

**Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)**

# **Diaspora Volunteers and International Development**

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**An Autoethnographic Research Project**

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August 2013**

**Ottawa, Canada**

**Funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)**

### Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the President and Executive Director of the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD), Temesghen Hailu, who, with diligence and tact, played a fundamental role from initiation to completion of this research. He is a fine symbol of diaspora volunteerism in its fullest sense. Additionally, my appreciation goes to the Board members of AHEAD, particularly to Mrs. Azieb Teferi, who always responded promptly and positively to the many demands of the research.

If there is a person who has made a difference in seemingly routine work, it is Ms. Bathseba Belai, whose continued mentoring and support made the research journey much easier. As a researcher and writer on diaspora engagement herself, she was the ideal person to support my work and I attribute the good qualities of the research to her keen mind and attention to detail.

I sincerely appreciate and commend the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for partnering with AHEAD in so many ways. It has been consistently supporting the diaspora research and pilot project initiatives. Moreover, for this particular research it provided the funding and offered its seasoned expertise which highly improved the objectives and methods of the research. Once the report is completed its reviewers had done a commendable job in going through the report and forwarding valuable suggestions for further improvement. I would like to particularly salute Loredana Marchetti for her patient and tactful coordinating skill in this partnership.

Cuso International and its partners VSO-Ethiopia and Cuso International in Guyana deserve my humble gratitude as they took upon themselves the responsibility of helping me in many ways to see the research through to completion. Besides their moral encouragement, all of them provided me with the necessary work space and office amenities as I collected data and wrote the report.

Were it not for the diaspora volunteers, the Diaspora Volunteer Program and this research would not have come into being in the first place. I am greatly indebted to those who shared stories of their volunteer journey. As I have experienced the same journey, I was happy to have been part of their joy and pain.

The challenge of doing what one loves is that there is a tendency to become so deeply absorbed in the work that one ignores the passage of time and results in neglecting one's family and leisure. I offer heartfelt thanks to my beloved wife Meskerem Alemayehu and my son Brook Solomon as they sacrificed what is dear to them: my time and energy.

Finally, honour to the unknown Enabler and Sustainer of the human spirit from Whom all creativity and storytelling flows.

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# Diaspora Volunteers and International Development: Report of Autoethnographic Research

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## Executive summary

Currently, as migration from one country to the other becomes the established trend, the negative consequences of brain-drain are felt by those populations whose educated people leave in significant numbers in search of better opportunities. Fortunately, these migrants retain their connection to their homeland, mostly through remittances and the sharing of the new skills they acquired in their adopted “hostland”. One recent systematic effort is the creation by some development organizations of a Diaspora Volunteering Program (DVP) to capitalize on the potential for development offered by the transfer of knowledge and skills through the diaspora.

This autoethnographic research examined the process of this DVP and its role in international development. The study engaged diaspora volunteer sending and hosting organizations, participant communities and diaspora volunteers themselves in storytelling regarding the meaning of development, their interaction with each other, the unique role and contributions of diaspora volunteers, the volunteer journey (from recruitment, to training, deployment and return), the costs involved and the potential for positive impact to the hostland. Interviews and field observation were carried out in Canada, Ethiopia and Guyana with a total of 35 participants from all levels of actors in diaspora volunteerism. As one of the first diaspora volunteers to participate in the formal pilot DVP project in Ethiopia (with partners both from Canadian and Ethiopian sides), I described my own research both in providing and analyzing data. It is this combination of such ethnographic and autobiography methods that made autoethnography the framework of the research.

The stories presented and their analysis in the study indicate that there is a growing understanding among the DVP participant communities that development is about building human capacity; there is more work to do to facilitate interactions among volunteer sending/hosting organizations, individual diaspora volunteers and participant communities; there are sufficient examples and models to ascertain the unique contributions of the diaspora volunteers to international development; the volunteer journey needs minor adjustment; the cost of sending diaspora volunteers is comparable to that of international volunteers; and, returned diaspora volunteers’ positive impact on the hostland and the homeland continues even after they have left their formal volunteer assignment.

Documentation and analysis of the DVP should continue, not only because it is in its early stages and merits further exploration, but also because the process benefits all participants involved in diaspora volunteerism and those who are interested in expanding its role in international development.

### Introduction

#### Background

The author was nominated for Canada's Champion of Change for his volunteer work in Ethiopia. Pam Jardine deserves an even higher award for her dedicated volunteer work in Guyana. Melat Ijigu already received an award from an American institution in honour of her current work in Ethiopia. Clive Gobin and Endesahw Woldie still traverse the expanse of Guyana and Ethiopia, respectively, in the hope of changing the lives of many people in those countries. As I write his story, I can envision Endeshaw walking in the rain to an office to secure support for his organization Alliance for Brain Gain and Innovative Development (ABIDE). Endeshaw, Melat and I were born and raised in Ethiopia, and later settled in Canada and the USA, while Clive and Pam were born and raised in Guyana, later settling in Canada and the UK, respectively.

As the reader may well imagine, we all have similarities and differences. Coincidentally or intentionally, we all have at least an MA degree. We have all travelled extensively. We have all had different professional jobs. We left our homelands and settled in the UK, USA and Canada for different reasons. Melat left Ethiopia when she was eleven years old, whereas Pam left Guyana in 1969. Currently, our ages range from our 20s to our 60s. We have each developed a deep passion for international development. Above all, we are similar in being diaspora volunteers and wanting to have an impact on the international development scene. In our respective placements, besides being volunteers, we have provided additional support to our communities of choice in different ways: Pam was a member of the Rotary club; Clive developed a project for the Ministry of Agriculture; and I trained two school teachers.

In August 2011, while my good friend Dawn from the UK was pushing the stroller with little boy Brook on a downtown street in Toronto, I was meditating on what inspired her and our other friend Angela to come and visit me all the way from Addis Ababa and London. They were international volunteers in Ethiopia, where we met for the first time. They were both born and raised in the UK. They came to Ethiopia as volunteers, to be involved in the development work the country is engaged in. I went to Ethiopia on a volunteer assignment from Canada. As a person native to Ethiopia, I speak the local Amharic language and understand the local culture more deeply than either Dawn or Angela. I have my own expertise and had my own particular assignment, but because of my situation as a member of the Ethiopian diaspora<sup>1</sup> I was able to help Dawn and Angela settle well in Addis. I tried to bridge the culture gap they experienced and in the meantime helped them contribute much more than they would have under normal circumstances. Our shared understanding of Western culture helped us to enjoy our spare time together, further cementing our bond of friendship.

Later in this report, I will define diaspora volunteerism and demonstrate how it is different from international volunteerism. The purpose of this autoethnography is to understand development from all perspectives in the context of diaspora volunteerism and discover where these volunteers fit in the picture. This naturally leads to a related effort to understand how the process

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<sup>1</sup> In some literature we find the letter "d" in the word diaspora capitalized and also the word referring only to a group of people. Therefore, while referring an individual there is a tendency to say 'a member of the diaspora'. As the word and the concept it enshrines are evolving I have not either capitalized "d" in the word nor I have not strictly followed the term 'a member of the diaspora'.

of recruiting and assigning diaspora volunteers works, which institutions work with them and how the whole process can be improved. In order to achieve this, I preferred to tell my own and the stories of the four volunteers I mentioned earlier. Many of us have been or are diaspora volunteers, among whom are those whom I met and interviewed. All four of those described in this report returned to our birth countries to give voluntary professional services. In this process we all experienced similar and different joys and pains. We all have learned lessons and developed relationships we would not have acquired, if we had not been involved in diaspora volunteerism. Thus, this report could be the beginning of a positive story of global brain-circulation and brain-*gain*, reversing what is typically called the brain-drain.

So this is not your usual type of research report. Rather, it is a crisscrossing of autobiography and ethnography, working hand in hand to present factual stories, share insights and provide suggestions for the future. It describes the individual diaspora volunteers and the process of engaging them, the institutions involved in facilitating their engagement and how these processes fit together in the arena of international development. In order to tell these stories and analyze them structurally/systematically, I traced the paths of the other four in the countries where they have been volunteering: Ethiopia and Guyana. I followed their footsteps and sat in their offices and homes. I sipped coffee with them in cafes and had meals together. I talked to people they worked with and asked questions in order to obtain stories that encapsulate the essence of our learning. Whether talking to the diaspora volunteers, their colleagues, their institutions or the participant communities, the following questions are characteristic of all the conversations:

- How do you understand diaspora volunteerism (DV) and development?
- What motivated you to come back and serve your countries of origin?
- What is the role of the institutions involved in the elaboration and implementation of diaspora volunteers' engagement policy and practices?
- Who benefited from this engagement?
- How will Canada, the US or the UK benefit from this engagement?
- What are the costs associated with deploying diaspora volunteers?
- What are your recommendations for refining the process of diaspora volunteerism (the volunteer journey)?

### **Where we started**

For reasons which will be discussed later, there is growing interest in defining and understanding diasporas and their role in the making of our new global world. There are hundreds of books and articles written on the subject, hundreds of institutions working in related areas of diaspora and migration. In many countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), International Organization for Migration (IOM) or other non-governmental organizations have established offices to investigate and take action on the diaspora issue. In an effort to identify the space across which the diasporas move terms like “host country” and “adopted country” (Scheffer, 2011), and “homeland,” “hostland” (Cohen, 2008) are becoming familiar.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Terms like “homeland/hostland,” “country of origin/country of adoption,” “old country/new country,” etc. have been alternatively used in the literature. For simplicity, I prefer in this study to use the terms “homeland/hostland.”

It is interesting to note how far this movement has grown since the first foray of the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)<sup>3</sup> into diaspora-related research, namely the study titled “Semantics Aside: The Role of the African Diaspora in Africa’s Capacity Building Efforts” (Case Study: Ethiopia, October 2004), which sought to examine the potential role, if any, of the African diaspora in development activities on the continent. Results of this inquiry not only showed that there was a growing momentum among diaspora communities to be actively involved in the development of their birth country, but also established that the homeland governments considered diaspora engagement both welcome and necessary. In follow-up research, AHEAD examined policies and mechanisms to engage diaspora communities. One of the chief recommendations of this latter study was to explore how the diaspora and volunteer sending organizations could work together to promote diaspora volunteerism, resulting in an action-research collaboration between AHEAD, Cuso International (then Cuso-VSO), IDRC, VSO-Ethiopia and ABIDE to promote diaspora volunteerism. The main purpose of the action-research (pilot project), in which I was involved as one of the participant diaspora volunteers, was to experiment with involving the diaspora in short-term volunteer assignments in Ethiopia, and determine the effectiveness of this type of volunteering. The pilot project proved the conclusion of the initial study that “in the case of Ethiopia, Diaspora engagement for capacity building is possible, necessary and welcome” (p. 34).

The present autoethnography aims to illustrate this conclusion more clearly, by sharing some of the personal stories, institutional involvements and partnerships and the views of beneficiary (participant) communities. Therefore, AHEAD is closely involved in study-action-reflection involving the promotion of diaspora volunteerism among the Ethiopian and African diaspora. The evolution of this volunteerism can be described as a surge in interest in, and a need to more broadly study and act on, the initiative.

### **Benefits**

Since my initial involvement in diaspora volunteerism in May 2009—beginning with my response to the call for application to participate in the above-mentioned pilot project—I have always wanted a more formal opportunity to share my experiences and feelings about this endeavour. My desire to do this is not motivated by self-aggrandizement, but with the hope of inspiring others to do the same or more, and to sustain the momentum of the initiative by helping institutions and communities have a better view of the challenges and the prospects of diaspora volunteerism. Personal stories and testimonies have a profound influence on the others because they are first-hand accounts of events. But beyond my personal voice, I have listened to and recounted the voices of other diaspora volunteers, leaders of institutions, and community participants. I have reviewed related documents, observed work places and participated in meetings and discussions related to diaspora volunteerism. Thus, the stories and the lessons presented here have multiple advantages at various levels in inspiring other members of diaspora communities, helping to refine strategies and processes of diaspora volunteerism, encouraging appropriate working relationships with participant communities, and finally, promoting the kind of international development we all aspire strive to achieve.

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<sup>3</sup> The Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD) commissioned this autoethnographic research.



### Limitations

The limitations of this research can be viewed on two levels; the first is the lack of clear and well organized baseline data on the diaspora community and the institutions that work with them and the absence of a strong network of diaspora-related institutions. There is no clarity concerning which organization does what with regard to diaspora issues. Moreover, whatever data does exist is incomplete and sometimes conflicts with other data.

The second limitation is lack of access to information, as one attempts to develop current data on diaspora issues. Relevant officials and documents are not easily accessible or are not willing to provide the information needed. A good example of this second problem is the African Union (AU) and its diaspora-related effort. The importance of the diaspora issue for the AU can simply be inferred from the fact that it has named the African diaspora the 6<sup>th</sup> region of Africa. There are now structures in place to capitalize on the concept and practice of diaspora for development.

In view of the relevance to the AU of issues related to diaspora and development, I was looking forward to engaging in discussion with them regarding the present research. After lengthy email exchanges and phone conversations with concerned AU officials, I was finally able to meet with a representative of the organization. Unfortunately, and for reasons she was not willing to divulge, the AU representative refused to be interviewed and we were unable to engage in meaningful conversation regarding the African diaspora and its role in the continent's development initiatives. Even the documents relative to AU's work on diaspora that the representative promised to send were never received, despite repeated email reminders. As stated earlier, the AU's efforts to engage the African diaspora show that the institution is keenly interested in this group's potential as development actors on that continent. But accessing information relating the organization's work in diaspora engagement is limited.

In both Ethiopia and Guyana, the two data collection sites, the staff of some development agencies, such as UNV and UNDP were either inaccessible or were not able to share much information despite their repeated assertions of interest and engagement in the issue.

Nonetheless, I was able to collect a large amount of relevant data from different sources. For purposes of brevity, I omitted many stories and insights. In the process, balancing autobiography and ethnography and merging stories and factual analysis proved difficult. However, it is my conviction that the information selected and presented in this report appropriately addresses all of the questions that the research set out to answer.

### Theoretical framework

#### Diaspora: the familiar and the unusual

The word *diaspora* —the dispersion or spread of any people beyond their original homeland—is both familiar and strange. Its association with “an ever-broadening set of cases: essentially to any and every nameable population category” makes it an elusive term to define and understand (Brubaker, 2005, p. 3).

