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Assessing co-development projects for civil society building in Iraq: the case of the Iraqi diaspora and Swedish institutions following the 2003 intervention in Iraq

Oula Kadhum

Abstract

While the literature has expounded diaspora's involvement in homeland politics through lobbying efforts to influence hostland foreign policies, involvement in homeland conflicts, and peace-building, this paper addresses a less explored area in the diaspora literature related to the development of democracy through transnational civil society building. Using the case study of the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden, this paper assesses co-development projects financed by Sweden's International Development Corporation Agency (SIDA) between Swedish institutional partners and Iraqi diaspora organisations from 2004 to 2008. Looking at both the perspective of the diaspora and public officials in Sweden, the paper problematizes the notion of diaspora as development partners and provides a nuanced understanding and new insights into the opportunities, challenges and limitations of diasporic initiatives aimed at supporting homeland civil society. Diaspora initiatives, it is argued, need to consider homeland security, understandings of development and goals, as well as homeland social and political contexts for exploring the opportunities and limitations of diasporic contributions. This is important for understanding both how and when diaspora's involvement is to be supported, especially in conflict or post-conflict settings.

Key words: Iraq; Diaspora; Transnationalism; Development; Civil Society

Introduction

This paper explores diaspora co-development projects between Swedish institutions, which were funded by Sweden's International and Development Agency (SIDA) and Iraqi diaspora individuals and organisations between 2004 to 2008. By looking at the perspectives of both institutional partners and diaspora involved in these initiatives, this paper seeks to address and assess co-development projects for a more grounded understanding of the practical challenges that such projects face in conflict zones, but also a clearer understanding of the concept of diaspora as 'partners' in development.

Positioned within the literature that explores the diaspora-development nexus¹, this paper attempts to contribute to the theoretical debates surrounding diasporas as development partners, while new empirical case study of a lesser explored diaspora working in a conflict zone provides new insights. While there are numerous policy and discussion papers that look at this partnership, with a few exceptions², academic case studies that interrogate the impact of development projects as well as address the broader theoretical implications of this relationship are lacking.

This study explores the case of the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden, in the aftermath of Iraq's

¹ Ninna Nyberg-Sorensen, Nicholas Van Hear, and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, 'The Migration-Development Nexus Evidence and Policy Options State-of-the-Art Overview', *International Migration* 40, no. 5 (December 2002): 3–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00210>; Ulf Johansson Dahre, Conference of the Horn of Africa, and Somalia International Rehabilitation Centre, eds., *The Role of Diasporas in Peace, Democracy and Development in the Horn of Africa: [The 5th Annual Somalia International Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) Conference of the Horn of Africa, August 19 - 20, 2006]*, Research Report in Social Anthropology, 2007,1 (Lund: Dep. of Sociology, Lund Univ. [u.a.], 2007); Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership*, Contemporary Political Theory (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hein De Haas, "Engaging Diasporas: How Governments and Development Agencies Can Support Diaspora Involvement in Development of Origin Countries" a Study for Oxfam Novib' (Oxford: International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, 2006); Hein De Haas, 'Remittances, Migration and Social Development', *A Conceptual Review of the Literature*, 2007, <http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/unrisd-remittances-mig-dev>; Dina Ionescu, 'Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners for Home and Destination Countries: Challenges for Policymakers', IOM Migration Research Series (International Organization for Migration, 2006); Nauja Kleist, 'Mobilising "The Diaspora": Somali Transnational Political Engagement', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 2 (March 2008): 307–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830701823855>; Thomas Faist, 'Migrants as Transnational Development Agents: An Inquiry into the Newest Round of the Migration–Development Nexus', *Population, Space and Place* 14, no. 1 (January 2008): 21–42, <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.471>; Bahar Baser, 'Home Thoughts from Abroad: The Variable Impacts of Diasporas on Peace-Building with Feargal Cochrane and Ashok Swain', 2009, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/12175>; Gery Nijenhuis and Annelet Broekhuis, 'Institutionalising Transnational Migrants' Activities: The Impact of Co-Development Programmes', *International Development Planning Review* 32, no. 3–4 (January 2010): 245–65, <https://doi.org/10.3828/idpr.2010.08>; Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi, eds., *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, Africa Now (London, UK : Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books ; Nordic Africa Institute, 2014); Giulia Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement in the Netherlands', in *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, Africa Now (London, UK : Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books ; Nordic Africa Institute, 2014), 190–209; G. Sinatti and C. Horst, 'Migrants as Agents of Development: Diaspora Engagement Discourse and Practice in Europe', *Ethnicities* 15, no. 1 (2015): 134–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796814530120>.

² Gery Nijenhuis and Annelet Broekhuis, 'Institutionalising Transnational Migrants' Activities: The Impact of Co-Development Programmes', *International Development Planning Review* 32, no. 3–4 (January 2010): 245–65; Giulia Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement in the Netherlands', in *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, Africa Now (London, UK : Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books ; Nordic Africa Institute, 2014), 190–209.

2003 US-led intervention. The case study was selected as part of the “Diaspora and Contested Sovereignty project”³, which sought to comparatively explore diasporic political transnationalism of conflict-generated diaspora. This included the case of the Iraqi diaspora in Europe. Sweden was selected due to various factors including its mode of incorporating immigrants, which provides for language classes, funding for native language classes for children and ethnic cultural and social events⁴, its liberal and multicultural citizenship regime⁵, as well as the size of the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden, which numbered 131,888 in 2015, and where political transnationalism was likely to occur.

This paper draws on interviews with 27 members from the Iraqi Swedish diaspora conducted between October 2015 to July 2016, as well as interviews with several civil servants and diplomats who worked alongside the diaspora during the project cycle from 2004 to 2008, and an evaluation report conducted to assess the co-development project commissioned on behalf of SIDA. Four diaspora projects focussed on transporting experiences of democracy through civil society building in Iraq were funded by SIDA and are here examined.

The paper argues that diaspora engagement policies must take into consideration conflict dynamics, as well as historical and political contexts, which as the case study will show can hamper the delivery of projects on the ground, their oversight and

³ Diasporas and Contested Sovereignty Project, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/cpd/diasporas/> [Last accessed 3 August 2018]

⁴ Karin Borevi, ‘Understanding Swedish Multiculturalism’, in *Debating Multiculturalism in the Nordic Welfare States*, ed. Peter Kivisto and Östen Wahlbeck, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 140–69

⁵ Marc Morjé Howard, *The Politics of Citizenship in Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ruud Koopmans et al., *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention*, v. 25 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

learning potential. Fundamentally, if security poses serious dangers to participant lives then co-development projects are not a viable policy option.

Empirically the case study reveals how homeland security, divergent understandings of development, civil society and project goals, as well as homeland social and political contexts can limit co-development projects in conflict areas. These dimensions have not been given sufficient attention in the literature. Ultimately, the paper underlines that conceptually, in terms of co-development projects, diaspora are far from being a true 'partner'. Not only is their involvement conditional on donor criteria as has been previously suggested⁶, but also evidenced by a lack of flexibility in continuing work that may not be measured a success in donor terms, but which is understood by diaspora as fulfilling developmental needs in conflict situations. As such, diaspora co-development projects do not signify a novel development approach. Rather it shows that a Western developmental approach has simply contracted a new developmental actor to conduct its policy goals, as defined by Western ideals and understandings of development and civil society.

