust, oral reports and exchanges between partners.

  All these factors potentially add value to diaspora-led initiatives, as compared to initiatives implemented by other international organisations.

- **Innovation**
  In addition to above, the positive perception of diasporas as development actors by the beneficiaries has been seen to facilitate the introduction of innovative practices. In fact, the evaluation’s surveys have shown that the diaspora is almost equally valued for its innovative thinking and advanced capacities as for its monetary contribution and cultural remittances, making it an excellent potential broker of change in their country of origin.

  Innovative projects are initiatives that introduce new practices to the beneficiary communities, proposing to change or set aside traditional customs. Usually promoted by highly educated specialists in the diaspora (e.g. doctors, engineers), innovative projects address problems that the community itself might not have recognized, and propose solutions that are conceptually new to the beneficiaries. Within the Diaspora Programme, DRC has funded some innovative projects. One example hereof is the project related to Mental Health Hospital in Burao (Somaliland), and the construction of a Library and Cultural Centre in Allingar (Afghanistan). In Burao, a Somali diaspora association in cooperation with a Danish university introduced a telemedical system in order to enable the hospital to offer weekly online consultations with Somali psychiatrists residing in Sweden. Members of the Somali diaspora thus introduced modern practices to an under-recognized problem for the modest cost of an internet connection. The initiative was appreciated by the local community as well as by existing medical personnel in Somaliland. In Allingar, an Afghan diaspora association built a library for students and a cultural centre with computers and internet access. The local community was initially reluctant towards the project, but changed its attitude once the increased access to information and study facilities produced a positive impact on the number of students from Allingar passing university entrance exams. Since the libraries establishment, a growing number of highschool students have been able to pass entry exams and thus access higher education, constituting a potential opportunity for a future improvement of local economy and living conditions.

- **Strong Commitment**
  Experience from the Diaspora Programme has shown that the long-term success of diaspora initiatives in the countries of origin depends more on the commitment expressed by the diaspora and by its local counterpart than on their technical development and project management skills. Thus, diaspora organisations without specific development competences and experience can very well be appropriate promoters of development processes in their country of origin. This is often the case of diaspora youth organisations, directed by educated leaders, and of those organisations expressing a strong territorial and or clan link with the projects’ beneficiaries.

  Often composed by second-generation migrants, diaspora youth organisations can constitute a bridge between the Danish society and the origin countries, due to their advanced integration process in the Danish society and their aspiration to link with their country of origin. Diaspora organisations supporting their extended families generally seek to fulfill needs directly expressed by local communities, thus working through a bottom-up approach that enhances project ownership and sustainability.
The co-development approach exemplifies this concept by highlighting the dual contribution that diasporas can offer for both country of origin and country of residence.

**HOW TO SUPPORT DIASPORAS**

- **Recognition, Scouting and Technical Assistance**
  Migrants have always been helping their families and communities of origin as a spontaneous expression of their relational linkages. Besides providing access to funding, DRC learned that the three following programmatic elements contribute to enhance the role of diasporas in development: the recognition of diaspora organisations as development actors in the Danish society; the scouting of new organisations and the provision of technical assistance to project implementation.

  Diaspora organisations need to be recognized as development actors by the Danish society as this enhances their legitimacy and commitment towards their countries of origin. Media exposure, the establishment of platforms to facilitate discussion and articulate common visions, as well as the facilitation of mechanisms to channel the voices of diaspora organisations into policy documents are all ways of fostering the recognition of diasporas as development actors. The Diaspora Programme has not yet sufficiently integrated these aspects into its programme structure, but will seek to do so in the future.

  Scouting is the explicit support to new, small or inexperienced diaspora organisations in Denmark. These associations often gather highly motivated persons, who have little or no experience in managing development projects in their country of origin. Through the Diaspora Programme, DRC learned that supporting such organisations can bring good results in terms of multiplier effects that the grant will generate. This was the case for a young Afghan organisation, which received a minor grant to strengthen its organisational setup and to conduct a feasibility study for a proposed intervention to support the primary education of street children. After the initial grant, the organisation managed to collect the funds necessary to further develop and implement the intervention with its own resources. Also, several ‘new’ organisations have been seen to apply for more than one project: through a first grant within the Programme, these organisations discover their ambition to contribute to the development of their country of origin while at the same time gaining practical experience and technical knowledge of how to do so. Experience has shown that organisations re-applying for a second and third grant are showing tangible improvements in their technical and conceptual understanding of development work.

- **Home and Abroad – the Co-Development Approach**
  Research demonstrates that the more migrants advance in their integration process in the host country, the more they are willing and capable to contribute to the development of their countries of origin. The co-development approach exemplifies this concept by highlighting the dual contribution that diasporas can offer for both country of origin and country of residence.