Volunteering to work for one's homeland while residing in another land is one of the criteria for belonging to the diaspora. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly discuss what diaspora

means, its global status, why the current interest in the relationship between diaspora and development, and, finally, the meaning and current status of diaspora volunteerism.

What is diaspora? Flying to Guyana to do this research, it was refreshing to read how Drew Gonsalves, a member of the Trinidad diaspora himself, is recreating old-time kaiso and calypso, mixing it with “newer beats of reggae” (Wright, 2013). While he is trying to live an active life in Toronto (forming a musical band called Kobo Town) and contributing to the city’s artistic life his “connection to his homeland remains the source of his passion.” And he sings:

*I bow to you, oh Trinidad...  
You are the land running through my veins.  
You are my land, the land of my life,  
Your joy is my life and your sorrow my knife,  
Your vision my sight and your land my birthright,  
You are the land of my struggle and your plight is my fight,  
The land of my struggle and your plight is my fight...*

— Paul Wright (2013, p. 48)

Drew’s deep connection to his homeland and its poetic expression is shared by many other members of the diaspora. Although not everyone is able to express such feeling in poetry or melody, such painful and powerful feelings of connection or disconnection from one’s homeland and the toil of trying to settle and get used to a new hostland is the shared story of many immigrants. Though that connection seems to lessen in the second and third generations, the first generation, in most cases, live and die with memories of a homeland that shape their joy and pain.

Like Ababu and Tadiwos<sup>4</sup> of Ethiopia, most others come back to the homeland with the goal of participating in its capacity-building efforts. Having acquired the best education and saved some money, they return to the homeland to invest, start life afresh and meaningfully contribute to their communities of origin. Ababu, for example, after studying and working in England and Germany returned to Ethiopia and opened an international school called “Andinet International School.” He ran the school for two years, hiring another principal to replace him once operations started flowing smoothly, and now serves on the Board of Directors. Currently, he is focused on building the Ethiopian Diaspora Association (EDA), which was established in August 2012 with the permission of the government.

Practically speaking, both Andrew and Ababu are called members of the diaspora in their homeland. Though the term has a long history related to the historic dispersion of the Jews, the term *diaspora* became more important with the evolution of globalization. As we know, one impact of globalization is the more rapid movement of people across boundaries, as, to borrow Sheridan’s (2009) words, it “cuts across national boundaries to integrate and connect communities outside of the nation-state” (p. 4). Through this inexorable process of integration

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<sup>4</sup> For ease of reading, I often use the first name of all the participants of this research without any title. In cases where the participants were not willing that their first names be mentioned I used pseudonyms.

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and connection, what we thought of as nations and nationalism crumble before our very eyes and transnationalism becomes the order of the day.

Sheridan advances two possible theories as to why people leave their home countries and settle in other countries. What she calls “the individual theory” states that individuals rationally and carefully evaluate the different options and determine the destinations best suited to meeting their needs. Building on the structuralist theory, she writes that the potential migrant is “vulnerable and subject to forces beyond his or her control. The migrant merely reacts to these forces, commonly referred to as “push and pull” factors: “these forces could be economic, social, or political, pushing people out of one country and pulling them towards another.” Though different migrants can list various reasons, usually the conditions in the homeland serve to “push” people out while “the state of affairs in the receiving country” seem to “pull” people into the hostland—in most cases the latter being higher income countries (Sheridan, 2009, p. 4). In a manner that seems a current trend, Tsuda (2009) lists “ethnopolitical persecution caused by major geopolitical disruptions, such as the dissolution of empires, colonial regimes, and multiethnic states” as some of the reasons or “push factors that forces them out of their country of birth” (p. 22). Once the new settlers begin to figure out how to pursue life in their newly adopted land, the word diaspora is attached to them.

Dufoix (2008) states that “Diaspora” is a Greek word, derived from the verb *diaspeiro*, which was used as early as the 5th century B.C. by Sophocles, Herodotus, and Thucydides” (p. 4). As mentioned earlier, the word was first associated with the dispersion of the Jews and their return to the Holy Land and both Banerjee (2012) and Cohen (2008) agree that the word and its related phenomena can be traced to antiquity. Banerjee, therefore, argues that globalization as a recent trend does not have to be merged with the formation of diasporas. In her article “Routing Diasporas” she states that though “its current ubiquity as a focus of academic study...is informed in no small measure by contemporary conditions of global capitalism *Globalization and diaspora*...bespeak different histories and modes of experience and should not be conflated” (Banerjee, 2012, p. 1, italics in the original). What is undeniable is that, like goods and services, people also continue to cross borders, thereby bringing new forms of connectedness and new forms of existence. It is in this context of continuous global movement of people and the creation of unique niches that we try to delimit who the diasporas are. As challenging as it may be to define the term *diaspora*, there is even the more delicate task of understanding its status in the world and exploring its implication in international development; an inescapable task as we venture into the realm of diaspora volunteerism.

What King et al. (2010) stated about the three defining criteria for diaspora are concise and appealing. They list the core criteria as “dispersion across international space, orientation to a homeland, and a clear sense of common identity sustained through ethnicity, language, and religion” (p. 36). Cohen (2008), the most quoted author on diaspora, seems to agree with Safran’s (1991) definition that “members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of ‘their original homeland;’ they idealized their ‘ancestral home,’ were committed to the restoration of ‘the original homeland’ and continued in various ways to ‘relate to that homeland’” (Cohen, 2008, p. 4).

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However, Lok Siu (2012) reminds us to be careful not to apply the term diaspora to every different ethnic group in a hostland. She argues that belonging to a certain diaspora group “does not depend on essential definitions of race or ethnicity. Rather, it is determined by self-identification and participation in diasporic activities. In other words, one belongs because one chooses to participate and take part in the community” (p. 148). I understand the validity of Lok Siu’s statement simply by looking at discrepancies of numbers in immigration statistics and the gap between the assumed number of diasporas and those who participate in “diasporic activities.” If certain individuals for their own reasons do not want to be identified as “diaspora” it should be accepted not only out of respect for their rights, but also as a matter of necessity for planning and designing relevant and effective diaspora related projects.

A good example is the case of some Oromo<sup>5</sup> people, who are members of the Ethiopian diaspora in North America. Although many Oromo emigrate from Ethiopia, a segment of them identify themselves, for political reasons, simply as Oromo, or Africans or “occupied ethnic groups” in Ethiopia, for whom factors such as civil war, ethnic politics and peer pressure play a major role in their self-identification. Thus, as they do not consider themselves part of the Ethiopian diaspora or join in Ethiopian diaspora activities, they cannot be accessed by projects aimed at the Ethiopian diaspora. Occasionally, those who welcome the new immigrants in the hostland decide where they belong.

Another example is Eritreans who were born and raised in Ethiopia when Eritrea was still an Ethiopian province. After Eritrean secession from Ethiopia, most Eritreans living abroad chose to be identified with the “Eritrean diaspora,” even though they emigrated with an Ethiopian passport and may have never set foot in Eritrea. Therefore, diaspora in one sense is about being connected to a birth country while living in a new country and, in another sense, it is about identifying oneself through choosing to associate with people of the same ethnic origin.

Thus, at one level one might say that a diaspora is made up of people who have been territorially dispersed across different nations because of different push factors and who are united by a sense of attachment to and longing for their country of origin. In this case, diasporas are people who are already settled in their new country, who are laying down roots in the new land and continue to get sustenance from the new country. While all their physical and intellectual needs are nurtured and protected in the hostland, yet the place where they were born and raised remains in their minds and hearts. At another level, the diaspora group one belongs to is a matter of choice. For a variety of reasons, such as politics, mixed ethnicity, war and related ethnic cleansing, family and peer pressure, marriage and status,<sup>6</sup> and so on, people tend to decide themselves where they belong (Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991; Tololyan, 1996; Tsuda, 2009; Van Hear, 1998).

Following is a list of the common features of diasporas developed by Cohen (2008) based on Safran’s 1991 definition:

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<sup>5</sup> The Oromo are an ethnic group found in Ethiopia, northern Kenya, and parts of Somalia.

<sup>6</sup> Status: some people, either due to their schooling in the new country, marriage to a native resident or working with professional native residents choose not to join the diaspora, believing diasporas to be “second class” while they are first class citizens by way of associating themselves with native residents. Hence we cannot call a person a member of a diaspora simply because he/she happens to have a country of origin different from the country in which he/she lives.

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1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation, even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility of another calamity might befall the group;
8. A sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even when home has become more vestigial;
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Cohen, 2008, p. 17)

### *Coming home*

An Ethiopian official recounted the following story about a member of the Ethiopian diaspora in Switzerland:

“The Ethiopians fled largely during the communist regime. Despite their great love for their country, they were forced to take another citizenship for convenience. So in Geneva, Switzerland I met a person who had lived in Switzerland for a very long time and had become a naturalized citizen. Recently, he wanted to come back to Ethiopia for a visit. He did not realize that he now needed a visa. He was unaware that we have the Yellow Card program which allows people of Ethiopian origin to have a permanent resident status in Ethiopia in consideration of the fact that Ethiopia does not recognize dual citizenship). He came to visit his relatives/family in Dembidolo, western Ethiopia. He thought as a former Ethiopian citizen, he should be able to enter Ethiopia without any difficulty, despite his Swiss passport. He was away for so many years without any contact with the Ethiopian reality. He was working hard to make his life in Switzerland better.

Now as he stood at the counter at the Bole International Airport to have his entrance processed, the immigration officer told him that he has not secured a visa. He totally forgot that as a Swiss citizen, he needed to have an entry visa.

He replied to the immigration officer, “Why do I need a visa? I am an Ethiopian.”

The officer said, “May be you were born and raised here, but you gave me a Swiss passport.”

“Yes. I have a Swiss passport. But I am an Ethiopian and you hear I am talking to you in Amharic – an Ethiopian language. I can even talk to you in Oromifa.”

“I understand what you are saying. I can’t deny the fact that as someone who was born and raised here you are an Ethiopian. But you produced a Swiss passport and, legally, a person

with a Swiss passport must have an entry visa to enter Ethiopia. Go to the visa office down there and get one.”

It finally dawned on him that he was now unable to enjoy the rights entitled to an Ethiopian citizen. He could not simply come back and enter the country. He told me that the realization of this fact touched his heart and made him cry in front of the immigration officer. He is now barred from returning to his country of birth because he is the citizen of another country.

As it turned out, he processed his visa at the time and was able to enter the country. Eventually, he was able to speak highly about the Yellow Card the government prepared for people of Ethiopian origin, so that they could come and go freely. Therefore, the government’s decision has addressed not only many formal administrative questions, but also emotional ones.

This story illustrates why both Pam and Melat—who have been away from their homeland for more than 15 years—say that by coming back to the homeland they feel rooted. Melat, in fact, insists that she has a responsibility, because she understands the need, knows the language and has the skills to make a difference. She summarizes her feeling by saying, “I feel proud to be here. I feel rooted. I feel a purpose in life. I feel good.”

### **The status of diaspora in the world**

Cohen (2008) recounts that accessing Google in August 2007 yielded “an impressive 14,100,000 hits from the word *diaspora*, while the more delimited term *global diaspora* generated 2,100,000 hits” (Cohen, 2008, p. xv). In comparison accessing Google in July 2013 yielded 67,900,000 hits from the word *diaspora* in 0.13 seconds, while *global diaspora* generated 21,200,000 hits. This simply shows a dramatic surge in few years in the range of activities that use the term *diaspora*. It is being applied to all kinds of networks, products, and associations. Given what King et al. (2010) cited about the extent of international migration, such surge is not surprising. King et al. state that:

In 2010, there were a total of 214 million international migrants – people living in a country other than that of their birth – which equates to 3 percent of the world’s population. To some extent, this belies the enormous political significance that migration seems to have in countries keen to control or even ban immigration....Globally, 49 percent of international migrants are females, and many flows – both emigrants and immigrants – are at approximate parity. But their skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial capabilities are lost to their home countries. (p. 48)

### **The AU and the CARICOM**

The African Union (AU) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are the two continental and sub-continental organizations that represent Ethiopia and Guyana respectively. However, the AU seems more advanced than CARICOM in terms of establishing plans and structures to define and utilize the diaspora. According to Ratha and Plaza (2011) the AU defines its diaspora as “consisting of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union.” The *Migration and Remittances Factbook* (World Bank, 2011) reports that more than 30 million people have officially emigrated from north and sub-Saharan Africa, excluding unrecorded migrants. According to Ratha and Plaza (2011), members of this population send more than \$40 billion a year to people in their homeland.

With the exception of Jamaica most CARICOM countries are not represented in the literature in terms of a diaspora community and their countries' respective effort to engage them. Whereas in Africa "Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Rwanda, among others, are looking to tap into their diasporas for investments in their homeland" and exploring and implementing strategies to use the diaspora for knowledge and skill transfer (Ratha and Plaza, 2011, p. 49).

**Table 1. A comparison between Ethiopia and Guyana**

Country	Total area of land	Population	Net migration rate
<b>Ethiopia</b>	1,104,300 sq km	93,877,025 (July 2013 est.)	-0.23 migrant(s)/1,000 population
<b>Guyana</b>	214,969 sq km	739,903 (July 2013 est.)	-11.21 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2013 est.)

**Ethiopia.** Officially called the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, it is a country located in East Africa bordered by Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya. It is the second-most populated country in Africa. The country is landlocked, in contrast to Guyana's small population and extensive coastline. Ethiopia is one of the founding members of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (currently the African Union), with Addis Ababa serving as the headquarters of the AU.

According to the current CIA *World Fact Book* (2013) the ancient Ethiopian monarchy maintained its freedom from colonial rule, except for a short-lived Italian occupation from 1936–41. In 1974, a military junta, the Derg, deposed Emperor Haile Selassie (who had ruled since 1930) and established a socialist state. It was during this period of socialist ideology that a major migration of Ethiopian professionals began. Though the socialist regime was toppled in 1991, emigration has continued for economic and political reasons.

**Table 2. Country situation<sup>7</sup>**

Country	Total population (million) 2008	GDP per capita purchasing power parity 2008	Remittances as % GDP 2007	Migrants As % of population 2010
Ethiopia	80.7	868	1.8%	0.60%
Guyana	0.8	2,542	25.8%	1.50%

<sup>7</sup> From Russell King, *People on the Move: An atlas of Migration*, p. 106.