The paper starts with a literature review of diaspora and development, with a particular focus on diaspora co-development projects, highlighting the gaps in the literature that this paper seeks to address. This is then followed by a brief background on the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden, Swedish foreign policy towards Iraq following the 2003 intervention and how the idea of co-development between the Iraqi diaspora and SIDA came to fruition. I then look at the three areas underlined by institutional partners and diaspora for an assessment of the challenges faced from each perspective

⁶ Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement'; Nijenhuis and Annelet Broekhuis, 'Institutionalising Transnational Migrants'

and the nature of the partnership between the two. Finally I conclude with some observations about co-development projects in conflict zones, as well as the conceptual implications of diaspora as ‘partners’.

Diaspora and development

The link between diaspora and development has had a long history in the diaspora literature. For the past twenty years this literature has captured the everyday transnational links that transmigrants continue to have with their former homelands⁷. Often these links were translocal, connecting migrants to their hometown associations, local organisations or familial networks, helping in their development through remittances or advocacy work for human rights or women’s rights⁸.

Though this literature had its roots in American scholarship, European scholars soon followed with their own empirical case studies of migrant organisations (MOs) and the development and advocacy work of their migrant communities⁹.

⁷ Georges Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller, ‘Transnational Lives and National Identities: The Identity Politics of Haitian Immigrants’, in *Transnationalism from Below* (Transaction Publishers, 1998); Linda G. Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (S.l.: Gordon and Breach, 1994); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, ‘From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration’, *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48–63.; Nina Glick-Schiller, ‘Long-Distance Nationalism E’, *Issues* 4, no. 1 (2005): 15–19; Alejandro Portes, ‘Introduction: The Debates and Significance of Immigrant Transnationalism’, *Global Networks* 1, no. 3 (2001): 181–194; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 3rd ed., rev.expanded, and updated (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Alejandro Portes, ‘Conclusion: Towards a New World - the Origins and Effects of Transnational Activities’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1 January 1999): 463–77; Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith, ‘The Locations of Transnationalism’, *Transnationalism from Below* 6 (1998): 3–34.

⁸ Glick Schiller et al., ‘From Immigrant to Transmigrant’; Glick Schiller et al., ‘Nations Unbound’; Fouron and Glick Schiller, ‘Transnational Lives and National Identities’; Levitt, ‘The Transnational Villagers’; Carolle Charles, ‘Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism (1980-1990)’, *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 1 (1995): 135–64; Manuel Orozco and Michelle Lapointe, ‘Mexican Hometown Associations and Development Opportunities’, *JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS-COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY* 57, no. 2 (2004): 31–52.

⁹ Nijenhuis and Annelet Broekhuis, ‘Institutionalising Transnational Migrants’; Marieke Van Houte, Nathalie Perrin, and Anna Ornert, ‘The Country of Residence and Migrant Transnationalism:How Do

In time diaspora were hailed as development agents¹⁰, as actors that could mobilise to redress global developmental inequalities through brain gain¹¹, financial remittances¹², and investments¹³. More recent scholarship has addressed diaspora mobilisation from the perspective of homeland governments and their diaspora policies and institutions to encourage development and economic growth¹⁴.

Beyond supporting livelihoods materially or providing much needed expertise and skills, diaspora are also transporting new ideas and practices to countries of origin. As such, instead of development through aid or material support, social remittances are

Opportunity Structures in Countries of Residence Transnational Attitudes and Behaviour of Migrant Organisations from the African Great Lakes Region?', in *Migration and Organised Civil Society*, 2013; Laura Morales and Laia Jorba, 'Transnational Links and Practices of Migrants' Organisations in Spain Laura Morales and Laia Jorba', in *Diaspora and Transnationalism Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Liza Mügge, 'Ideologies of Nationhood in Sending-State Transnationalism: Comparing Surinam and Turkey', *Ethnicities*, 18 September 2012, 1468796812451096; Marlou Schrover and Floris Vermeulen, 'Immigrant Organisations', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 5 (1 September 2005): 823–32; Dirk Halm and Zeynep Sezgin, *Migration and Organized Civil Society: Rethinking National Policy* (Routledge, 2013); Eva Kristine Østergaard-Nielsen, 'Transnational Political Practices and the Receiving State: Turks and Kurds in Germany and the Netherlands', *Global Networks* 1, no. 3 (2001): 261–282; Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie, 'Political Participation and Political Trust in Amsterdam: Civic Communities and Ethnic Networks', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 4 (1999): 703–26; Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany*, *Transnationalism* 8 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003); Ruba Salih, 'Moroccan Migrant Women: Transnationalism, Nation-States and Gender', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 4 (1 October 2001): 655–71.

¹⁰ Devesh Kapur, 'Remittances - The New Development Mantra', Research/academic paper, 26 February 2009; Hein De Haas, 'Remittances, Migration and Social Development', *A Conceptual Review of the Literature*, 2007; Stephen Lubkemann, 'Liberian Remittance Relief and Not-Only-for-Profit Entrepreneurship — Exploring the Economic Relevance of Diasporas in Post-Conflict Transitions', in *Diasporas and International Development: Exploring the Potential*, 2008.

¹¹ Rubin Patterson, 'Transnationalism: Diaspora-Homeland Development', *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (1 June 2006): 1891–1907.

¹² Kapur, 'Remittances - The New Development Mantra'; Lubkemann, 'Liberian Remittance Relief'.

¹³ Devesh Kapur, *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mark Sidel, 'Focusing on the State: Government Responses to Diaspora Giving and Implications for Equity', in *Diasporas and Development*, ed. Barbara J. Merz, Lincoln C. Chen, and Peter F. Geithner, *Studies in Global Equity* (Cambridge, Mass: Published by Global Equity Initiative, Asia Center, Harvard University : Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Alan Gamlen et al., 'WP-78-2013: Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions — Oxford IMI', November 2013; Francesco Ragazzi, 'A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies', *Political Geography*, 2014; Liza Mügge, 'Ideologies of Nationhood in Sending-State Transnationalism: Comparing Surinam and Turkey', *Ethnicities*, 18 September 2012, 1468796812451096.

transferred, which develop new norms and values¹⁵. Levitt coined the term social remittances to refer to the norms, practices, identities and social capital that migrants send back to their countries of origin, a distinction from financial remittances related to money¹⁶. Levitt's study of the Dominican diaspora showed that the ideas and behaviours that Dominicans brought with them, such as community organization and social responsibility, were transformed in the US as they met with a legal framework that demanded accountability and contractual agreements. In turn, legal norms, accountability and transparency were some of the social remittances that diaspora leaders remitted back to the country of origin when dealing with community projects back home¹⁷. As the Dominican community leaders' organizational capacity and ideas about public services fomented in the host country, they were able to further institutionalize these in their hometowns.

Exactly what is transported back is dependent on a number of factors including the hostlands that diaspora live in, their education, work experiences, social class and broader environment¹⁸. However, for diaspora from developing countries living in Western hostlands, experiences and expressions of democracy have become an important element that many wish to transport back to countries of origin experiencing state collapse, conflict, or authoritarianism¹⁹. Through return or circular migration to countries of origin, diaspora are transporting democratic principles, such

¹⁵ Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*; Liisa Laakso and Petri Hautaniemi, eds., *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, Africa Now (London, UK : Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books ; Nordic Africa Institute, 2014); Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, 'Contributions of Digital Diasporas to Governance Reconstruction in Post-Conflict and Fragile States: Potential and Promise', *Rebuilding Governance in Post-Conflict Societies: What's New, What's Not*, 2006, 185–203.