  Complying with donor requirements, the Diaspora Programme as it is now focussed on the country of origin, on enhancing the impact of diaspora-led relief and development projects and thus the quality of life of the beneficiary communities in Somalia and Afghanistan. Training resources are directed towards that goal, focusing on capacity building on technical skills such as project design and management.

  However, through its experience in working with the diasporas, DRC learned that the effectiveness and long-term impact of programmes aiming to facilitate diasporas as development agents would be improved by including activities aimed at supporting the overall organisational development of diaspora organisations, and their recognition as part of the host countries, civil society. This may include for instance actions to empower diaspora organisations’ governance structures, networking skills, activities to improve their advocacy capacity in Denmark, efforts to incorporate diaspora consultations into national policy-level documents and strategy. The Diaspora Programme will seek to integrate activities in that regard into future programming.

- **Know Your Diaspora – the Importance of Evidence Based Programming**
  The current Diaspora Programme strongly focuses on the enhancement of evidence-based programming in the field of Migrations and Development. Particularly, evaluation and research conducted in connection with the Programme (Saggiomo & Ferro 2014; Marquard-Busk & Kessing 2014) has addressed the modalities used by the Somali diaspora to promote development in their homeland; assessed the initial impact of migrant projects; analysed the beneficiaries’ perception of the comparative value of diaspora as development agent; and examined how the Somali diaspora in Denmark identifies itself as agents of development.

  The results of the research produced so far are very valuable for both scientific and programmatic purposes. From a scientific perspective, they point towards the existence of a link between the type of transnational partnership adopted by diaspora associations and the impact of their projects in Somalia. In addition, the results demonstrate a relationship between integration in DK and development engagement in Somalia, which has further implications for policies interested to enhance cooperation with and support to diasporas as development actors. From a programmatic perspective, research results are used to design more effective tools to strengthen the diasporas’ capacity in promoting development. In the future, these may include the design of training packages that are tailored on the individual diaspora organisation’s needs and potentials.
Involving Beneficiaries in Programme Governance – the Advisory Board

One of the best practices identified in the current phase of the Diaspora Programme is the establishment of an Advisory Board that provides input and advice on the design and implementation of the Diaspora Programme as well as on the assessment of diaspora project applications. With the Advisory Boards, the Diaspora Programme seeks to implement a participatory governance system, whose innovative aspect is that the Board is composed of diaspora representatives which are, democratically elected by their communities living in Denmark. Their participation in the Diaspora Programme fulfils the dual aim of improving the Programme itself by creating a closer link and consultation with its primary target group, while at the same time enhancing the role of migrant associations in the Danish society and expressing our recognition of migrants as development actor.

In addition to this, the Advisory Board proved to be an important governance exercise for diaspora members, because it offers the opportunity to practice democratic procedures for decision making and accountability. This provides innovative hands-on learning with transparent governance processes, which is particularly relevant considering that the diasporas’ countries of origin often are politically unstable and weak in terms of democratic governance mechanisms. Within the theoretical framework of circular migrations, where migrants typically move in a circular pattern between home and host country, the workings of the Advisory Board can contribute to a bottom-up stabilisation process by transferring values of democratic governance practices to the local communities that the diaspora organisations are working with, as well as inspire politicians in Somalia, of which many are from the diaspora, on similar practices in the long run.

The Importance of the Diaspora

The term “diaspora” often refers to migrant communities that nurture a dual sense of belonging to both home and host country. Diaspora communities mainly result from forced migrations from their countries of origin, to which they maintain strong ties. They share a commitment to contribute to the restoration, development and maintenance, of their country of origin, and often nurture thoughts of an eventual return, while at the same time seeking to establish and maintain a sustainable livelihood in their country of destination. This dual citizenship, with the diaspora constituting a link between home and host country, has been the subject of research in the last decade, with a focus on the professional, social, cultural and monetary contributions that diasporas are able to send back home, and on their potential to generate development processes. Their capacity to influence economic and social development in their homeland is impressive, considering that in 2013, the global volume of migrants’ remittances to developing countries reached $404 billion, exceeding nearly four times the international community’s investment in Overseas Development Assistance. Money is not the only contribution to the development of migrants’ countries of origin. Cultural remittances, intended as the new ideas, education and work skills acquired by migrants in the host country over the years, largely contribute to the social and economic change in the migrants’ homelands. This is the reason why various actors are directing their attention to the role of diaspora in triggering development and to how their efforts can be complementary to the international cooperation world.