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The story of the Ethiopian diaspora began in two major ways. The most narrated story is of those fleeing the country's harshest communist rule, imprisonment, torture and killing. Elaborating on this, Terrazas (2007) writes:

The Derg's brutal tactics induced hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians to flee from forced resettlement, ethnic violence, and humanitarian disasters. Proxy conflict erupted between Ethiopia and Somalia, fueled by Cold War rivalries, displacing many more. Refugees who fled the Derg often first went to neighboring countries before being resettled in the West, thereby establishing communities. Soon, they brought their families as well.<sup>8</sup>

People fled the country by “Bole or Bale” a famous phrase used to describe the means of travel. “Bole” is the name of Ethiopia's international airport, representing the legal method of leaving the country, while “Bale,” the name of one of the southeastern remote provinces of Ethiopia, indicating illegal migration on foot or in a vehicle, driving to neighbouring countries. The majority of immigrants stayed in Kenya, Sudan, Egypt, Italy and England before arriving in Europe and North America.

The second well known method of leaving the country is going abroad—for further education, to visit friends or relatives, or to receive medical treatment—and then settling permanently in the hostland. The most recent and larger entry of Ethiopians to the U.S. was made through the Diversity Immigrant Visa program, a congressionally mandated lottery program to receive a residence permit.

Currently, the Ethiopian diaspora is well established in North America and Europe, with many and varied associations, media, forums, churches—even a National Association in Ethiopia itself. It has brought large financial and cultural remittances to the country. According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), there was a policy and an effort within the ministry to engage the diaspora in economic development and investment prior to 2002. However, it was precisely in that year that the government established an independent unit within the ministry to focus on diaspora issues. There was also another diaspora unit within the now defunct Ministry of Capacity Building. The ministry has now been transformed into the Civil Service Ministry and the diaspora unit was abolished.

The issue of diaspora engagement in Ethiopia is addressed not only at the national, but also at the regional level, where regional governments are expected to give equal emphasis to facilitating diaspora contributions. Particularly after the Ethiopian millennium (2007) there are increasing numbers of the diaspora travelling to Ethiopia and visiting the regions. Based on this information, there are diaspora offices in each regional bureau, headed by the presidents of the regions. In fact, regional cities, such as Awassa, Bahirdar, and even Addis Ababa, offered (among other things) plots of land for the diaspora to build houses as an incentive for them to return.

**Guyana.** The Republic of Guyana, referred to here as Guyana, is a sovereign state on the northern coast of South America. It is part of the Anglophone Caribbean, but belongs to the mainland, unlike many other Caribbean countries which are islands. Guyana is a member state of CARICOM, whose office I had the opportunity to visit, only to find that it has no diaspora projects whatever.

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<sup>8</sup> Migration Policy Institute: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/cbi-caribbeanmigration.pdf>



Guyana was founded and profoundly influenced Dutch and British colonization. It became an independent republic on 23 February 1970, but the country's colonial past has so shaped its present character that it is almost impossible to think of and work on any diaspora engagement project without understanding this history.

It is extremely difficult to obtain data on the actual numbers and the pattern of immigration of Guyanese citizens. Though there are large numbers flowing out of the country in relation to its total population, they are dwarfed when compared to the migrant population of the whole Caribbean region. According to the CIA *World Fact Book*, Guyana has an approximate population of 739,903 and a source from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports more than this same number living in North America, the largest concentration being in New York City. Therefore, Guyana would seem to be a good place to see the impact of the diaspora on development.

### **The current interest in diaspora and development**

*For birthing an idea  
Which has always been in our minds  
To do what we can  
In whatever way possible  
To pay the debt that we have accumulated  
To say thank you  
To the country and people  
We have left behind  
Only physically,  
But never in spirit.*

— Haile Belai, 2001<sup>9</sup>

According to World Bank (2012)<sup>10</sup> data, Ethiopia is categorized as a low-income country with a GDP (current US\$) of \$43.13 billion and a total population of 91.73 million. Guyana is categorized as lower-middle-income country with a GDP (current US\$) of \$2.851 billion and a total population of 795,400. Aside from the level of their respective human development, it is clear that much remains to be done in terms of their material progress.

As indicated in Table 2, both Ethiopia and Guyana have lost significant skilled human power through emigration. In a country where about 85.9 % of people with a tertiary-level education migrate (Ratha and Xu, 2008), it is unimaginably difficult to implement any development project. In her studies on the engagement of diaspora in Africa, Bathseba Belai (2007) states that “brain drain to the developed world has severely weakened the capacity of many developing

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.aheadonline.org/poem.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/country/>

countries to fuel their growth” (p. 9). She also states that the Caribbean region and the African continent have been the most affected in this regard.

It is significant that, as more and more migrants settle in higher income countries, it has been calculated that the African diaspora, for example, sends more than \$40 billion a year to residents of their home or ancestral lands. However, Ratha and Plaza (2011) and Belai (2007) agree that this significant the brain drain can be reversed by maximizing the gains of migration beyond remittances. What Dufoix (2008) called “long-distance nationalism” has an impact in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America beyond such remittances. According to Dufoix, the impact included humanitarian aid to homelands, lobbying hostland governments to either support or refuse homeland national policies, and formation of an alternative political space to give voice to marginalized or oppressed groups in homelands. Having gained strength both in quantity and quality, the next level in this social evolution of diaspora involvement seems to be the transfer of skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial capabilities to the homeland population. This can be done in a variety of ways and there are already various initiatives being undertaken across North America and Europe. Diaspora volunteerism is one such initiative supported by both homeland and hostland governments.

As VSO-Ethiopia’s Country Director Wubeshet Woldemariam expressed it:

People are the best agent of change, as we believe. If we let trained people leave the country, its development is definitely to be hampered. Our feasibility study showed the positive aspects of DV to reverse the process of brain drain. Two million members of the diaspora may live scattered throughout North America, Europe and Asia (part of Africa too). They are an untapped human resource. Though the majority left the country, they still maintain emotional, financial, and social links to their country of origin. They send back money; they come and visit families. So the question of engaging the diaspora, particularly for knowledge and skill transfer through voluntary work, becomes crucial. If we can bring international volunteers, why not the diaspora community? That is where the initiative to bring the DV started.<sup>11</sup>

Temesghen Hailu, President and Executive Director of AHEAD, summarizes the motive and objective of diaspora for development from Ethiopia’s perspective:

- Because of the success of the diaspora abroad, it should be sensitized regarding the urgency of addressing, concretely and practically, Ethiopia’s development needs;
- The diaspora has a moral responsibility to contribute;
- A significant part of the homeland’s brainpower is in the diaspora and is used to benefit the country in which they have settled; that same brain-power should be used for the benefit of Ethiopia;
- Already the diaspora contributes millions annually in remittances, but the transfer of skills knowledge and expertise could foster more sustainable development;
- Foreign assistance should be temporary and not contribute to permanent dependency; ultimately, sustainable development must be achieved by the efforts of the citizens of the homeland;

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, January 2013.

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- volunteer engagement by the diaspora will motivate Ethiopians at home to take development into their own hands.

### **Volunteerism**

Speaking of the traditions upon which Canada was founded and built Janet Lautenschlager (1992) insists that it is “our spirit of volunteerism.” Even two decades ago she wrote:

Volunteers supply the human energy that drives many thousands of voluntary organizations and community groups across Canada. Today, some 5.6 million people express their concerns and interests through volunteer work for countless organizations in a wide range of fields. In addition, approximately 13 million Canadians do volunteer work on their own, outside of organized groups. (p. 1)

For example, statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor (2003) give the following figures about the state of volunteerism on its own territory:

In 2003, about 64 million people (more than a quarter of the U.S. population) did volunteer work;

- The value of volunteer time, on average, is \$17.19 an hour;
- Volunteers donate an average of 52 hours of time a year;
- Volunteers are most likely to work with religious groups, education or youth services, or social or community service groups.

Of course, volunteerism is not without its critics, some of whom have valid points to make. In one of the volunteer training sessions, we were asked to list the negative aspects of volunteerism. The following were among some of the criticisms listed: sending volunteers shows support for or endorses corrupt governments; volunteers do the actual work, rather than building capacity or sharing skills; volunteers cannot understand the values and cultures, as these are deep and pervasive and, as a result, cannot be understood and transferred easily. In fact, there was another probing question: Are the things they do actually needed? In a well written article on the Canadian Youth Volunteerism Abroad program, Plum and Jorgen (2012) discuss the stance of neo-colonial and neo-liberal agendas such a program may have the risk of promoting.

### **Diaspora volunteerism (DV)**

According to Tsuda (2009), there are different types of diaspora return. Whether through different institutional arrangements, individual initiative or the encouragement of homeland governments, Tsuda states that “diasporic return continues to be more ethnically driven and emotionally charged than other types of labour migration” (p. 4). Based on the earlier definition of diaspora, we can safely say that one of the basic motivations of diaspora volunteerism (return to one's homeland to give voluntary service) is the original tie to the homeland. Beyond the nostalgic desire to rediscover one's ethnic roots, efforts of hostland and homeland governments to encourage the diaspora to participate and contribute in national development brought into existence and sustain diaspora volunteerism. As we shall see later, however, the circular movement of diasporas between the homeland and hostland benefits both places in many untold ways.

Institutions like the Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA), People to People (P2P) and the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)<sup>12</sup> are well known examples of the promotion of diaspora volunteerism among members of the Ethiopian diaspora in North America. Beyond their use of the members of the diaspora to administer their affairs and fundraise, these North American organizations have been sending diaspora members to the homeland to provide professional support to local partner institutions. In particular, AHEAD took this effort to the next stage by commissioning a feasibility study on diaspora volunteerism (Belai, 2007). This current research itself bears witness to the way in which the concept of diaspora volunteerism evolved through the stages of feasibility study, project implementation and impact assessment. Currently, AHEAD has partnered with Cuso International to work on institutionalizing diaspora volunteerism, based on the fact that the latter has gained vast experience in both international and diaspora volunteerism.

Guyana's diaspora volunteerism experience has also been functioning for the past two decades. According to Clive Gobin (2011)<sup>13</sup> there are many diaspora organizations in North America which have links to local communities and organisations, schools, hospitals, sports clubs and other associations. He notes that Cuso International has been facilitating the movement of international volunteers to Guyana over the years and has recognized that the skills-base of the Guyanese diaspora can also be harnessed for local developmental efforts. Such recognition led to a pilot diaspora volunteerism project implemented in the health and education sectors. Gobin states that out of this initiative and project came "the Burns Unit at Georgetown Hospital as well as an ongoing relationship with Peter Jailall and his group who visit" Guyana regularly for an education project (p. 7).

At present the MoFA of Guyana, in collaboration with IOM, has developed a project called the Guyana Diaspora Project (GUYD), which aims to map the skills, resources and level of interest of the Guyanese diaspora in order to match diaspora members to the country's development needs and objectives. A website is developed to this end, so that individuals, groups, associations and organizations in the diaspora can be registered and create a profile of their skills and capacities. The website was developed and launched in September 2012, and by the time I was collecting data (April 2013), 600 people have been registered in the system.

By way of summary, following are the principal ways in which diaspora volunteerism (DV) contributes to the world and to the members of the diasporas themselves:

1. For those who departed/fled the country under traumatic conditions, DV provides the opportunity to heal and to be reintroduced to the original homeland. In this process, pre-departure and in-country training (ICT) play an important role in the preparing the volunteers in transition;
2. For those who left voluntarily under peaceful conditions, either for education, training, employment, through sponsorships, family reunions, etc., DV can help them carry out the unfulfilled obligation they may feel toward their country—a form of "payback" to the country that raised and educated them, but which they left for reasons of personal gain;

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<sup>12</sup> Registered charities in Canada and the USA whose main objective is the promotion of national development in Ethiopia.

<sup>13</sup> Unpublished source.

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3. The first two reduce the need to return to settle permanently in the homeland, because it offers the possibility of staying and serving in the homeland for a period of time and coming back to the hostland to resume “normal” life to which they have now become accustomed;
4. DV allows diaspora communities to go back and reconnect with the language and culture that created and nourished them, enabling them to keep their individual/communal ethnic identities and preserve the rich diversity they bring to their hostland; while serving professionally, they are able to reinforce their culture and sense of original identity that identified them with the diaspora in the first place;
5. DV reverses the sometimes rocky relationship of intermittent visits to the homeland and offers the opportunity for a more moderate and professional relationship with the homeland and its government. This is especially important when some homeland governments are embittered by the outcry and protests of diaspora members concerning the lack of democracy and accountability “back home;”
6. Individuals engaged in DV are able to realize and appreciate the special opportunities the hostland provides;
7. Comparing the homeland and the hostland also provides insight into what the commonalities of the human family;
8. As diaspora volunteers come from different host countries and as their expertise is coordinated, it will be vitally important to see how the knowledge and skills acquired from service in different countries contributes to the development of a nation; for example, Ethiopia now has diaspora communities in most of the developed nations of the world;
9. Immigrants and well-travelled residents are known to be open to pluralism and multiculturalism, which are fundamental to the character of countries such as Canada and the U.S.

## Methodology

### What is autoethnography?

In order to make this research report more accessible and personal to more readers, I have elected to use autoethnography as my method of research and writing. According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010), autoethnography “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (p. 275). They add that the autoethnographic research and writing approach:

challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (p. 273)

In contrast to research that claims to be objective or impersonal, I have found it valuable to present stories that relate to me and to the research participants, that is, stories that are meaningful, accessible, and evocative and which are grounded in personal experience. The story of my life itself is so woven in these stories. In the story of my life Guyana is familiar as much as Ethiopia is.

Since 1999 when I attended a one-month training on a literacy program called ‘On the Wings of Words’ run by Varqa Foundation in Guyana, I have been in touch with the country. Because of that relation a Guyanese young man came to Ethiopia to work with me on the literacy and related projects for one year. An Ethiopian colleague who was working with me left to Guyana and permanently settled there promoting similar development projects. Wherever I resided I continued to live in and keep in touch with the people and their stories. Not only documenting the stories but also, I felt, such autoethnography “sensitizes readers to issues of identity politics . . . and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010, p. 275). In fact, the stories are so self-explanatory, that the listing of findings and their discussion can be done in a concise manner. It is a way of helping readers explore people’s culture in a poetic and imaginative way.

Ethnographers normally study the relational practices of a culture, its common values, beliefs, and shared experiences, for the purpose of helping all better understand it. Accordingly, ethnographers become *participant observers* in the culture, by taking *field notes* of cultural happenings, and their own and others role and engagement in these happenings. Therefore, ethnography is about “the routine, daily lives of people” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 11). Moreover, according to Lecompte, Preissle and Tesch (1993), ethnography emphasizes “the discovery of shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors, [and] highlights the social mechanisms that facilitate these processes (p. 141). When researchers do autoethnography or combine ethnography with autobiography, however, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture, by possessing a particular cultural identity and/or by being part of an endeavour. However, beyond telling about experiences, “autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010, p. 278). It is this methodological background that encouraged me to write and analyze my own experience as a volunteer and the culture of volunteerism in general.