¹⁶ Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*

¹⁷ Peggy Levitt and Deepak Lamba-Nieves, 'Social Remittances Revisited', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 2011): 1–22.

¹⁸ Kapur, *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy*

¹⁹ Dahre et al., 'The Role of Diasporas in Peace'; Kleist, 'Mobilising "The Diaspora"'.

as effective political participation²⁰ through civil society and social capital²¹. Indeed, diaspora have been labelled norm entrepreneurs and hailed as agents of the liberal peace²². Various religious and county Liberian diaspora organisations in the US, for example, have attempted to spread norms of pluralism, rule of law, human rights, anti-corruption and democracy in their home country²³. The Somalian diaspora's experience in exile in Denmark and their exposure to education and democracy has resulted in creating new governance visions for reconstruction and peaceful engagement, that stands in contrast to the warlords in the homeland²⁴. In the Horn of Africa a plethora of diasporic organisations have been supporting democratic practices including influencing peace, supporting women's rights, minority rights and human rights in Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan²⁵.

Diaspora's potential for developing homelands has been further recognised by several international organisations and initiatives, including the European Commission, the Global Commission for International Migration, the United Nations General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the Global Forum on Migration and Development²⁶. Diaspora were considered new actors incorporated into the development mantra stimulating new collaborations with UN agencies, including the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which

²⁰ Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (Yale University Press, 2000).

²¹ Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton university press, 1994).

²² Mandy Turner, 'Three Discourses on Diasporas and Peacebuilding', in *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding*, ed. Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner, New Security Challenges Series (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 173–90.

²³ Osman Antwi-Boateng, 'After War Then Peace: The US-Based Liberian Diaspora as Peace-Building Norm Entrepreneurs', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (1 March 2012): 93–112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fer023>.

²⁴ Kleist, 'Mobilising "The Diaspora"'.

²⁵ Dahre et al., 'The Role of Diasporas in Peace'; Laakso and Hautaniemi, *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking*.

²⁶ Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement'.

collaborates on various projects with diaspora groups for the economic and social development of their countries of origin. The early noughties thus marked a new era for diaspora who were now seen not only as development agents but also development partners.

Western governments who had substantial diaspora populations living in their midst soon began to see the promising link between migration, transnationalism and development. As a result, diasporic-development projects in countries of origin have also materialised as an extension of the foreign policies of hostland governments, often working through United Nations frameworks of ‘good governance’ or the Migration-Development nexus²⁷. As migrants leave their homelands, many maintain various social and political links, which can serve as a platform for development cooperation. Indeed, diaspora are increasingly seen as bridges between their hostlands and homelands due to their linguistic, cultural, social and political understanding of their homelands and hostlands, but also their networks and their linking capabilities between institutions in the homeland and hostland²⁸. As a result, host states are now more aware of their diverse populations and are taking full advantage of their continued ties to their country of origin²⁹.

Development cooperation or what is termed, co-development diaspora partnerships were thus born with the explicit aim of working with diaspora organisations and individuals to strengthen weak states. Hostland governments, including the

²⁷ See for instance the Migration and Development Programme of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

²⁸ Cindy Horst, ‘Diaspora Engagements in Development Cooperation’ (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, PRIO, August 2008),.

²⁹ Laakso and Hautaniemi, *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking*’.

Netherlands and France have had a long history with migration and co-development projects, often through return migration that is coupled with assistance with entrepreneurship in the homeland³⁰. These older collaborations have been criticised as they have been characterised by a conditional agreement between migrant return and development as opposed to diaspora development for its own merit.

Instead of focussing on the return dimension, partnerships were later formed as a means of encouraging diaspora organisations into the development realm through government support or funding. This has been manifested through co-financing, facilitating remittances, consultations and capacity-building to support diaspora organisations investing in homeland development through civil society or local initiatives³¹. Successful collaborations have included working with diaspora platforms including, the French-Moroccan, Migrations et Développement, which has consultative status with the Moroccan government, AFFORD UK and Seva in the Netherlands³².

A good example is the collaboration between the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Somali diaspora in

³⁰ De Haas, 'Engaging Diasporas'.

³¹ Nyberg-Sorensen et al, 'The Migration-Development Nexus Evidence'; Grillo and Bruno Riccio, 'Translocal Development: Italy-Senegal', *Population, Space and Place* 10, no. 2 (March 2004): 99–111; Ionescu, 'Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners'; Dahre et al., 'The Role of Diasporas'; Nijenhuis and Broekhuis, 'Institutionalising Transnational Migrants' Activities'; Rojan Ezzati and Cindy Horst, 'Norwegian Collaboration with Diasporas', in *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, *Africa Now* (London, UK : Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books ; Nordic Africa Institute, 2014), 190–209; Cindy Horst, 'Diaspora Engagements in Development Cooperation' (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, PRIO, August 2008);, Stefan Möhl, 'The Same But Different? Codevelopment Policies in France, Germany, Spain and the Institutions of the European Union from a Comparative Perspective', *Documentos CIDOB. Migraciones*, no. 20 (2010): 1; Franziska Bühner, 'Cooperating with Diaspora Communities Guidelines for Practice' (Eschborn: GIZ Migration and Development, 2011); 'Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA)', International Organization for Migration, 15 April 2015; Laakso and Hautaniemi, *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking*.

³² De Haas, 'Engaging Diasporas'.

Finland. A pilot project was launched called the '*MIDA Health - Strengthening the Health Sector in Somaliland and Puntland through the Engagement of Somali Diaspora Health Professionals from Finland*' under the framework of the IOM's Migration and Development for Africa (MIDA) programme³³. The aim of the project was to connect professional and skilled diaspora from Finland to assist in contributing to the country's health sector. The project lasted 18 months from 2008 to 2009 and was considered a success in delivering 22 female and male doctors and nurses to help with capacity building in Somaliland and Puntland³⁴.

The literature so far suggests that diaspora co-development projects have been met with a mixed bag of optimism and scepticism. While the number of policy papers dedicated to analysing this relationship has heralded diaspora as advantageous partners in development due to their alleged accessibility to both the hostland and homeland, skills and language capabilities³⁵, others have questioned their role as partners and have advocated for funding projects that are already undertaken by diaspora organisations through their familial or translocal networks³⁶ or engagement, which encourages and funds diaspora initiated projects³⁷. In other words, instead of expecting diaspora to fit into a Western understanding of what development means, the concept of development needs to be broadened to projects that are envisaged by diaspora organisations, rather than rolled out in a top-down fashion to diaspora

³³ "Migration for Development in Africa" (MIDA) is a capacity-building programme, which helps to mobilize competencies acquired by African nationals abroad for the benefit of Africa's development. 'Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA)', International Organization for Migration, 15 April 2015, <https://www.iom.int/mida>.

³⁴ Thomas Lothar Weiss, ed., *Migration for Development in the Horn of Africa Health Expertise from the Somali Diaspora in Finland* (International Organisation for Migration, 2009).

³⁵ Nyberg-Sorensen et al, 'The Migration-Development Nexus Evidence'; Ionescu, 'Engaging Diasporas as Development Partners'; 'Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA)'.

³⁶ _Horst, 'Diaspora Engagements in Development Cooperation'.

³⁷ De Haas, "'Engaging Diasporas'.

organisations.

Yet with a few exceptions³⁸, academic studies that scrutinise how diasporas are being engaged for development purposes by foreign ministries towards countries of origin and which evaluate the development impact of these collaborations are few and far between. Furthermore, most of the case studies presented are from the African Continent. To this author's knowledge, no co-development projects between a hostland government and a diaspora from the Middle East has been examined previously in the literature as this paper seeks to do. Finally, very little has been written about engaging the diaspora towards transporting democracy through civil society following regime change. These are the gaps in the literature that this paper seeks to address using the case study of the Swedish International Development Corporation (SIDA) and its collaboration with Iraqi diaspora organisations in Sweden to spread democratic norms in Iraq from 2004 to 2008; in the aftermath of the 2003 US led intervention.

The Iraqi diaspora in Sweden

The Swedish Iraqi diaspora was born of several waves of migration. Starting in the 1970s, the first wave consisted largely of Iraqi Kurds and Christians. The Kurds were fleeing from the oppressive forces of Saddam Hussein's government and the defeat of the autonomous Kurdish movement from 1961-1975³⁹. Meanwhile for Iraqi

³⁸ Nijenhuis and Annelet Broekhuis, 'Institutionalising Transnational Migrants'; Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement'; David Khoudour-Casteras, 'Neither Migration nor Development: The Contradictions of French Co-Development Policy' (Multinational Conference on migration and policy, Maastricht, 2009).

³⁹ Amir Hassanpour and Shahrzad Mojab, 'Kurdish Diaspora', in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* (Springer US, 2005), 214–24.

Christians, some of whom were also living in the Kurdish region and often caught in the midst of the Iraqi states' war with the Kurds, the 1970s proved to be a perilous time⁴⁰.

In the 1980s Iraqi migration to Sweden increased due to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1989) and its ramifications. This migration wave saw middle class but impoverished Iraqi families flee and make their way to Sweden where Sweden's humanitarian reputation for taking refugees was now taking hold. At the same time persecuted Iraqi communists who were now leaving the Soviet Union or its satellite states were also making their way to Sweden as the Soviet Union's future was becoming more and more uncertain.

Further migrations were provoked when Shi'a Iraqis, both Arab and Faili Kurds, who were considered of Persian descent were forcefully banished from Iraq, especially as hostilities between Iraq and Iran took hold in the 1970s and 1980s⁴¹. It is during this time that political party branches representing the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) were formed in the Swedish diaspora reflecting the political persuasions of diaspora individuals who had fled the country. Later in 1988 the Kurds were targets of Saddam's Anfal campaign where thousands

⁴⁰ Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq: Its Origins and Development to the Present Day* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2005).

⁴¹ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, Rev. ed (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Hala Mundhir Fattah, *A Brief History of Iraq*, Brief History (New York: Facts On File, 2009).

of Kurds were exterminated in chemical gas attacks, leading many to leave and head for the Turkish border⁴².

Yet the first real surge in Iraqi migration to Sweden took place in the 1990s following the first Gulf War. Not only did the violence and destruction cause many to flee, but the Shi'a uprising that was crushed by the regime in 1991 saw the first wave of largely Shi'a families from the south arrive in Sweden, some of whom had been previously in the Rafha refugee camp in Saudi Arabia.

The final migration wave, and the largest, which has not abated in Sweden has been due to the 2003 Iraq war. With violence erupting as the coalition battled Iraqi forces and subsequent sectarian violence, many Iraqi families have been forced into refuge in neighbouring countries and beyond. Many made their way to Sweden as by now Sweden's open door immigration policy and reputation for taking refugees on humanitarian grounds was well known amongst Iraqi families. A series of chain migrations led many to make their way to Sweden and join family and friends who had already settled in Sweden in previous waves. Many were motivated by Sweden's family reunification policy that permits immediate family and or spouses to join once permit residence has been granted⁴³. Since the year 2000 and up till 2014, 61,442 Iraqis have entered Sweden⁴⁴. As of 2015, there are a reported 131,888 Iraqis in Sweden⁴⁵.

⁴² Martin Van Bruinessen, 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no. 1 (1998): 39–52.

⁴³ Swedish Member of Parliament 1 in interview with author, 11 June 2015, Stockholm

⁴⁴ Statistics Sweden www.scb.se

⁴⁵ Statistics Sweden www.scb.se

Iraqis in Sweden live all over the country but there are large concentrations in Sweden's capital city Stockholm, as well as Malmo and Gothenburg. A large Iraqi Assyrian, and Mandaean community also reside in Sodertalje, a town south of Stockholm, where there are reportedly 10,000 Iraqis living since the 2003 Iraq War. Finally, it is important to stress that the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden is in no way homogenous. As argued elsewhere⁴⁶, there is a world of diversity, richness and complexity found within the Iraqi diaspora. When using the concept of diaspora in this study I merely use it as a short hand for the group of individuals interviewed and not as a means of unifying or homogenising the Iraqi community in Sweden.

Sweden's foreign policy stance towards the Iraq war

By not engaging in military intervention and occupation, the Swedish government did not have a say in the building of the future Iraqi state in 2003. Consequently, the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden had no entry into the country during the occupation years (2003-2004), and therefore no stake in contributing to Iraq in any shape or form.

Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the 2003 Iraq war, it was very clear that the Swedish public held strong anti-war views about the war in Iraq. Retrospective reports estimate that the global anti-war march on the 15 February attracted between 100,000 and up to 150,000 people in Stockholm⁴⁷. Swedish organisations and citizens from all hues and colours joined the march, including politicians from all parties but

⁴⁶ Oula Kadhum, 'Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism', *Global Networks*, 12 December 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12222>.

⁴⁷ De Vries and Helma Gerritje Engelen, 'Insiders and Outsiders: Global Social Movements, Party Politics, and Democracy in Europe and North America' (2007), <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/7678>.

mainly the Vänster (Left) and Green Party. A Left party member of parliament on the Foreign Affairs Committee who was an activist at the time recalled that on both sides of the political spectrum there was a feeling that this war was simply “wrong”⁴⁸.

This sentiment had a lasting impression on the Swedish government at the time. The government of Goran Persson, the Prime Minister, had taken the decision to follow the United Nation’s lead, and who later declared the occupation of Iraq illegal under the UN Charter⁴⁹. On the one hand Sweden was interested in helping rebuild the country, yet on the other it steered away from any direct political involvement with coalition forces during this period. Several interviewees indicated that the Left party, which was in a coalition government with the Social Democrats at the time and the Communist party saw the Iraqi Governing Council as a Vichy government⁵⁰ or a Quisling government⁵¹. This was in reference to Norway’s Vidkun Quisling’s collaboration with the Nazi government during the Second World War, which was considered a puppet government. I asked several Swedish officials about this and most disagreed with the analogy of a Quisling government. One Parliamentarian from a liberal party suggested that puppet government was more appropriate⁵².

In any case, Sweden clearly felt apprehensive about working with an occupied government, as did other EU countries and embassies⁵³, so working through the UN provided Sweden a means of helping in the rebuilding of Iraq without directly

⁴⁸ Member of Parliament 2 in interview with author, 30 June 2015, Telephone call to Gothenburg

⁴⁹ Ewen MacAskill and Julian Borger in Washington, ‘Iraq War Was Illegal and Breached UN Charter, Says Annan’, the Guardian, 16 September 2004, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>.