### Narrative and its analysis

The substance of the autoethnography methodology is stories (narratives) and their analysis. Covington (1995) writes, “there is a human need to create stories, no matter how we structure them. Stories are not only phenomenological interpretations or theories of who we are; they also constitute a primary means of communication and exchange (p. 405). Baron and Bluck (2011) also tell us that “humans are storytellers. Telling stories is a unique phenomenon that occurs across various cultures” (p. 93).

Though stories in most cases are self-explanatory, researchers who are at arm’s length from the storytellers tend and need to analyze them; hence narrative analysis. Smith and Sparkes (2009) state that “narrative analysis, as an umbrella term, is a method that takes the story itself as its object of enquiry” (p. 280). More specifically, Riessman (2008) describes narrative analysis as “a family of methods for interpreting texts [e.g., oral, written, and visual] that have in common a storied form” (p. 11). According to Smith and Sparkes (2009) narrative analysis is one of the techniques to interpret the ways in which people perceive reality, make sense of their worlds, and perform social actions. As a technique, it “may be a particularly good choice for researchers interested in complex, subjective experiences, as well as intentions, patterns of reasoning, and attempts to find meaning in personal experiences” (Woiike, 2008, p. 434). It is out of this complex, personal and original nature of narrative analysis that a lengthy and rather messy

process emerges. But as a technique, as Smith and Sparkes (2009) would agree, it provides opportunities and spaces for people to tell long, in-depth, rich, and contradictory stories about their thoughts, emotions, and lives in ways they may not have done previously, and in a manner that quicker and cleaner methods might suppress.

The data in this research were generated mainly from interviews, to some extent from field observations, and, more importantly, from my personal experience. I conducted this research in environments with which I am thoroughly familiar. As is acknowledged in ethnographic studies, I began my research “with biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 11). However, I entered the field with a set of specific questions and consciously interacted with the research participants, as I sought stories that could provide a basis for analysis. During my time with the research participants, in addition to interviewing them, I observed some of them in their work places, looking for justifications and meanings in their stories.

The following research questions were presented to all participants, with the request that they respond from both their personal and institutional experience:

1. How does your view of and practice of development compare with that of other participants involved in volunteerism?
2. How do you perceive the interactions between and among diaspora volunteers and participant institutions and communities?
3. What can you identify as specific characteristics and contributions of diaspora volunteers?
4. How do you compare the selection, training, deployment and monitoring of diaspora volunteers (the volunteer journey) to the actual need and practice of development?
5. How do you see the experience of volunteers overseas affecting their involvement in Canadian society after their return?
6. What recommendations can you make to address the gap and the mismatch between diaspora volunteerism and the theories and practices of development?

The stories and analysis for each research question will be presented shortly under themes taken from the questions themselves.

### **Sources of data**

I travelled to Ethiopia in the months of January–February and to Guyana in March–April, 2013.

In both countries the sources of data may be divided into three major categories: institutions, individuals, and community. The institutions can be further divided into policy makers and policy implementers. The concerned officials spoke on behalf of their organizations. In most cases, they reflected the organization’s view rather than their own. Though the term “community” in this case indicates the participant communities who are traditionally called “beneficiaries,” they are still represented by institutions which organize and support them. In other cases, we can say that there are institutions on three levels: those which set policy on diaspora volunteerism, those which recruit, assign and monitor diaspora volunteers, and those which employ and make use of diaspora volunteers. Some institutions, such as the Ministries of Health or Education participate in policymaking, while at the same time employing volunteers.

Appendix I shows the number and type of institutions whose representatives I spoke with. In some cases, I interacted with the head of an organization and with the person directing the diaspora unit. After completing the data collection in Guyana, I made a presentation to, and engaged in conversation with, the staff of Cuso International-Guyana on the process of the research and the preliminary findings.

I interviewed and spoke with seven diaspora volunteers in Ethiopia and six in Guyana, observed eight work sites, visited different communities where volunteer activities are taking place, and four universities (Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, University of Guyana and Nations University in Guyana). I attended meetings and workshops, including the WITNESS voluntary youth group, Starbroek market area volunteer-based children's class, a meeting of the Guyanese President with foreigners, a gathering organized by InterNations group, and evaluation meetings for health and partnership programs. While writing the report I continued to meet diaspora volunteers, people from diaspora volunteer-sending organizations, and attended meetings, such as the presentations in Toronto by Sister Tibebe Maco, the President of HIDA (see Appendix I), Guyanese cultural night, and others.

My own diaspora volunteer experience was an important aspect of this inquiry. It helped me create an easy rapport with the participants, express myself clearly, and engage comfortably in discussion. As mentioned earlier in the description of the context and meaning of autoethnography, such an overt admission of personal experiences and preconceptions during an inquiry and in the writing process sets this qualitative inquiry apart from quantitative inquiry. That is why Wallace and Loudon (1997) argue that "qualitative researchers presume that understanding of events is constructed through the preconceptions we bring to them" (p. 321). Cognizant of the impact of personal experience in research, Cohen and Manion (1994) reiterate the importance of experience and authority in our endeavour to come to terms with the problems of day-to-day living. Therefore, rather than claiming to be objective in my presentation I take a position; that is, I make judgements, tell my stories, and share insights. It is the mix of the interview, my personal experience, and the field observations that make up autoethnography.

Due to this same personal involvement in the inquiry process, I also urge my readers to evaluate the research in terms of my own background and credibility, as well as the methods I used, the potential benefits of the research to the Diaspora Volunteering Program, and the knowledge it generates for the community of learners in the area of international development.

Most interviews in Ethiopia were done in the Amharic language and then translated into English while all the interviews in Guyana were carried out in English.

### ***I keep walking: A page from my diary***

Guyana is a beautiful country—the rivers, the lakes, the Atlantic Ocean, the sea wall, the coloured flowers, the handsome people. Every time I find myself dumbfounded by the natural beauty of this country I would ask myself: "why do people want to leave this country in the first place?" The natural beauty, the mining (resources), the hospitality, the spirituality... who is going to preserve them? Aside from the downtown, I would say its capital city, Georgetown, is still a city in a garden.

I keep walking in the sun, in the hot temperature. I am sweating. I try to ignore the terrible smell coming from some corners because human inefficiency is turning the garden city into a garbage dump.



I went from listening to Pam's inspiring story to the Parliament building where I thought some influential people might be found. From the carving on a statue by the gate, I learn that it is a historic structure, built in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a colonial architect. In fact, from the way the parliament is strangled by so many challenges and by the blame about its dysfunctionality, one might say that the spirit of the long-dead colonial architect still haunts it. Complaints abound about the racial and political divisions, social tensions, and inefficient bureaucracy in this parliament shaped by its colonial past.

My interviewees spoke with great bitterness of the corruption in Guyana, its poisonous effect on the whole development process and the frustrating level at which it continues... and I went to the parliament building to talk with some officials, including Cathy Hughes, a prominent founder and leader of one of the opposition parties. I could not understand what the security guard was saying. Somehow, I figured out that he was telling me to come back in the afternoon to see Cathy. I came back after enjoying the Roti Chicken lunch at the Sports bar right across the street in the Starbroek market. While I was talking to the same security guard, a woman across from him told me that Cathy was out of town and would not return before next week. I have to call or return next week.

While leaving the Parliament building, I took a picture of many million-dollar [*Guyanese dollars*] cars parked in the compound. I wondered to whom those cars belonged. Is the monthly salary of an MP enough to buy such type of cars? Or is this part of the whirlpool of politics and corruption? I am just asking myself. Some say that endemic corruption, unemployment and crime have taken their toll on the people and the generations continue to emigrate. For example, after writing about the miserably low salary of GPL<sup>14</sup> meter-readers, columnist Frederick Kissoon, ended his 9 April 2013 column in Guyana's *Kaieteur News* with the words, "Guyana died a long time ago." This is the context of development in Guyana.

### ***What's up?***

On any one of the elite streets of Addis Ababa, either Bole or Edna Mall, people say it is easy to identify the members of the diaspora who happen to be there, on vacation or for other work. Not only by the clothes, hats and glasses they are wearing, or their unusual beard style, but also by the phrase "What's up?" In fact, the younger segment of the population refer to members of the diasporas by the term "What's up?" because, diaspora members, curious to find out what is new in the city or wanting to plan what they will do next use the phrase repeatedly. If you ask me 'What's up?' at this point, I will say I am about to tell you how I organized the findings and analysis part of the report.

As I mentioned earlier, the central data for this research consist of stories or snippets from a large number of interviews. The purpose of the formal data collection was to gather material for stories, rather than presenting verbatim accounts of what people said. Therefore, the few stories presented under each research question/theme form the springboard on which the analysis of the same stories and the sharing of insights from observations and personal experience are built. The stories are either quoted directly from other participants (put in italics) or they are my personal accounts and appear in block quotations without italics. They are told in sequence under themes

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<sup>14</sup> Guyana Power and Light Company.

derived from the research questions and followed by two levels of analysis. They are not in any particular order and sometimes some of the stories address two or more themes. The stories are, in most cases, self-explanatory and do not require much analysis, but the latter is used to convey my understanding and view of the stories.

The first level of analysis is a simple listing or summary of findings from each story, while the second level is a discussion of the implications of those findings. While at first the listings of the findings seem to correspond with the order in which they appear in the stories, in the later analysis, the discussion becomes more interconnected and comprehensive. In this later analysis, comparisons are also drawn with literature and more supporting quotes are given from the interviews.

## Data and analysis

### Views and practices of development

#### Stories

##### ***Be careful what you ask for***

When asked about the meaning of development, a diaspora volunteer related this story:

*Once upon a time there was a poor man beseeching God for gold. He was so insistent that he prayed day and night decrying his poverty, lamenting his desperate situation and asking God for material salvation. And it is said that one day God showed up in person to grant his wish:*

*“What do you need?”*

*“Earthly riches, dear God.”*

*“How much?”*

*“I would not mind if whatever I touch turns to gold.”*

*“Your wish is granted.”*

*The poor man was happy that God granted his wish and rushed to his home to embrace his wife and share the news. Just as he joyously hugged his wife, she turned into a golden statue. He was shocked and hit the table. To his amazement, the table also turned to gold.*

*He realized that his prayers were wrong and started to think how to rectify them.*

##### ***Development defined***

Ephrem, the Program Manager for HIDA said:

*“Development is qualitative change in the lives of the people. It needs universal participation. It is a series of progressive, qualitative personal, institutional, and structural changes. So it cannot be addressed by a single entity. We have to work in partnership. We have so many partnerships including 67 Edirs.<sup>15</sup> At the core of our work is volunteerism. In 10 years, we have worked with more than 5000 local volunteers. Currently we have engaged*

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<sup>15</sup> Traditional community organizations in Ethiopia established mainly to help each other during mourning.

*640 volunteers whose names can be shown. We provide them with 100birr (about Can\$5.00) monthly allowance for transport.*

*I feel the view is not shared by all. Even development students in college refuse to acknowledge when I say development is not just economic growth. Proper development must address inequalities and social injustice. If the process of development does not bring these changes it is no longer development. Development in many sectors is thought about in terms of economic models (GDP, GNP, income growth, etc.). The government also puts development in figures so people are led to believe that there has been development, when in reality their life has not changed. Development is a process; it is not one-stop shopping. It has ups and downs; once it occurs, it is long-lasting and sustainable. But not many people understand this. As the Ethiopian proverb goes, "You cannot clap with one hand." That is why in order to have an effect in development, we need to work together, in partnership. Working with Edirs is a good example, because they reach almost everyone in the locality.*

### ***Bottom up or top down?***

*Haile from MoH Ethiopia in a written statement said, "Our organization understands development as an effort, planned, organization-wide, and managed from the top, to increase organization effectiveness through planned interventions in the organization's processes. i.e. is a planned system of change."*

Maxine from Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) said the following about where development begins:

*It is a mix of all. It is a conscious effort by programs to do that. We know for example that women were taught only to be housewives. They were destined to achieve/earn a little money, just for school clothing or a TV set. Our program consciously tried to convince them that they could do much more than that. In other cases, the women already saw themselves as entrepreneurs, but needed to be supported and encouraged, needed others to share their knowledge. Once you point them in the right direction, we can pretty much sit back and they will come to us and say "Look, I wanted to do this and this, but how?" They say, "we heard about this, how do we go about it?" The more you go out of the cities the more women needed encouragement and confirmation that they can do it. Women in the cities only need the facilities. They are exposed to doing things, so they don't need much encouragement, just the tools. In the rural areas you have to encourage and take them by hand until they say, "This is possible."*

Speaking of how and why AHEAD was established, Temesghen said, "*AHEAD was established at a one-hour meeting during the lunch break of seven Ethiopians and following their discussion as to how the Ethiopian diaspora could contribute towards the development of Ethiopia.*

*Bearing in mind the investment which Ethiopia had made in their own education, the seven thought that they had a moral obligation to give back to their country and to raise the awareness of other Ethiopians in the diaspora regarding their own responsibility and, like AHEAD, to make a commitment to give back.*

### ***Capacity Building and the Diaspora (Edudev)<sup>16</sup>***

Wubeshet Woldemariam, country director of VSO-Ethiopia said, *“Though we also have service delivery in mind our main objective for the volunteers is to share their skills for the local partners. Development in most cases is equated with economic growth. But there is also peoples’ development perspective; freeing people from the shackles that bar them from living a descent standard of living. People need to take care of themselves; being in charge of their progress and reduction of poverty.”*

Poverty manifests itself in many ways, beginning with the lack of services to meet basic needs to the denial of choices and opportunities and violations of human dignity. VSO’s mission is to bring people together to fight poverty. People are the best agents of change. Knowledge is our most valuable commodity. Thinking globally and connecting people in the process of development is our objective. When people come together, they share resources, skill, ideas, and perspectives.

VSO Ethiopia’s mission is a country without poverty – improving quality of life, increasing access to the basic services, such as education, health, sustainable/secure livelihoods. We work through volunteers. When we develop partnership, it is based on our mission (organizations that support our mission). The government’s Growth and Transformation plan is also on board with us in terms of the need to reduce poverty. But in order to do this in Ethiopia, there is a shortage of skilled professionals.