⁵⁰ Respondent 1 in interview with author, 7 October 2014, Stockholm

⁵¹ Respondent 10 in interview with author, 12 October 2014 Stockholm

⁵² Member of Parliament 1 in interview with author, 11 June 2015 Stockholm

⁵³ Sida Evaluation Report

involving itself with the coalition. Swedish foreign policy and development towards Iraq was thus directed largely through the United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and other UN agencies⁵⁴. For instance after the Canal Hotel bombing in August 2003, which killed the UN Special Representative in Iraq, Sergio Viera, the UN asked the Swedish Rescue Agency for help, but as one Swedish Ambassador stated no official government team was sent:

The Swedish Rescue Agency was a request from the UN, they asked if we could help. We need help to set up shop could you help us logistically? So we did not send any Swedish official government team in that sense this was a specific question from the UN officially, can you support us logistically? And of course when the UN asks for help Sweden tries to help and this is what we did in this specific case.⁵⁵

Consequently for the Iraqi diaspora in Sweden opportunities to engage directly inside the country were minimal during this time. Since the coalition was the governing body, by not forming part of this coalition the Swedish government distanced itself from occupation and governance of Iraq, which limited the diaspora's access to the political process inside the country. Their anti-war stance meant that very little political collaboration was occurring between Sweden and Iraq whilst it was still occupied. The author asked the former First Secretary to Iraq whether there was any political work with Iraq during the period 2003 to 28 June 2004 and he responded, 'No. No new political initiatives, that is true.'⁵⁶.

The anti-war movement that swept the country prior to the Iraq war thus influenced Sweden's foreign policy. Large swathes of the Swedish public had made their feelings towards the war quite clear as witnessed by the 15 February 2003 global march, one

⁵⁴ Former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official in interview with author, 25 June 2015

⁵⁵ Swedish Ambassador 1 in interview with author, 15 February 2015, London

⁵⁶ Swedish Ambassador 1 interview with author, 15 February 2015, London. On the 28 June 2004 Iraq regained sovereign powers from the coalition forces.

of the biggest marches in Swedish history after the Vietnam War. This influenced the Swedish government's foreign policy position, which was against intervention, and instead chose to follow UN protocol, which weakened any real power to influence or be involved in pre and post war state-building plans. Consequently, leading up to intervention and in the first year of occupation, the Swedish Iraqi diaspora was limited in what it could contribute to Iraq. Political activity was largely oriented towards anti-occupation protests in Sergels Torg⁵⁷ in central Stockholm or in front of the Riksdag⁵⁸.

Once intervention had taken place and the anti-war movement declined, the diaspora who were part of the anti-war movement faced a new reality. Either they could continue protesting against the coalition or start thinking about how to contribute to rebuilding the country. Sweden's anti-occupation stance had cut any links to the coalition and thus contributing to institution-building and governance in Iraq. Instead this channelled their political contributions towards supporting the state through civil society by trying to support democracy in Iraq.

Knowing that Sweden's foreign policy towards Iraq was directed towards development through the United Nations, diaspora groups saw an opportunity to urge Sweden's democratic tradition to support Iraq's transition to democracy. One such organisation, the Federation of Iraqi Associations (FIA), an umbrella organisation representing over 60 Iraqi organisations from different ethnicities, sects and political persuasions, started to lobby in 2004 the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It called on the MFA to organise a meeting alongside Sweden's International

⁵⁷ Literally means Sergel's square in Swedish. It is a public square in central Stockholm

⁵⁸ The Swedish Parliament is called the Riksdag

Development Agency (SIDA) and the Ministry of Democracy in order to encourage Sweden's involvement in supporting Iraq's fledgling democracy. I questioned Respondent 25 what the goal of the meeting was, 'the goal was that the Swedish budget had some money to put towards supporting democracy in Iraq but it didn't know what to do with it so at least each person [from the federation] could present their views and they have a general idea'⁵⁹

Indeed by 2004, the Swedish government awoke to the fact that in their midst was a big Iraqi diaspora in Sweden they could tap into. Swedish politicians as well as MFA officials started to meet and listen to diaspora groups⁶⁰.

This unique relationship we have between our countries where so many Swedes are of Iraqi origin. I mean Olof Palme, Swedish prime minister was a negotiator in the Iraq–Iran war, and there were Swedish companies in Iraq since the 1950s. ABB built all the electricity basically that's why the Americans had difficulty with the electricity grid because basically it was all European standards. And ASEA from Sweden and of course Erikson and these companies, all things taken together it was a unique relationship. The government wanted to move ahead on that. Mrs Roxman⁶¹ had very clearly that task.⁶²

Indeed, as we shall see in the next section two institutional projects were funded that attempted to work through the diaspora in Sweden to support democracy building in Iraq. The first was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation and managed by the Olof Palme International Centre, which is associated with Sweden's Social Democratic party. The second was funded by the Centre Party in Sweden and managed and carried out by an Iraqi-Swedish member of parliament.

Diaspora co-development projects with Swedish Organisations

⁵⁹ Respondent 25 in interview with author, 30 June 2015, Stockholm

⁶⁰ Swedish Ambassador 1 in interview with author, 15 February 2015, London

⁶¹ The first Ambassador to Iraq appointed by the Swedish Queen in 2004.

⁶² Swedish Ambassador 1 in interview with author, 15 February 2015, London

The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' response to helping rebuild Iraq was to contribute to the long-term development of a democratic Iraq. Indeed Sweden's development goals in Iraq were outlined in Sweden's country strategy for development cooperation with Iraq, 2004–06 (extended until June 2008), which sets out three priorities:

- i) To promote a peaceful development towards a democratic state governed by law and respecting human rights,
- ii) To support economic recovery aiming at pro-poor growth, and
- iii) To lay the basis of a broader cooperation between Sweden and Iraq.⁶³

As part of the programme, the Swedish government used the resource base of the Swedish-Iraqi community in Sweden to help with this strategy. Practically speaking, this policy translated into collaborating with Iraqi-Swedish diaspora organisations and their civil society partners in Iraq⁶⁴. The experiences and acquired value systems of the Iraqi-Swedish resource base were considered crucial and important for working with local Iraqi civil society organisations. As one government report stated, 'Working through these Swedish-Iraqi organisations thus constitutes the immediate and main modality for providing support' ⁶⁵.

Consequently, Iraqi diaspora member organisations that supported democracy and human rights, and that operated a non-sectarian agenda, were given the opportunity to apply to receive funding for the rebuilding of Iraq's civil society⁶⁶. Through an open tender process, the Olof Palme International Centre (OPIC), the Social Democrat Party's International Organisation working for peace and human rights⁶⁷, was chosen

⁶³ SIDA Evaluation Report

⁶⁴ Senior SIDA Director in discussion with author, 14 October 2014, Stockholm

⁶⁵ Evaluation of the Olof Palme International Centre's support to Civil Society Organisations in Iraq, 2007, shared with the author by Senior SIDA Director via email exchange on 7 August 2015

⁶⁶ Senior SIDA Director in interview with author, October 2014

⁶⁷ Olof Palme International Center, www.palmecenter.se/en/about-palmecentret/ [Last Accessed 22 October 2015]

to administer an Iraq Programme between mid-2005 and mid-2008 with a total budget of SEK 35 million.⁶⁸

A total of 19 projects were selected to support civil society groups all over Iraq through Iraqi diasporic partnerships running from mid-2005 to 2008.