Taramattie Persaud, the Country Representative of Cuso International in Guyana says, *“Most organizations the first thing they ask is money. But once you start to engage them with discussion they understand development comes not only with money but with capacity building and training, they get it. And we tell them that is what Cuso would like to do and partners develop appreciation for it.”*

Nana Osei, International Volunteer Program and Recruitment Advisor for the Africa Diaspora Program in Cuso International says, *“As you know, we don’t fund projects, we are not a funding organization and so the work that we do is all through people with skills that are needed by other people, other organizations who then go and live alongside the partner organization, in the community, experiencing the same life, the same challenges, being in that environment and working alongside in a collaborative fashion; so for us, the people-to-people aspect is very important. Secondly, we also focus on partnership, so we wouldn’t be an organization that would sit here from my headquarters in Canada and impose programming or determine what should be done in the countries where we work. Every project we’re involved in, every program that we support has been collectively and collaboratively developed in partnership with the organizations on the ground; so I think, for us, those would be the two main things that we would envisage in terms of development; first, people being the agents of change and secondly, working in partnership with the people that we support.”*

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<sup>16</sup> In my studies of development and education, I did not come across a good English word that combines both the words, concepts and practices of education and development. “Edudev” is my own creation by combining the first parts of the word ‘Education’ and ‘Development’. At a deeper level in their true meaning I could not see a difference between education and development, and there is a need for a word that combines both concepts.

### ***Knowledge versus money transfer and the diaspora***

Anyin Choo, Head of Diaspora Unit in the MoFA Guyana says, *“Remittance is just one form of contribution that the diaspora makes to the homeland. But besides remittance, we are looking for other perspectives, especially the transfer of knowledge and skills. The project/initiative we are doing with IOM right now is basically to map the skills we have out there. But as the next step, we are also looking at the possibilities of having Guyanese people return. We have had many positive responses. Many of those who responded to the survey indicated their interest and willingness to come back; they would be eager actually to jump on the first plane if we had jobs to offer them. So I think the prospects are very good, the possibilities are endless; I think, while many other countries are cultivating close relations with the diaspora, recognizing the great potential, Guyana is making baby steps. But we are making steps in the right directions, hopefully.”*

Tewabech Bishaw, the president of ABIDE and a long-time advocate of diaspora engagement in Ethiopia says, *“At this time in the country’s development the government has recognized the role the diaspora can play in the country’s development. But the primary focus has been on investment and remittance. The aspect of knowledge as an important resource in national capacity-building has not been acknowledged, not well articulated, although it is now in the policy of diaspora participation. In terms of working out the details, I think, a lot needs to be done. As has been done for investors, there should be a receptive audience for people with knowledge who are interested to share.”*

Nana says, *“There tends to be an assumption that big NGOs from Canada or wherever might be able to provide funding. I think that’s something that is quite normal and from my experience with aid, it is also based on what the experience has been for those organizations overseas; a lot of the contact that has occurred between most of the organizations that I know has been defined by the local community organizations coming into contact with foreign NGOs, presenting proposals to them and receiving funding to implement those proposals; so sometimes it’s just their experience, what their history has been in terms of interactions with large, international NGOs; so when we go in there and present ourselves as an organization that works through people rather than through funding specific pieces of work, then we really have to work hard to create that distinction.”*

### ***Resource mobilization***

Alexander Vincent, Registrar at the University of Guyana says, *“The diaspora has been helping with resource mobilization, both human and material. And there is also a recognition aspect. A lot of Guyanese who are in the diaspora are graduates of our university. By virtue of their performance in their respective universities, they earn recognition for the university which educated them. It is not formal recognition. But the current professor is pleased if you recognize the professor who taught you earlier. There is the student exchange aspect, too. Recently, a Guyanese student in New York arranged student exchanges between a NY university and UG, ....so that the students from the U.S. can be educated by Guyanese professors.*

*We have some professors coming down to teach courses Guyana. For example, environmental and green policy, forestry, carbon strategy, biodiversity, etc.*

*We have professors coming during their sabbatical leave and teaching and doing collaborative research. They are engaged in curriculum review and in developing some policies for the university. They serve as mentors for junior lecturers and train them.*

*In terms of mobilization of material resources: they sent books for the library, motivate and provide incentives for students (through prizes such as scholarships); so students are encouraged to perform better; when they go back to their respective universities, they form associations to support the University, sometimes including international volunteers who were placed in the university. For example, we offer online nursing course in collaboration with a Canadian university. This was possible through the efforts of a member of the Guyanese diaspora—someone who was in contact with the university.*

*We have an office called 'Resource Mobilization.' This is the office that looks for opportunities and works for their realization. The office also has responsibility for the Alumni. It offers ideas for the diaspora and alumni and seeks their input. I would say we are not highly structured (in this regard). But I can say that faculty members and Deans reach out to the diaspora and there are more and more attempts to reach them. In some cases, members of the diaspora themselves try to contact us with some initiative and then the Office of Resource Mobilization will support them. We also use diaspora members as external examiners or for peer review."*

### ***Development is learning from the past and learning by doing***

*While relaxing on his couch and cooling off, Clive, the diaspora volunteer in Guyana, tells me, "There is definitely a need and, of course, knowledge management means so many things for so many people. In my project, (funded by ACCENTURE UK) making markets work for the poor, it is essentially trying to get rural micro-enterprises take on a more market-led approach. We have volunteers coming and working with the enterprises themselves; making the market ready, understanding market chains, pricing, packaging, etc. My work focuses on organizing best practices and sharing them among enterprises so that we don't make the same mistakes. Unfortunately, in Guyana we don't have appropriate infrastructure in the remote areas. Creating strategies like wikis, document depositories for the people to deposit and share their experiences was the intention; but as you go out to the rural corners of the country there is no electricity, there are no computers or Internet...so that is not going to work. There is also a low literacy rate. Besides, people are reluctant to share. What I have been trying to do is to bring people together and build trust among them. People who trust each other are willing to share. So now we take a group who knows how to prepare mango chutneys and support them to share their knowledge with others who produce mangoes, but who have no idea how to store them when they are produced in excess. We are trying to get organization together to share knowledge.*

*People in the hinterlands are interested in learning by doing. They want people to come to them and show them hands-on how to make things.*

*First, you have to identify the gaps, the knowledge needed at the local level. In a way, it is a simplistic approach, in that you just go to the people, see what they are doing, and ask them what they would like to do. Then you try to find a bridge to close the gap between what they are doing and what they want to do. We are working with partners.*

*Over the years, I have seen in Guyana people coming at different times and at different places trying to do the same thing and making the same mistake over and over again.*

*Therefore, documenting the learning and sharing it helps individuals and organizations to start from where others left off. There is no need to start fresh or repeat the same mistake...this is how knowledge management and development are related.*

*The other issue is that there are different organizations in different places working the same thing and they don't know about each other. Or they don't know what the specifics of the other organizations are. For example, UNDP has projects very similar to those of Cuso International in Guyana. At the same time, I found out that Conservation International is doing the same thing. They have all knowledge management (KM) components. But we are not sharing knowledge with each other, so we are probably going to make the same mistakes, wasting a whole lot of resources...and then walk away. And after five years, somebody else will come and try the same thing and fail the same way. So there is either no learning, or the learning is not passed on or perpetuated. Therefore, definitely there is a role for KM in development.*

*Volunteers have also been coming and going for the last few decades. They have given one or two years of their lives to make a difference. Did we organize the learning? Is the knowledge accumulated? Where are the reports? Who is looking at them?"*

### ***Development: Fruit of the tree of sacrifice***

Thinking about sacrifice, I read through what field notes I had jotted down after I interviewed Pam, one of the diaspora volunteers in Guyana. I noticed that she was the type of diaspora volunteer I was looking for. Her story is typical of the diaspora, the kind of story that I would like others to hear and be inspired by. It is a story of going back to discover roots and going back to make a difference. Three years in one's life is not easy. Leaving children and a newly arrived grandson behind and finding yourself in a strange and at the same time familiar society is not easy: familiar in that she was born and raised in Guyana, yet strange in that she came back after four decades and after so much change.

Tears came to her eyes when she spoke of the love she cherished for this tiny land of Guyana. Even the breeze that is coming through the open window and the constantly running fan could not cool her ardor. With sweat and tears running down her face, she continued to tell her stories. Now she is turned into a development agent wanting to make a difference.

Clive continues with his grievances, *"My challenge for the work in KM, besides the infrastructure, includes the expensive price of travel in Guyana. It is really, really expensive. If you want to share knowledge by bringing people face-to-face, it is expensive. To go to Lethem (in Rupunnuni)...for a 350-mile trip, you need US\$250 (about 50,000 Guyanese dollars). As a result, moving people around is very difficult. Sometimes, you have to start at a very basic stage...for example, even if you teach bookkeeping, they get it, but that is not the end. Six months down the line people forget things, people can move away... so you have a gap there. And basically you are back to square one. That person may have trained someone, but still that low literacy level continues to be a challenge."*

### ***Humility is like low ground***

Yvette is one of the women who benefitted from the project the diaspora volunteers participated in. She revealed her potential for broader leadership arising from a single family responsibility. She says, *"If you motivate the local people they have the potential. You must be with the people; you must be humble enough to say I am here to learn from you. You must*

*say I understand a few things but the rest I will go and find out for you. You must never feel you are better than they are.*

*Once there was an international volunteer who wanted to interview me about my work. I was willing to be interviewed. So we had an appointment to do the interview. Because of my busy work schedule, it was difficult to give her a two and a half-hour interview, but I still agreed to do it, thinking it would benefit everyone. I showed up for the interview and waited for 20 minutes. She did not come, and when I checked, she was still interviewing another person. She arrived late. Then, in the process of interviewing me about Amerindian family life, she kept saying I had to answer her the way she wanted it. But then I said if you know the answer why are you asking me? You are asking me how Amerindian people live and I am telling you that and you are refusing to listen. What do you want me to tell you? I am part Amerindian and work with them. I am in a better position than she is to tell about their stories. But she had preconceptions about how the Amerindians live and how the women and men relate to each other.*

*Later, when she had a presentation about the research she invited me to attend. But I politely declined, as I was busy doing something else. She then asked a common friend to convince me to come. They wanted me to put aside whatever I was doing, assuming what I do was less important.”*

We agreed with Yvette that humility is like low ground. Just as lower ground attracts water to it, humility also attracts people to you and makes them your friends.

### ***Development should be holistic***

*Clive also told me the following story, “We have families that prepare and sell soap. They prepare it from fruits from a tree and process it organically. It is reputedly good for your skin and for treating minor lesions. We worked with them and we got them a major distribution contract. It brought them an excellent excess income. We introduced them to a company that would take their products and distribute them. Now the market is not a constraint; the problem is obtaining the raw material and the processing capacity. They have moved from producing 200 to 300 bars of soap to 7000.*

*We ran into another group who make the same type of soap. They need minor adjustments, but still we are going to link them with the same distributor. The distributor is even prepared to help them with packaging and labelling. There are other examples where women are producing and selling and getting more income and improving the life of their families. And everybody is happy.*

*...we have interviewed a few women, asking what changes have occurred as a result of VSO’s intervention. They told us ...very often you hear that I was shy and fearful. A woman said, “five years ago I would never have imagined I could manage a peanut factory. Managing the people and the factory, helping them speak to people, to make presentations, to feel more confident. Besides the economic empowerment, there is the social empowerment aspect. I have heard the same stories in Regions 1,2 and 9.*

*There is a story from one of the regions about a woman who has no secondary education, who barely reads and writes. She has been taught bookkeeping and now she is the bookkeeper for her organization; and she said that she never imagined being able to do this.*



*When you hear these stories it is fulfilling. You feel you are making a contribution. I am not here to change Guyana. But I like volunteering at a grassroots level, where change can happen. I get emails and messages from people who want to volunteer from abroad.*

*There are now members of the diaspora who want to come and serve. I think we need to start the movement and this is the beginning of that movement. I think once you come back to Guyana and hear the success stories people will be inspired. People will recognize that they can make a difference. Many people may have left after bad experiences. But you can say, 'hey things have changed' or 'let's make a difference.' So if you want to come here, there are opportunities and organizations you can work with. I get the sense that in the near future, we will have an organization that will facilitate movement among the diaspora.*

*So we are doing the pioneering leg work, breaking the ice...and creating the interest. When people see what you have done or that you are doing it, they become inspired. Whenever I travel, I take pictures and put them on Facebook and people say, "Where is that?" "I want to see it," "What is going on?" "I want to do that." or "How can I go there?" "I like that!" Some people leave me a message saying they need to talk seriously about the volunteerism and the projects."*

### ***Women's empowerment***

*Maxine again tells this story, "So initially I worked with most of the women but I did not know them intimately. Because we don't stay long enough to get to know them...we just focus on what should be done (technically). You need to be able to sit and chat with them. Beyond how to package potato chips, the conversations sometimes extends to family issues. So you became a mentor in all respects. The fact that you listen to their pleas, you offer them comfort, etc. and they come to like you.*

*Some of the community members were very bashful when we first met them. They rarely talked, preferring to listen a lot of listening and barely asking questions. When we went on the tour to Surinam, we selected people at random just to say thank you to the groups we met. We were pleasantly surprised at how they expressed themselves, when we encouraged them by saying, 'This is your thing, so say what you think.' They became very vocal. They know where they want to go...they just needed a little assistance.*

*Some of their thought processes, the way they analyze situations are surprising. You have to be very mindful of cultural differences. They were supposed to be mothers and wives staying in their localities. You cannot take them out of their localities for an extended period because most of their husbands worked in the goldmine, and are stuck there. So they do everything for their families and kids when the men are away."*

### ***Growing organically***

*Tinebeb Berhane worked for six years with VSO-Ethiopia. She is the one of the staff who welcomed and supported us from the day we arrived in Addis Ababa as diaspora volunteers. The idea of diaspora volunteerism grew with her because she was involved from the beginning. She tells the story of how the diaspora volunteer program grew from a feasibility study to a pilot project and now to an independent section in VSO-Ethiopia, managing 13 diaspora volunteers so far.*

*She says, "We expect the program will grow further. Mobility is one of the human rights. We cannot stop people from going to other countries. So the best thing we can do is effectively*

*utilize the knowledge and skill they acquired while living abroad. There is great potential in North America in this regard. We are particularly concerned with diaspora professionals, as opposed to remittance and investment. To help them transfer their knowledge and skills.*