Table 1. Diaspora co-development projects in Iraq⁶⁹.

	Geographical area in Iraq	Focus of activity	Target Group	Year of Activity
1	Baghdad	Gender Equality - General Education and Citizen Rights	Women	2006-2007
2	All of Iraq	Trade Union Rights	Trade Union Leaders	2006-2007
3	Najaf	General Education and	Men and	2006

⁶⁸ Quoted from Swedish International Development Agency's Mapping and Institutional Analysis of Civil Society Groups in Iraq report, December 2008 shared with the author by Senior SIDA Director via email exchange on 7 August 2015

⁶⁹ SIDA Evaluation Report.

		Citizen Rights	women with varying levels of education	
4	Baghdad	Media - Political and Citizen Rights	Iraqi Journalists	2006-2007
5	Diwania	Women's Centre in a new Democracy	Women	2006
6	Sadr City	Democracy and Equality through Sport – Organisational and Capacity Building	Local level trainers of Youth	2005-2007
7	Erbil	Political and Citizen Rights	Women and Children	2005-2007
8	Basra	Gender equality Education	Women	2005-2006
9	Basra	Democracy	NGOs, Police and Security Personnel, Iraqi Ministry of Health	2005-2006
10	Sulaymaniyah	Education	Women	2005-2006
11	Baghdad	Democracy	Children	2005-2007
12	Kirkuk	Organisational and Capacity Building	Youth and Student Groups	2005-2007

13	Baghdad, Sadr City and Babylon	Education, Popular movements and Private sector	Men and Women	2005-2007
14	Kirkuk	Gender Equality and Human rights	Women	2006-2007
15	Baghdad	Developing Democracy	Politically active people particularly youth and women.	2005 to 2007
16	Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah, Mosul and Kirkuk	Election monitoring- Developing democracy	1150 election observers	2005
17	Sulaymaniyah	Gender Equality and Democracy development	Women	2005-2006
18	Amadiya	Developing Democracy and Conflict Management	Families, Widows and Children	2005-2007
19	Basra	Developing Democracy – increasing political participation. Capacity and Organisational Development.	Iraqi youth with girls and women as priority	2005-2007
20	Baghdad	Empowerment of young Iraqis	Youth	2005-2007
21	Nasiriyah	Democracy and Girls with special needs	Girls	2006-2007
22	Unknown	Iraqi Public Sector	Unknown	2006-2007

Table 1. Above shows that diaspora projects selected by OPIC focussed heavily on supporting Iraq through civil society, with only one project (number 9) targeting state officials. Most of the projects are related to democratic development, improving the political participation of women and youth groups and human rights, whether labour rights or gender equality.

Interviews with diaspora members who participated in the OPIC projects and with SIDA and Olof Palme officials, as well as an evaluation report conducted on behalf of SIDA to assess the co-development initiative reveal mixed results. Leaving aside some of the programme deficits outlined by the evaluation report including, flexibility in dealing with conflict situation, thematic clarity of development goals, programme transparency between staff and the Iraqi and Swedish NGOs, as well as defined goals in order to measure project outcomes, from the Swedish institutional perspective there were three areas that hindered the projects' progress and impact. These relate to the state of Iraqi civil society at the time, the security situation, and the diaspora's inexperience in development work. Meanwhile for the diaspora, it was more about the security and political context. The following section looks at the three issues raised from both the institutional and diasporic perspective. Though there was agreement about the security situation being the main obstacle to development projects, institutional partners and diaspora emphasised different aspects.

The security situation

One of the biggest impediments to the co-development project was the security situation in Iraq. Though this created similarities between the difficulties encountered

by development professionals working in conflict zones, it also highlighted other issues including the voluntary nature of diaspora work and gender dimensions that are distinct and particular to diaspora workers from conflict areas and whose homelands uphold conservative religious ideologies.

Both institutional partners and diaspora individuals emphasised how the security context affected the project work. This hindered project implementation by Iraqi diasporic partners in accessing certain locations and carrying out the intended work. As a result, project outcomes were disrupted. It also meant that project monitoring was difficult to conduct by institutional partners. This meant that it was difficult to oversee the initiatives taking place, account for funding to home institutions, as well as lessons learned from the experiences of the projects taking place⁷⁰. When the Project Manager interviewed was questioned as to why the programme ended in 2008, he stated that security was the biggest obstacle. With Sweden's bureaucratic culture of reporting and accountability, following up on projects and monitoring their progress organisationally was very difficult and complicated under the conflict conditions in Iraq, where killings were a regular occurrence.

This dynamic and the problems it would create is captured by the following example from Respondent 14 in her attempt to help develop Iraq's political culture. For Respondent 14, who was a member of parliament for the Swedish Centre Party, this was an opportunity to promote democracy in Iraq. Indeed she worked alongside her father on projects in Baghdad. There, they established in 2004, a new political party called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), built on liberal and secular values.

⁷⁰ SIDA Evaluation Report

Funding for the project came from the Swedish Centre Party's international foundation (CIS), which following Sweden's tradition of supporting democracy around the world, is funded by SIDA in line with the number of parliamentary seats each party has won. Money for the project was to be spent on strengthening politicians and parties to have a broader impact on democracy and gender equality issues.

Yet the project caused a political and legal problem for CIS. The National Democratic Alliance received SEK 600,000 each year from the Centre Party International Foundation (CIS), between 2004 to 2010, before funding was eventually stopped⁷¹. Similar to the situation faced by the Olof Palme Centre, the CIS could not verify where funds had been spent by the diaspora individual carrying out the tasks and what activities had actually occurred. This led to a government investigation, which lasted over two years. Danish investigators were eventually hired to carry out an evaluation but could not verify either way whether the activities had taken place. Despite the investigation, the General Secretary admitted that they were proud of the work they did in trying to support a fragile democracy in Iraq with Respondent 14, but the lack of transparency and accountability for spending meant that the project could not be sustained.

The security situation also posed other problems. As conflict worsened, especially following the bombing of the Al 'Askari Mosque in Samarra⁷² central and southern Iraq were conflict zones and posed difficulties for projects located in these areas. Consequently, though there was to be a Baghdad office to oversee projects around the

⁷¹ Secretary General of CIS in interview with author, June 2015, Stockholm

⁷² Robert F. Worth, 'Blast Destroys Shrine in Iraq, Setting Off Sectarian Fury', *The New York Times*, 22 February 2006, sec. Middle East,

country, this ended up in Erbil, where the security situation was more stable. Eventually, the majority of projects and their oversight took place in the northern Kurdish region. This reality hampered the project's own goals of representing various peoples and locations in Iraq.

Yet from the diasporic perspective, while it was agreed that the security situation was the biggest obstacle, they emphasised other elements. For those working outside the Kurdish north, the difficulties of the security context meant that they lacked the institutional support and oversight needed for their projects to develop and continue. The bureaucracy needed to maintain funds proved very time-consuming and difficult for those involved, especially as all were volunteers unlike development workers who are paid for their work.

Furthermore, not only did the on-going violence and conflict in Iraq impede project work, but also made it very difficult to hire Swedish-Iraqis willing to return under hazardous and often life-threatening conditions. This was particularly the case for hiring women from the diaspora to return to Iraq where gender-based violence was rampant and women's bodies became sites of contestation and competition between conservative Islamist parties and militias and the US-led coalition's rhetoric surrounding women's rights⁷³. As one respondent remarked, diaspora women were not interested in risking their lives for a voluntary position, those who returned wanted to be paid⁷⁴. In a patriarchal, violent and insecure context, the gendered dimensions of development work in a conflict zone had not been taken into account by Swedish officials, which left many diaspora women in vulnerable and often

⁷³ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Islam and Women's Rights', *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1 April 2007): 503–17.