*So development is positive human change. All other changes like technological or other developments are means to an end which is the betterment of human lives. VSO's motto is related to this; development for the people through the people. We bring human resources to those people who are in need. We are not like any other implementing agency giving grants and donations."*

### **Findings**

#### ***Development and its values***

- Every growth or change is not development. Development is not about the improvement of just one material aspect;
- Development is a qualitative change in all aspects and at all levels: economic, social, intellectual aspects; and at the individual, community and institutional level;
- Sustainable development requires a higher participation of local people and institutions;
- There is still misunderstanding of what development means in many sectors, including governments and development students/agents;
- Governments tend to deliver a planned system of change to a community, while non-governmental organizations who work with the people tend to listen to the people's voice;
- Development can mainly be defined as the building of human capacity so that people are enabled to take care of themselves by themselves;
- Strategically, development can be achieved through more skilled people sharing their skills with other people who need them; whether at the individual or institutional level, this sharing needs to be done through equal partnership;
- Though the importance of material resource in development cannot be denied, its provision to a community before they have the skill to effectively use, maintain, and recreate it, inhibits development by creating dependence;
- There is a growing realization that diasporas, aside from providing remittance, can be helpful in terms of knowledge and skill transfer to facilitate such building of capacity;
- The diasporas already have been taking individual and organized steps to extend their humanitarian and development assistance to their homelands;
- In line with this movement, governments and other national and international organizations are setting up policies, structures and processes to capitalize on the great potential of the diaspora;
- In order for these policies, structures and processes to work effectively and harmoniously, a system of knowledge management (KM) is needed. Such KM includes the study and documenting of best experiences, implementing and acting on innovative ideas based on such experience, continuously reflecting on the opportunities and challenges along the way, and harnessing and augmenting networks of shared interest;
- Whether in capacity building, resource mobilization or knowledge management—all components of meaningful development—the motor that propels development is

sacrificial effort. Development requires the sacrifice of self-interest to communal needs. Sacrifice is an element that inspires in people the desire to do more and better;

- The quality of sacrifice must be supported by another essential quality: humility. Development workers or anyone who is involved in community development must understand that the people for/with whom development projects are designed and implemented want to see humility in their co-workers. Readiness to learn from others, as opposed to an I-know-it-all attitude, the capacity to admit mistakes, and belief in the worth and dignity of others are some of the qualities of humility. Identifying with the people's culture and language is another characteristic of for humility. When sacrifice and humility are combined, they have the power to attract more and more material and human resources;
- When the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes are put in place at the community level, development begins to happen slowly and organically. It results not only in a quantitative change in material lives, but also in a qualitative change in human character. People are no longer shy to speak about their needs and take every step courageously to improve their lot. There is a growth in the learning process and a corresponding change in the structures and policies that support the growth process.

### Analysis

In a world of abundance, when a country ranks very low on any economic index or when its social life is characterized by corruption, crime and violence, teen pregnancy, high youth unemployment, poor health and infrastructure, and a dysfunctional educational system, we know that the country needs "development." Therefore, it is not surprising to see how the definition of development changed, rather improved, over time from a simplistic view of economic growth to that of a qualitative social change. There can no longer be any disagreement with Amartya Sen (1999), who described development as the process of realizing human capabilities. What is more interesting is the unity of vision between non-governmental organizations and participant communities, even when governments lag behind in this understanding of development. In their books on African development Moyo (2009) and Bolton (2007) have articulated well the importance of building local capacity, as opposed to pouring financial aid into Africa.

Though there is no denying the power of individuals or leaders in making change, lasting change can only occur when all community members build their capacity to transform themselves, as they start to think critically about their situation and become engaged in transforming it. This simultaneous process of action and reflection is called praxis by Freire (1970). When individuals and institutions enter into equal partnership to understand and transform their situation, not only is the material aspect of their lives positively affected, but also their intellectual and spiritual lives. Pouring material resources into a development "project" before making sure the participants have the educational, intellectual, and moral foundation to sustain it has the potential to corrupt the entire process.

It is in this sharing of skills that the diaspora can play a major role. In a way, the diaspora is part of the community, a part which had the prior opportunity to build capacity. Chacko (2010) maintains the even before they started life in North America, "foreign-born Ethiopians, along with other fellow Africans, have traditionally demonstrated higher levels of educational achievement than either Native Americans or many other immigrant groups" (p. 253). Many members of the diaspora can serve as examples of how individuals can be transformed, if given

## DIASPORA AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

the opportunity to be trained and live well. They are symbols of success in transcending the challenges imposed upon them in their homelands. Therefore, they are an excellent link between institutions and interest groups who want to contribute to international development.

Such linkages, when made through volunteer initiatives bring not only knowledge and skill into play but positive attitudes of humility and sacrifice that are essential in international development.

To this end, the setting of policy and erection of institutions by the Ethiopian government and the GUYD project by the Guyanese government (mapping the diaspora) are commendable efforts. Even though they are not the only lower income countries in the world working on diaspora issues, there are lessons to be learned from them. For any endeavour to be successful it must have a set direction with a responsible body to pursue it. It may take time, but as long as all the concerned individuals, communities and institutions come and consult, learn and grow together by overcoming challenges and augmenting their strength, the diaspora for development vision will soon be a reality.

Given the initial challenges such development effort presents as a change process, the work requires sacrifice and patience. The desire to learn from the process has to be a central concern as different institutions and individuals work through many physical and intellectual challenges. Development comes in all directions and everyone benefits in the process. The participant communities become owners of their own development process—truly development from the people to the people.

A good example is the Guyanese women's organization established to bring income to a few women producing healthy snack for school children. But because of the involvement of Cuso International Guyana, IICA and the systematic work done by the diaspora volunteer, the following were the simultaneous results:

1. Local women were able to get skills training, learned consultation, planning, production, marketing, accounting, and how to manage an organization, Every activity is now primarily run by the local women. They did not allow men to be on the board so that the process could not be hijacked;
2. Since the activity is owned by the local community, the women created transparency and accountability by making their bookkeeping/ledger open for investigation at any time by anyone;
3. By deliberately deciding to buy local produce, they also built the capacity and enriched the local farmers. The farmers are given feedback about the raw materials they supplied to the processing factory;
4. By producing the . . . snack close to where it will be consumed, they reduced the cost and the time needed for the storage, export, distribution, and retail sale;
5. Above all, the local school children are supplied with fresh healthy food.

Such a communal business model can be replicated depending on the context of other localities.

A representative from IOM Ethiopia commented: "In the prevailing consensus about development, the idea of diaspora and development is new. It is at its initial stage and we are learning as we go. Of course, there are various levels of understanding among the partners, so it has to be discussed." An official from the MoFA Ethiopia agrees: "Unity of vision does not exist. It is a new trend. To engage the diaspora for development is a kind of new international

phenomenon. Our government is also giving emphasis to the idea. So a continuous sharing of views on development makes things easier.”

Diaspora volunteers have a marginal advantage over the international volunteers as the latter tend to see the developing world through their own eyes and interpret things according to their own understanding and cultural background. It may be, then, possible that improper understanding of one’s culture guarantees that there will be misunderstanding of the people involved in development work. I recall vividly the discomfort experienced by one volunteer from the UK in Ethiopia upon seeing some same sex men and women putting their arms over each other’s shoulders while walking in the street, or next of kin boys and girls holding hands, or men hugging and kissing on the cheeks, all without the slightest feeling of sexuality. She would say, “it is strange.” When people are born and raised in a certain reality and when the media, the school and the government endorse this reality, it is hard for them to think and imagine other ways of doing things. It is equally true for both sides, be it Africans trying to understand Europeans or vice versa. That is what we call culture and the standard by which we try to measure everything else.

### Interactions among stakeholders

#### Stories

##### ***The diaspora volunteers and development participants***

Clive says, “*Sometimes, unless you have the right pedagogy, people give you the impression that they have understood the training...but when they go home or to work they can’t use any of the lessons they have learned. The people may not have learned in the first place. There are cultural differences between the trainer and the trainees too. It takes time to understand the people. I am Guyanese from the coast and when I go to the rural community the culture is completely different. Can you imagine what happens if you bring someone who is not from Guyana?*”

*The next thing is they have to feel comfortable to ask questions. If you are a total stranger, they feel embarrassed; they don’t want to show their ignorance; they are not going to say anything. Usually, they remain silent. You go and offer a three day or a one-week beautiful training, and after you leave, you will find out that it has been completely useless; just wasted three to seven days of your life.*

*Cuso International seems to get it from time to time...and in the ICT training they are trying to sensitize the volunteer to those situations. Generally, it boils down to volunteers going to the community and building trust. You have to go to where they are in all aspects: geographically, socially, and mentally, and then integrate with and become part of the society. So if you come here for two years, you are not going to achieve much in the first six months, particularly if you are working in a rural community. It is true that volunteers feel pressure to do what they came here to do. So as soon as they hit the ground they say ‘let’s get this thing going’. In the rural setting, if you keep pushing people too much, they withdraw. You have to get the right mix.*

*It is only after repeatedly going to Region 9 that I now have the sense that the people are feeling more comfortable. It might have been good if I lived there, rather than shuttling back and forth. It is an interesting experience. I go to Region 9 with people from European*

*background. I see there is willingness to work together, to learn, to listen, to implement, to partner, to get things done. For me it is rewarding and fulfilling. You feel it is as though you are making actually a difference in somebody's life or for the community."*

### ***The government and diaspora***

The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia is located in an arc shaped building. Some people say it is an analogy of its crooked bureaucratic work. But I used to say it is a sign of being inclusive. I was welcomed by two officials to talk about diaspora issues. One of them said, *"When it comes to MoE we have gathered information from the Universities and made needs' assessment and sent the information to the MoFA. At the same time MoFA also sent the information to the Ethiopian embassies all over the world. Based on that, we have been waiting for the number and type of people we requested but, somehow, it did not happen.*

*As MoE we also have developed our own website and have sent out the call. The invitation has been made to all Ethiopians of first and second generation who reside abroad to come and contribute to the development of their country of origin. ...Last year there were 10 diaspora members who contacted us and out of these we succeeded in bringing some of them. Of those who came, a few settled permanently, mainly teachers. We have been undertaking a massive expansion of higher education. We now have 31 public universities. Since there are only a few teachers with MA and PhD degrees, we expect in the next five years to train 25,000 graduates with MA and PhD degrees, using both local and foreign universities to train them. We are expecting the Ethiopian diaspora to participate in this capacity-building process. They can teach and research and also help to advise our graduate students not only face-to-face, but also virtually through e-learning.*

*When we made the call, it was out of the conviction that the diaspora believes in this process/ endeavour. It is not begging, but rather a shared vision and responsibility. We have a benefits package for those who respond to the call, although it may not be attractive enough. We offer a flight, provide housing, and pocket money. We give them the same amount that an Ethiopian professor gets here. We also provide medical insurance. We try to make sure that they do not incur costs by coming and serving here. This may not be a big deal for the diaspora, but we are counting on their love for their country of origin and their need to serve it.*

*Two years of the five-year program have now passed, during which we set out to produce 25,000 graduates. So there is an urgent need for involvement of the diaspora. I am not sure where the problem lies but we are not getting the numbers of diaspora volunteers that we expected. If they do to come here, they have a great role to play in teaching, research and mentoring our graduates."*

### ***What is missing?***

Amira is very vocal in her criticism of the institutional interactions among diaspora-related organizations. She says, *"What is missing now is that there is no pro-active planning, and that is what I raised in the meeting with the Minister. For example, institutions of higher learning had articulated their needs in terms of human resources particularly from the Ethiopian diaspora. Then it is easy for the government to look for these people and engage them in a planned setting. I feel the government is only reacting. Many of the knowledge-based initiatives came from the diaspora, particularly from professors in the diaspora who would like to use their sabbaticals. People have come to give part or all of their sabbatical*

*leave, but unfortunately people/institutions who could have made use of these resources haven't done the necessary preparation. It is only after the diaspora arrived here that everybody is in a rush to facilitate things. There is no planned and organized system to engage/invite, host/welcome and monitor, support/encourage them. Therefore, we could not benefit from the process as much as we could.*

*Moreover, the universities have a shopping list that they want this type of teacher or researcher and they posted these invitations on the website of the Ethiopian Embassy in the United States. But you know if a person from the diaspora comes here for a short time—shorter time than the normal employment period—then we have to prepare the necessary structure, find out the best match for the skill. We need to prepare also a team of people that work with the diaspora so that the relationship continues in the form of skill sharing and link creation.”*

### ***Diasporas themselves***

*Another Ethiopian official stated, “Sometime, there is fear, lack of trust, a fear of the unknown, maybe on both sides, perhaps a lack of trust in that many in the diaspora have learned to have inquisitive minds, critical perspectives, and how to express their views openly, speak their minds, attitudes and feelings. Culturally, and in this context this may be the type of talent that is most welcome. So because of this, the institution thinks they may not respond to some of the queries and the individuals are afraid they may be misinterpreted. So trust has to be developed. And first and foremost, it is the institutions of the host country that are responsible; policies must create an enabling setting, so that people can come and see, feel they are welcome here, feel that they have a role to play, that they have a contribution to make, something to be proud of. This has to be clearly brought up. I think, there is a movement in that direction, but it is slow.*

*Now we have two major things happening in the country: one is the development of a diaspora policy that gives you the green light and indicates that the diaspora investors and professionals are welcome. At least, this is written in black and white. The second major thing is the establishment of the Ethiopian Diaspora Association. Since I came here in the last five years, we have been debating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish this. Depending on the political climate/mood, this has been a bit emotional and controversial. Interaction between the government and the diaspora has been built on suspicion. Many diaspora professionals are willing to be engaged and to partner, provided there is a system, a modality, a feeling of welcome and facilitation.*

*But there are some who have reasons for not coming and participating in this process. Unfortunately, these latter ones are vocal. They talk about it and dominate the scene, while, the silent majority who are willing to contribute are quieter. But the loud minority are singled out for a fight both inside and outside the country. The media wants sensational stories. Ok ...the minorities can have their views; it is their right to protest. But they don't have to be allowed to affect the process. They don't have to take the place of the majority who want to come.*

*Those who are willing to participate in the development process are waiting. It is up to the institutions of the country to make use of them, to stimulate the engagement. Ethiopia is not unique; many African countries, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, Senegal and Rwanda are all making efforts. I heard that in Rwanda the Ministry of Education and other*

*ministries think that the Ministers themselves came to Rwanda on a contract basis and that they run the show. They come, they serve, and then they return at the end of their contract. Nigeria has a national diaspora day. We have also a diaspora day but it has not been popular.”*

### **Government and non-governmental organizations**

A representative from a diaspora NGO told me this story:

*“One day I went to an office for a discussion on NGOs. The chief of the office walked in and we all stood up. He looked at me and said,*

*‘What are you doing here?’*

*I replied, ‘Why are you asking me this?’*

*He said: ‘I thought we were not talking about knowledge diaspora. We are talking about NGOs.’*

*I said, ‘Ok, but our organization is an NGO.’*

*One of the problems is the current attitude about NGOs as partners in development. The attitude is completely skewed. And as a development partner, I don’t know why the country came up with this suffocating policy. It is stifling. It has all kinds of restrictions. It assumes that all NGOs exist to promote their own interests or have a political agenda. These are overgeneralizations. Countries establish NGOs to help them in development. NGOs come in different shades with all kinds of partnership agreements.”*

### **What I learned in downtown Toronto**

A note from my diary: I live in downtown Toronto where the city is divided roughly into east and west, north and south. The city has some of the world’s best and most famous shops where the price of a single dinner plate could feed an entire African family of five for a month. Every time I leave my apartment and walk around, I cannot help but witness how someone did something nice or beautiful, such as redecorating or redesigning a shop. It is clear that people are constantly thinking how to make things look better or come up with new and more attractive approaches. As soon as I enter one of the shops, in most cases, I am captivated by the way customers are welcomed and treated. It is as if they know you in person. Even though there is a training and supervision behind, putting those qualities of customer service in action requires talent and commitment.

Then I think of how any governmental or non-governmental structure or system could copy this model and be more efficient. What is that makes the business area so active, thriving, and attentive? Is money the only motivating factor?

Come tomorrow, or come the next holiday and there is a change almost every day. Someone has to move something, try something new. Redesign, refurbish, and bring something new. What can a culture and a people which appears so stagnant or dead learn from this highly dynamic situation? Come, come and learn!

### **The donors and the beneficiaries**

A government official in Guyana said, *“Well, what I can tell you is that we have given the idea some thought; already Cuso has approached us and shown interest. We know that the possibilities exist. When the time is right we will sit with potential donors and discuss our*



*ideas. But right now at this point in time our project with IOM is focused on gathering information, floating ideas on the next steps, which mean possibly exploring possibilities of developing a pilot project centred on bringing some diaspora professionals back to Guyana on a short-term basis. We have been discussing this idea, but at this point we are not ready for it. We are still waiting for more responses until we have substantial information that will give us an idea of the skills, the interests out there. I can also tell you that we are having an internal needs assessment on the skills that we need in the country, so that we can match them with the skills that are available from the diaspora. So this is an ongoing exercise, and we are hoping that at the conclusion of this exercise, we will be able to match the internal need with the available skills outside. Once we have figured this out, we will be able to contact the international donors to ask them, I mean, they have the mechanism in place, it is just that we need to work out the details of what exactly we need and how to go about achieving it."*

### ***Diaspora and individuals***

I met Oletta, a 20 year old woman and very articulate about her keen interest in the development of Guyana. She told me her experience with one of the diaspora volunteers. She is a student in her final year of environmental studies in the University of Guyana (UG). She is, of course, worried about the tendency to carelessly dispose of garbage in Georgetown. She says, *"you see people doing 'nasty' things in the environment, throw garbage everywhere."* She is concerned about the destruction of the environment so while pursuing environmental studies, she volunteers for community and church services. She had been working with Pam for over a year when we sat down for interview.

*She says, "For the first time, I read the advertisement in the University website about the work Pam is doing...I applied as a volunteer and Pam was on the three-person panel who were recruiting. She called me and told me I was short-listed. Then I made it to the finals and started to work with Pam. At first, I was intimidated because I did not have any experience working with an international NGO. But Pam reassured and encouraged me. She was very passionate about what she was doing. She started with orientation and since then I am learning the concept and practice of development day by day.*

*Pam understands that I not only needed to finish my studies at the university, but also that I have to do well. So she is highly flexible in the programming of our work. Every time I meet Pam I feel I am learning something. She wisely pushes me to do things I would not normally do. She also teaches me personal manner.*

*My intimidation has changed to assertiveness. I was accustomed to meeting the same people at church or school. But through Pam, I met all kinds of people, high and low, and slowly I started to feel comfortable with whomever I meet.*

*At first, I did not have the impression that she is Guyanese. I assumed her to be an international volunteer. But slowly I realized that she knows Guyana better than I do. She has a good deal of knowledge about Guyanese expressions, places, and people. I learned so much about Guyana from her.*

*She understood me better than anybody else. She is the type of person you can be comfortable around. She can easily blend in any environment. She is working with a rural community, maybe with uneducated women. But she lives in the city, belongs to the Rotary Club, and interacts with high-profile people ... She is comfortable everywhere."*

### ***Who are we accepting?***

One of the diaspora volunteers told me this:

*“There is a room for volunteers in development. It is about matching up correctly. You have got to send the right people in. If you don’t do it right, you lose integrity, you lose credibility and people see you as not being really serious. So, getting the right match is absolutely important. I think, Cuso is doing well. If you get 2% wrong, the partners don’t care about the remaining 98% being right. They may consider it a mess. There seems to be a low tolerance for not getting things right.*

*For example, there was a lady who came totally unprepared for the type of life she may have in the rural area. The bathroom is located outside the house, there is no infrastructure, there were insects and worms. She called the little lizards “baby dinosaurs.” So she went back after two days. Her replacement also was a total misfit for the locality and she left after two months. Now imagine what happened after these two failures in this community. All the 2% wrong seemed to happen there and they can easily lose trust in the process.*

*Volunteerism is one great way to reach impoverished localities with better expertise. They cannot afford to pay in full for professional support. I have heard stories of localities how volunteers improved their lives.”*

### ***The downside***

A consultant to volunteer hosting organizations said the following:

*“There is this notion that unless you look foreign you are not well regarded. So some diaspora feel bad about it. There was an instance of an Indian lady who came from India to work with the Canadian Institute of Planners and faced same challenges. The local people see the ‘localness’ (native features) of the person and not what they bring.*

*There were also seven Canadians here to volunteer and two of them come from a Guyanese family. They were chosen not as diaspora...they just were accepted like any volunteers. They had problems adjusting, lack of cooperation, etc.*

*There was an intern who came here and lost it at the end of one week because she could not secure the necessary collaboration. She was excited when she came here. The challenge particularly is when they come as a team. They see difference between the way they and others are treated. As a professional it is difficult to accept that.*

*There is another lady who works with the government and brings diaspora physicians. They are all medical personnel. They go to different parts of the country and offer free medical services. The difference is that they go in groups, and they don’t mingle with the locals so much. They just offer their professional service at a given time. The people are happy just to hang out, socialize and entertain guests at home. The problem is when it comes to a professional level.*

*At one point I remember a Guyanese hired in Canada came to give professional service here. She was the manager...but the employees felt more comfortable with the white intern than the diaspora manager. Members of the diaspora can be considered opportunists, who will go anywhere if a better opportunity comes up.*

*This is particularly exaggerated when somebody from outside comes for a job that a local person can do. If it is skill sharing, that is fine...a lot of foreign money that comes to Guyana*

*is for capacity building. If you come here for scientific training, rare skills training is ok. But if you come here for customer service training...there are more locally trained people here who can give the training, using more examples from the local context.*

*There is another Guyanese diaspora woman...who faced a lot of challenge, because traditionally the government employees used to be Afro-Guyanese. So as an Indo-Guyanese diaspora you feel challenged getting the cooperation needed. It is through subtle bureaucracy, legality and inefficiency that they deny you the service. (It is usually how racism works...immediate, structural cooperation)."*

### Findings

- Since development is a learning process, people who are involved in it need to know how to teach and learn. For smooth teaching, sharing and learning to happen there must be rapport and good communication among the stakeholders;
- In this learning process understanding where the participant community stands is fundamental for effective sharing;
- Assessing the actual level of the community and its strengths and challenges helps us build better learning methods. The concepts and the methods of learning have to be within the reach of what educators call the "zone of proximal development," the difference between what learners already know and what they can attain through facilitators support;
- When community members trust development facilitators, their openness increases thereby making way for further understanding and cooperation;
- Trust, transparency and accountability are essentials not only among individual development facilitators (volunteers) and the community, but also among institutions working together;
- For example, if we want to bring many Ethiopian diaspora professors to teach in Addis Ababa University, all the institutions involved in making this a reality need to come together, consult and delineate their areas of responsibilities and act accordingly. The University prepares a document about its needs and potential; the Ministry of Education organizes the documentation and facilitates the relations with the other organizations; VSO-Ethiopia and ABIDE can help match the local effort with the international partners and also welcome, train, deploy and monitor volunteers; Cuso International and AHEAD, in collaboration with the Ethiopian embassies, work together to reach, recruit and send the professors. If there are gaps in this relationship and interaction, then we cannot get the diaspora back to Ethiopia. Currently, given the MoE's statistics there remains much to be done;
- In this interactive relation and process there are two key players, whose willingness to work together and to put aside their differences matter most. These are the governments of Ethiopia and Guyana and the diasporas themselves, who ultimately interact with the community to facilitate development. They cannot both continue to remain attached to their old systems and beliefs and then plan to work for development. Both sides need to compromise and put the interest of community development before their own interests. Otherwise, all the discussions of involving the diaspora in development become impractical wishful thinking;

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- Out of necessity and practicality, the government also need to open up to work with other non-governmental organizations, whether local or international. While putting some monitoring mechanisms in place to safeguard the interests of the people, the government must implement a more welcoming policy and open interactions with NGOs. Development is done in partnership. If we are afraid of our partners or not experimenting with new methods and possibilities, it stifles cooperation and learning;
- Governments can take few lessons (with limitations!) from business organizations on how to be efficient and effective. The principles that make businesses thrive and advance can also help a government and country advance. Employing the best, a sense of ownership, hard work, saving and investing, finding or creating new clients and partners and retaining them is how businesses develop. These same principles may be adapted as appropriate and applied in the public sector in order to create a more efficient government.
- Non-governmental organizations can take the lead, but governments must be responsive and cannot just wait for the “right” moment to come. Though financial donations are not bad in and of themselves, governments must begin to rely on their own resources. Partnerships and monitoring become effective when the financial investment comes from the government side;
- Diaspora volunteers have a considerable impact on individuals. The staff of partner organizations and most community members have high regard for the diaspora. They see them as symbol of success and, therefore, try to emulate their models. Therefore, members of the diaspora have to be very careful while interacting and working with individuals and community members. Community members tend to listen to them and aspire to put their advice into practice;
- Diaspora volunteers have to be “the right people,” as they represent the spirit of volunteerism, the diaspora, what it means to go abroad and get an education. They represent good will, of coming back and helping their people;
- At the same time, there are elements of hatred and grievance against the diaspora (for leaving the country when they were most needed, for coming back when everything is safe, and for taking employment opportunities, even for showing off wealth and expertise.

### Analysis

Like most other international endeavours, international development efforts involve a large number of stakeholders. If we consider, for example, diaspora volunteerism in the context of Cuso International in Canada, there are more than five organizations involved in the process of placing a diaspora volunteer. In Canada, Cuso partnered with AHEAD and the U.S. to engage and recruit diasporas for volunteerism. Organizations such as CIDA, IDRC, and USAID were involved directly or indirectly, offering assistance to the process. On the Ethiopian side, there are VSO-Ethiopia and ABIDE, working together to get community partners to work with and welcome volunteers and oversee their placement. The Ethiopian government and the participant communities are also stakeholders. Unless these organizations have a shared vision, they cannot have unity of action which is vital to the realization of the program.

About the importance of shared vision, Senge (2006) writes:

A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea such as freedom. It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further – if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person- then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision. (p. 192)

Particularly in the initial stage, when the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder are not ironed out, there can be unnecessary tensions and gaps in communication and understanding while trying to work together. When such tension is felt by participant communities, the growth process is hampered. That is why all, be they organizations or individuals, must approach the work in a learning mode, a learning that has no fear of failure. As is true with individuals, the quality of interactions among institutions is measured by the trust each one develops in the other. Moreover, all the institutions working for the realization of a diaspora volunteering program must understand that what matters ultimately is the coming together of diasporas and participant communities to be engaged in a common learning process. In the interviews I did with participant communities and diaspora volunteers, the question of building trust among each other, and particularly with the government and the community have been of paramount concern.

Moreover, organizations in the homeland who work with volunteers, while still firm in the execution of projects, must also be flexible and patient in the management of volunteers. Due to the many demands of personal and family lives, financial challenges, and reverse cultural shock, working with communities at the local level can prove demanding. The institutions must be as considerate towards each other as they are towards the diaspora volunteers. In figure 1, I have indicated the many possible participants and interactions that exist in a diaspora volunteerism program.

**Figure 1. The community of interest around a diaspora volunteerism program**



\*Extracurricular activities are those which diaspora volunteers undertake beyond their main volunteer duties.

## Specific characteristics and contributions of DV

### Stories

#### *Come, come and serve*

What is the precise place of the diaspora volunteers in this picture of person-to-person or people-to-people development?