⁷⁴ Respondent 10n in interview with author, October 2015

dangerous positions. Their treatment and experiences differed from men in the diaspora who did not face physical threats to their bodies based on their gender. This aspect of diaspora co-development projects, which is outside the scope of this study, remains a largely understudied area. It also highlights that gender dimensions also need to be taken into account when selecting diasporic partners in certain conflict zones where gender-based violence is a real threat.

The diaspora's inexperience in development work

Perhaps the most often repeated phrase among the institutional partners interviewed, which echoes much of the academic literature in relation to diaspora co-development projects, is their lack of experience in development models and methods⁷⁵. Especially in light of Sweden's rights based approach, which stresses 'empowering the end beneficiaries' through their active participation, but also in their ability to hold those funding and conducting the activities to account as the "duty bearers"⁷⁶. While the resource base and relations that the diaspora bring into the development equation were acknowledged by institutional partners, Swedish-Iraqi NGOs were said to lack capacity. Simply put, the diaspora were unable to provide the training to Iraqi NGOs that was needed and thus contribute to the process of accountability to those above (the Swedish partners) and responsibility to those below (Iraqi NGOs) in the developmental chain. This resulted in a lot more time dedicated to training and strengthening the capacity of Swedish-Iraqi NGOs than had been envisaged, impacting results on the ground. There was, however, recognition from institutional partners that this may itself be an overriding product of the programme⁷⁷. As one Olof Palme employee stated,

⁷⁵ SIDA Evaluation Report and Interview with Senior SIDA Director

⁷⁶ SIDA Evaluation Report, pg 13

⁷⁷ SIDA Evaluation Report.

There was an evaluation of the programmes. There were effects in raising awareness of course, about raising awareness of democracy and human rights. This is one effect. Strengthening the organisational capacities of the NGOs and supporting the training and education capacities of organisations and individuals.⁷⁸

At the time, however, this was an obstacle to project effectiveness. Even before the co-development project was executed, one Swedish official stated that there were five problems facing the Iraqi diaspora, which made co-development problematic; fragmentation, unclear objectives, unrealistic goals, issues of neutrality, which is key for institutional donors, and capacity to keep organisation together and manage an organised system⁷⁹. Funding was therefore stopped in 2008, when in 2009 a new Iraq country strategy was put in place that diverted funding from diaspora organisations to working with international development organisations on the ground in Iraq. The majority of these projects took place in the Kurdish-controlled zone⁸⁰, either in Erbil or Sulaymaniyah.

For the diaspora individuals involved, it appears that the paperwork demanded for further funding was extremely time consuming and detailed. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that those who were working on projects in Iraq were volunteers and were not funded for their work, as the money was to be spent explicitly for the projects⁸¹. Additionally, there was a clear disparity between the evaluations of the institutional partners and diaspora individuals delivering the projects. From the diaspora perspective, those interviewed felt that their projects were very successful in helping Iraqis on the ground. One such project ‘The children’s library for the springboard to democracy’ used the books of one of Sweden’s most

⁷⁸ Olof Palme employee in interview with author, 13 October 2014, Stockholm, Sweden

⁷⁹ Senior SIDA Director in interview with author, 14 October 2014, Stockholm, Sweden

⁸⁰ Swedish Ambassador to Iraq 2 in interview with, 12 June 2005, Skype conversation.

⁸¹ Respondent 11 in interview with author, 12 October 2014, Stockholm

celebrated children's authors, Astrid Lindgren, to encourage children to role-play and use their imagination to help build a better future for Iraq. The idea was that the process of building a new state requires an imagination and a vision that for many Iraqis was repressed under the Baath's authoritarian regime. The diaspora individual, who led and worked on the project, considered it one of the most successful under the programme. She explained that while for the Swedes the project was for educating children about democracy and freedom and to learn to be open-minded, for her it was more about giving Iraqi women time to work or to educate themselves. The project was therefore understood in different developmental terms. While Swedish partners focussed on the children and inspiring their creative imaginations, for the diaspora individual, the priority was Iraqi women who needed the space and time to earn a livelihood. In any case, the project was seen as a success and was eventually taken over by the Olof Palme Centre. After funding from Olof Palme ceased in 2008 the project continued with funding from other Swedish organisations including Forum Syd⁸², a non-governmental member organisation, that works to promote democracy, gender equality and sustainability, and also Radiohjälpen⁸³, a foundation that also supports long-term international development.

Meanwhile, another organisation was focussed on training Iraqis on democratic elections and election monitoring. According to two of the members working on the project, it was very successful in training thousands of Iraqis to become election observers around the country⁸⁴. The problems faced in terms of their work were related to the homeland political context, which impacted mobilisation towards democratic work for diaspora who were not affiliated to the dominant Shia or Kurdish

⁸² Forum Syd <http://www.forumsyd.org> [Last accessed 24 June 2016]

⁸³ Radiohjälpen <http://www.svt.se/radiohjalpen/> [Last accessed 24 June 2016]

⁸⁴ Respondent 25 in interview with author, 30 June 2015, and Respondent

parties in Iraq. This hampered opportunities to mobilise unless one works outside the structures and fields of power⁸⁵. As a result, their work took place largely from Erbil, in the north.

Iraqi civil society

From the Swedish institutional perspective, Iraq's fledgling civil society was problematic for co-development projects due to the fact that civil society actors in Iraq had little experience of organisational life beyond those associated with the ruling Baath party. Indeed any oppositional party or organisation that worked against party values and interests was repressed during Saddam Hussein's reign (1979 – 2003). Certainly the concept of civil society, as understood in its broadest sense by Western actors, as a normative ideal, or a description of associational life, or a public sphere where public policy is debated⁸⁶ was not to be found in Iraq in 2005. The evaluation report states that even 'the current government is not familiar with the civil society concept'⁸⁷. Most of the organisations, for instance, were linked to political parties, which was challenging for the programme since its criteria stipulated that organisations should be politically independent. Secondly, the organisations were found to be non-democratic in their structures, often having a hierarchical leadership rather than being member organisations with a democratically elected leadership.

One project, which was initially funded by the Olof Palme Centre⁸⁸ and later by the Centre party foundation (CIS), encouraged the political participation of women and

⁸⁵ 'Ethno-sectarianism in Iraq'

⁸⁶ Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004).

⁸⁷ SIDA Evaluation Report, 6

⁸⁸ SIDA Evaluation Report

youth so that they form part of the debate in democracy and civil society⁸⁹. This was carried out by an organisation they created called the Iraqi United Nations Association. The association focused on supporting human rights and civil society initiatives, including educating and training women in computer skills and rights and youth political education⁹⁰. According to Respondent 14, her primary goal was to teach Iraqis how to work through political parties, “the political party culture necessary for building democracy”⁹¹. In agreement with institutional partners, Respondent 14 was also frustrated by the state of civil society in Iraq, underlining a culture shock that was felt by many diaspora individuals returning to Iraq. Here she lists the problems that she encountered:

Number one, security. We could be killed at any time. It was a misery how much people died. And number two, insufficient amount of knowledge about how NGOs should be working, what political party means, how a democracy functions. It was not surprising but we didn’t speak the same language.

This quote captures a number of important facets related to co-development projects. The frustrations of those versed in developmental frameworks, democracy and human rights when working in states transitioning from authoritarianism exemplifies the assumptions of western development models that are predicated on an *a priori* understanding of human rights, political rights and Western ideas of civil society. For societies inexperienced in political freedom and organising, due to repressive policies and regimes such as Iraq’s, democratic values cannot be transported through short term projects but need to be experienced and felt locally through building social capital in an environment of trust, tolerance and reciprocation⁹². This takes time, not

⁸⁹ Secretary General of CIS in interview with author, June 2015

⁹⁰ Respondent 13 in interview with author, 12 October 2014, Stockholm

⁹¹ Respondent 14 in interview with author, 14 October 2014, Stockholm

⁹² Putnam et al., Making Democracy Work.

to mention a receptive and open political environment. Or in the very least one marked by peace and not conflict, which was the case in Iraq between 2005 to 2008.

Furthermore, the idea that diaspora are a linking bridge between the hostland and homeland, as expounded by much of the diaspora co-development literature, was challenged in the context of post-2003 Iraq. Many diasporans who returned were killed, while others returned back to Sweden and felt disconnected from Iraqi society, and experienced culture shock themselves. Having lived in Western hostlands for so long, the Iraq that diaspora individuals working on these projects had imagined they belonged to and knew, no longer existed. Adjusting therefore was an additional obstacle recounted by several diaspora individuals who struggled in the face of corruption, societal fragmentation and distrust, and ethno-sectarian attitudes. The cultural dissonance this evoked proved too strong for many who struggled to understand where they now belonged or to accept that their future now lay in Sweden and not in Iraq.

Others, who managed to stay for a few years, encountered other problems. Stand offs between Iraqi insiders and outsiders were regularly discussed in interviews where those on the outside were resented by Iraqis on the inside for not having lived through the ravages of Saddam's authoritarian rule. This was exacerbated when many Iraqis returned to take up jobs, or were critiqued for upholding western attitudes. The case of Iraq thus demonstrates that when a diaspora has been disconnected from their homeland for decades, and when that society has undergone a rapid decline due to successive wars, sanctions and conflict, the diaspora's potential for social remittances or bridging capital may not be possible nor welcome.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that Sweden's development agency and Iraqis in the diaspora were strongly motivated to help in the rebuilding of Iraq and many individuals risked their lives in order to do so. However, clearly there were problems that hindered Sweden's co-development progress with the diaspora. This paper has attempted to draw attention to these issues by highlighting the contextual limitations, divergent expectations between institutional partners and diaspora individuals, as well as towards the country of origin, and different understandings of development goals.

Thus despite the noble efforts of many, interviews with diaspora recipients of hostland funding, as well as with programme managers and policy makers involved in its implementation, though there were issues with diaspora capacity in development cooperation⁹³, the major obstacle that stood in the way was the security situation. This affected both participants and policy implementers from carrying out their work. Security conditions posed risks to participant lives, made execution difficult and personnel difficult to hire. In the lawless environment of Iraq this created potential opportunities for corruption, as there were no mechanisms for accountability.

Secondly, since no assessments could be made, no lessons could be learnt, adapted or changed during the project cycles, and thus projects could not be adequately supported. A centre for civil society in Iraq was supposed to be built in Baghdad to support the work of the projects, yet this was to be moved eventually to Erbil due to

⁹³ SIDA Evaluation Report and Interview with Senior SIDA Director

the security situation⁹⁴, which impacted the support offered to diaspora organisations outside of northern Iraq. It is thus no surprise that following this programme, diaspora co-development projects were not taken up by Sweden's next government in 2009, and a new Iraq strategy was developed that worked through international organisations and foundations to support Iraqi institutions and civil society. In this respect the Swedish government returned to a traditional development model as opposed to the diaspora –development nexus to enact its goals in Iraq.

In any case, what these collaborations show is that though good intentions existed, and good ideas carried out, under conflict conditions, as was the case in Iraq, there are limitations to what diaspora can do without risking their lives and without failing the accountability and transparency conditions needed by hostland donors. It further shows that diaspora engagement in conflict zones should not be viewed as simply good or bad, or both, as much of the literature has been preoccupied with⁹⁵ but rather oriented towards understanding *when* and *how* diasporas can best contribute to development during conflict or post conflict settings, if at all, while acknowledging the limitations of political and security contexts and their gendered implications. For example, the Swedish co-development case study shows that there was very little understanding of Iraqi society prior to 2003 under an authoritarian and violent regime. This might have pre-empted some of the culture shock and expectations of Iraqi civil society for both institutional and diasporic partners. Furthermore, it might have better

⁹⁴ SIDA Evaluation Report

⁹⁵ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (1 October 2004): 563–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Hazel Smith and Paul B. Stares, *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* (Tokyo ; New York: United Nations University Press, 2007); Feargal Cochrane, 'Civil Society beyond the State: The Impact of Diaspora Communities on Peace Building', *Global Media Journal: Mediterranean Edition* 2, no. 2 (2007): 19–29, <http://web.iaincirebon.ac.id/ebook/moon/CivilSociety/3.%20Cochrane.pdf>; Osman Antwi-Boateng, 'After War Then Peace'.

re-directed diaspora engagement towards other types of developmental projects, and also importantly managed expectations and measures of success.

As shown, there is often a disparity between the evaluations of institutional partners/donors and diaspora engaged in co-development projects. While institutional partners found that there was an overestimation of the capacity of diaspora organisations in developmental work, diaspora organisations felt their work helped the people they worked with in Iraq. There are two implications of this finding. First, in agreement with Giulia Sinatti, there is a clear inconsistency in understandings of development⁹⁶. While Western institutional developmental approaches are steeped in the transportation of democratic practices that are learned and passed down through organisational processes, diaspora organisations have shown that in conflict zones more elementary developmental needs are often required such as supporting livelihoods. This may explain the success of the children's library, which was supported beyond the Olof Palme centre for several years by various institutions in Sweden. The time given to educating children freed up time for Iraqi women to educate themselves or work, which supported their families in difficult times.

Secondly, there needs to be a more flexible approach to co-development projects that takes into consideration local contexts and needs. Co-development approaches should not be viewed as static models to be replicated and rolled out by diasporic partners. This negates the diasporic side of the cooperation, by seeing diaspora as simply contracted development workers rather than genuine partners in developmental work. If diaspora's comparative advantage lies in their bridging capital, then institutional

⁹⁶ Sinatti, 'Approaches to Diaspora Engagement'.

partners need to listen to their diasporic partners, adapt their strategies and expectations in order to fulfil local developmental needs.

Consequently, there is little evidence to suggest there is a genuine partnership at play since diasporic engagement is conditional on donor selection criteria⁹⁷ and operational methods instead of a two way conversation underlined by equality in decision making. It is therefore a conceptual stretch to label diaspora ‘partners’ in development. Rather, so far the picture shows that diaspora are but one actor employed by institutions in their development toolkit rather than symbolising a novel approach or advancement in developmental understandings and paradigms.

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⁹⁷ Nijenhuis and Broekhuis, ‘Institutionalising Transnational Migrants’; Sinatti, ‘Approaches to Diaspora Engagement’.