Nana answers: *"A quite special place, in my view, because we are working through people to affect change in areas where change is needed. You want the volunteer that you're sending to have the right motivations, the right sort of worldview, the right understanding of the issues to really invest themselves in order to be able to go and commit themselves to that kind of work. For me, you won't find that commitment better defined in any category of volunteering than with diaspora volunteers, because for the most part, as an organization, we have to sell the idea of volunteering to prospective volunteers; we have to sell our programs; we have to tell them why it's important and about the impact that we are trying to achieve. On the other hand, when we are dealing with diaspora volunteers, it's actually the opposite. The diaspora volunteers already come with a bond, a very deep bond, a very deep connection to the country they are originally from, so we don't have to do any selling; they want to do that already; so, for the most part, it's a matter of their interest in meeting opportunities. A lot of them are interested and they want to do this kind of work; they want to give back to their country in one way or another, but they just haven't found the right sort of structure or support or the right opportunities. People usually don't know what to do. So our responsibility is to come in and say: we have the right sort of programming in place and we have designed these placements that respond to well defined needs that have been expressed to us by the country or local areas that we are supporting. It's a strategic program that responds to national or local priorities, so it's not a haphazard or ad-hoc type of activity that we would send somebody to do. It is well defined and strategic and we offer that programmatic sort of structure and say, 'this is what you can do based on the skills that you are bringing. This is the support that we will give you and we are just asking you to donate your time and skills and we will take care of the rest.' And I think this is what diaspora volunteers are usually looking for. They're just looking for the support, because they already have that connection as a function of the relationship they have with... most of them have family still in the country and they've probably gone there for visits."*

#### *Turtles*

*"Once upon a time, there was a mother turtle. She was going to have babies. She was restless and feeling lots of pain, so she went to Kara beach and dug a hole to lay her eggs.*

*One month later, the mother turtle went far away into the sea and never came back. The baby turtles were left on the beach. One week later, the baby turtles hatched and one of them crawled under the sand because she saw a hawk watching her. The hawk flew down to catch the turtle, but the baby turtle was so smart that she dug so far into the sand that the hawk could not find her.*

*When the hawk went away, the little baby turtle came out of the sand and started to crawl till it reached the sea. It then dived into the bottom of the sea and searched something to eat. The baby turtle saw a net. She crashed into it and got stuck. She wriggled and wriggled until*

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*she came out. The net had a hole and when baby turtle saw the hole, she swam right through it. She said “No matter how hard you try, try, try, you can’t catch me!”*

*The little baby turtle grew very big as she kept travelling and one day she met a male turtle. They went back to Kara beach to live. One week later they had baby turtles and lived happily ever after.*

— Clyde Cozier, *Stories from an Amerindian village*, by Children from Karrau Creek Primary School

Figure 2. A drawing by one of Peter Jailall’s students



### Witness

Barbara Hogan, Director of International Volunteering at Cuso International, says, “*It is an interesting thing because every volunteer that comes through contributes in a different way and has particular expertise or richness of their background that they bring wherever our volunteers are from. It is also interesting to see what is just in diaspora volunteerism, because we do inherently know that when Solomon goes back to Ethiopia, he has that kind of understanding of how things work, right? Particularly because you were there recently and*



*that can help you to be more effective in your work and make things happen a bit faster. That's the nugget that I hear quite often: 'I am able to hit the ground running a bit faster,' right? 'I know how things work.' 'I know the language.' I think that's the real benefit; and we know from a lot of volunteer feedback and even Chris was saying the other day 'I have to learn Swahili in order to be effective' or 'in order for people to be comfortable building relationships with me.' So there are certain things that we know that can be lacking in other volunteers that makes it more difficult for them. It's not that they're insurmountable, but you just come in and you know the language. If I had known Bahasa Indonesian before I went to Indonesia, it would have saved me seven months of trying to figure things out, right?... And we do have to kind of document those things a little bit better. We often have that conversation about what is the real value and the richness and it is those very practical things. But we don't have it in a document that says thus and so."*

### **Peter Jailall**

Tara would describe him as a "one star example of diaspora volunteerism. He is an enthusiastic, an educator, a poet; ...he would have had so many success stories."

A poet, educator, activist, life time volunteer— a symbol of consistency. From the way he offered me his advice about travelling to and in Guyana as well as the type of information he shared with me, I knew he had a good knowledge of the country. He has been going back and forth since his first arrival in 1975. He did his studies in different colleges including OISE and York University. He says he has Indian blood and "Guyanese origin" as well as Canadian citizenship and character.

Many immigrants arrive in Canada in the hope that they will return to their country of origin. They have the immediate objective of working and saving some money, going to school, or helping their children go to school. But in many cases it is unlikely that they will return "home" after they meet their objectives, in fact, whether they meet them or not. They work hard, spend money on their families, pay their mortgages and fill their cars with gas.

Peter had a plan to return to Guyana when he was in his 30s and because he did not feel ready, he postponed it until he was in his 40s. Once he turned 40, he had other commitments and so he postponed it until his 50s. Now he is 70 and I met him at the Square One Mall in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

Despite his longer-than-expected stay and retirement in Canada, he feels amazingly fulfilled. He has raised two successful children. He provided them the best education and each has become a successful professional in his own field, thanks to his stay in Canada. One is a physician and the other is a teacher, both making an important contribution to Canada. Raising two successful children is not an easy task for an immigrant.

To make up for his dream of going back and settling in Guyana, he has instead been going back and forth. Peter was the main actor in preparing context-based story materials to teach children literacy with better pedagogy. The story about the turtle baby is an example of one written by a child that was part of Peter's project.

### **Pam the visionary catalyst**

Yvette told me the following story:

*"School's Snack Management Committee with Society for Sustainable Operational Strategy (SSOS) is an NGO linked to the MoE. Prior to 2005, the Ministry of Education in Guyana*



*used to give milk and biscuits to the school children in the hope that they would get better nourishment and, as a result, perform better. But by the time the snacks reach Rupununni the majority are spoiled. Because in some cases the snack was spoiled, the MoE was asked if the local community could prepare the snacks. So a proposal was developed for the MoE so that local women would produce/prepare the snacks. From this initiative, the Seven-Pocket Projects, managed by women, came into existence. What the women do is prepare the snacks and sell them to the government, so that they can reach the children while they are fresh.*

*Since the project has been so successful, it is being expanded into other localities. They make peanut butter and juices. and offer these nutritious snacks to the children every day. The government pays for each child's snack in and around the community. We kept growing and slowly we got funding from CIDA and USAid. We now have our own place. In 2011, we started to get training from VSO in how to package and promote our products. It is an all-women managed project.*

*Pam first reached our technical personnel and later visited our 'factory;' then she sent us an invitation for a meeting. We now have six groups processing different products, such as peanuts, cassava, coconut, etc. Then marketing the product became a challenge.*

*Pam was involved in training, workshops, meeting, study tours, bringing new ideas to new organizations. She has helped us to certify our building and our products. Pam is a person you can rely on. Once she tells you she will see how she can help you, she means it. She makes sure that she does it. She goes away and does whatever she can to help you. She urges us to move forward and overcome our limitations."*

### ***Diasporas and their fears I***

Choo says, "I think when we first started implementing the GUYD project, what we had anticipated was the challenge of communication, in view of the fact that lots of Guyanese migrated in the 1980s and 90s when Guyana was economically unstable. They had taken with them a dark image of Guyana. Sometimes the information people get overseas about Guyana does not represent the reality today. There is a lot of misinformation out there. One of the first things we have to ensure is that whatever image we are going to put out there for the diaspora must be a true image of Guyana. So first of all, we have to correct some of the information out there. There are people who think that any initiative is politically motivated.

These are some of the challenges we have had. What was being posted online was the question of national security. People say that in Guyana there is a question of basic safety. How can you guarantee people safety if you want them to come home? This is a question we thought about even before we started the project. What is unique to Guyana is that it has a very small population...about 750,000. People laugh when we tell them. One of the disadvantages of having such a small population is that whatever happens gets magnified. I mean, there is crime all over the Caribbean. There is crime in Trinidad and in Barbados, but they may not publicize it.

In Guyana we have a free press. I think, people don't realize how much freedom the press has. Whenever something happens, there is publicity about it. Because of the small size of the population, the news gets magnified and people think there is a surge in crime. But Guyana is no different from New York or Toronto; they have their crime and their own issues, too. It is reported that in a certain city a crime takes place every few seconds. Since their population is large, the effect is not as exaggerated as it is in Guyana. I try to tell

people, yes, we do have problem. But it is not unique to Guyana. Every country and every city has its own crime problem. It is not that the government is sitting back and doing nothing about it. We are making efforts to address these problems. It is not that we publicize everything we do. A lot of the work is done behind the scenes. So, these are some of the challenges we anticipated and faced initially. We have questions posted online related to these problems. We are trying to deal with them as best we can.”

### ***Diaspora and their fears II***

A diaspora volunteer related the following story:

*“I had serious diarrhoea because I ate salad in one of the city’s restaurant. It was really terrible. I did not go to work for a few days. In our partner meeting with one of the institutions, I commented on this problem I was having. Maybe I did not put it in the right way...or perhaps it looked as if I was generalizing the problem... One of the staff members lashed out at me in anger and started to criticize me for ‘forgetting your roots’, ‘overrating Canada’, ‘exaggerating the life style that we all know not to be so good’.*

*I was dumbfounded and could not say a word. It was my co-volunteer who came to my rescue. He humbly tried to justify the validity of the comparison I had made. He explained how lettuce in Canada is treated carefully when it comes from the store before it is served to customers in a restaurant. But in Addis Ababa, vegetables can be sold on the street and sometimes the washing at your house may not be as effective in remove the disease-causing bacteria. At the same time members of the diaspora slowly lose the immunity they used to have in their country of origin. In Canada or the U.S., the diseases are different and our bodies develop different immunities. Therefore, it is not surprising that diaspora volunteers can get sick as soon as they return to the old country.”*

### ***A diaspora for many diasporas***

Endeshaw Woldie is one of the diaspora volunteers from Canada. He earned his first degree from the University of Western Ontario in Sociology and Economics. He has a second degree in Conflict Analysis and Management from Victoria University. He worked for the government of Alberta as a Career and Employment Consultant and volunteered in Ethiopia through Cuso International as a program manager for ABIDE, a local non-governmental organization. By the time I met him, he had served the organization for a year and a half and was looking forward to serving six more months.

ABIDE is established basically to create the system to engage the Ethiopian diaspora for development purposes. Endeshaw was assigned in the most sensitive of places because promotion of diaspora issues is the central mission of the organization. He has to understand the subtlety of the challenges, and how the government, other organizations, and individuals both in and out of the country feel about it.

While he is enthusiastic about the work assigned to him, Endeshaw faces serious challenges as he strives to carry out his tasks. He is paid like any ordinary public professional in Ethiopia, but his work requires him to go from place to place, from office to office, to meet individuals and chat with them over coffee. His office is located out of town, where he has to wait for a service bus from Addis Ababa University to take him to Kaliti, a suburb of Addis Ababa. It is difficult to be consistently on time when he must travel daily from Hayahulet to Kaliti, and given the delicate type of work he has to perform. Once in his office, he has no Internet or telephone connection. The office is given by Addis Ababa University’s Kaliti

campus and they want it to stay open every day. There is a great deal of traffic and construction on the way to Kaliti. It is the main road leading to Djibouti and Mojo, where we have both a sea and a dry port. So big trucks are always on the road. When I was in Ethiopia during January and March 2013 to do this research, I travelled Kaliti to visit the places where Endeshaw and another diaspora volunteer were working, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. I can testify that it is quite difficult to travel every day to those work sites under those circumstances, especially after living and working in North America. These places are not comfortable, even for the local professionals.

ABIDE has been established and working for the last seven years on diaspora issues with some degree of success. ABIDE's advocacy in Ethiopia has been crucial in the growth of diaspora engagement and the erection of structures to support it. Endeshaw is the second diaspora volunteer for the organization.

Endeshaw says, *"I have visited so many offices on behalf of ABIDE. I walked for long hours in the scorching sun... I could have saved, lets say, \$40,000 Canadian dollars by staying in Canada. But I am here for no other reason than to serve this organization and the Ethiopian people."*

Both Endeshaw and the founder Tewabech agree that if it were not for the lack of resources, ABIDE could have achieved much more in the field of diaspora engagement. Endeshaw concluded that, *"the factors contributing to the slow growth of ABIDE include such external factors as the lack of awareness on the part of higher officials, some reluctance in the public service environment, and lack of strategic leadership at all levels"*.

### **Peace Corps**

Daniel Backer, Director of Programing and Training, Peace Corps Ethiopia office says, *"When an international volunteer (ferenjjs, as they are called in Ethiopia) serves in a volunteer capacity, it is considered as normal, because there is a perception that ferenjjs have the knowledge and the resource to be volunteers. But when they see Habesha, who is Ethiopian, doing it, for sure they will develop a sense of "wow...we can also do it. We have potential!"*

*But in order to do this, you need structure. We need to take enough time with the partners to develop the volunteer assignments and job descriptions we can all agree with. We also need to encourage community contributions.*

*Currently (as of February 2013), the Peace Corps has 200 volunteers in Ethiopia in three sectors: health and HIV prevention, education, and agriculture and environment projects.*

*In the education project, we have English teacher training and this is where I see the synergy between diaspora volunteers and schools. The other projects are very specific in working with the government.*

*The reason I say that English teaching is the greatest need is because the teachers don't speak English. The students need to practice. The diaspora just can come and talk to teachers and students in English. They can continue to work even as alumni. They can even come again and continue the conversation. They can create links between Ethiopian and U.S. classrooms, so that students can converse with each other in English with their peers in sister schools. Then other projects such as equipping the library can continue.*

*Language is a huge barrier to our productivity. Of course, we give our volunteers ten weeks of language training before they start giving service. But the Amharic language—indeed any language—is very difficult to learn in ten weeks. Even Oromiffa and Tigrigna present the same difficulty.”*

Birhane Mehari, a diaspora professor in Addis Ababa University, agrees with what Daniel said: *“the diaspora volunteer had a command of the English language, because of his exposure to so many experiences and situations. He had contact with so many other international authors. He has confidence and experience in giving comparative examples.”*

### ***Growing organically***

Maxine keeps telling stories:

*“The organizations originally were individual entities that were basically set up as...family societies that made and shared very little money...It was community work. Over time, and with assistance from this office, they evolved into businesses. Pam’s program came in to reorganize them for advocacy and we were able to develop strategies and tools so that they can see other industries, share experiences, network with other micro-industries. We had just come back from Surinam. So they learned what was necessary for them to reach where they are now.*

*They produce good products, but assistance was needed to help them learn the skills of packaging and marketing to bring their business up to the standard of the international market, so that they could meet its rules and regulations. Before that, it could only be sold to their own or nearby communities. By working with them, helping them grow in the right direction...they are now able to expand into the international market.*

*So we have taken them from just a group of women trying to improve their individual livelihoods to an established business. VSO was already helping to train them in such things as bookkeeping. What we did with Pam...was to help them write individual constitutions, encourage them to network with each other, so that they can now speak with one voice. They have established a board; they have invoices and logos, and have moved into legitimate business practice.*

*Since we were concentrating on technical aspect, there were areas we did not address, such as administration. But the program Pam runs also helped with administration and management. Because of that, we were able to influence how they were structured according to rules, how they were governing themselves, how they registered as businesses. But there are still some hiccups, because when they register as a business the requirements did not match what they are doing. We are now working with them to ensure that everything is flowing smoothly. The agency for business registration needs to consider how they regulate the process of registration.*

*Through Pam’s program, we were able to do more than technical cooperation. We were able to look at their whole management scheme. The women were also able to go out and advocate for themselves as legitimate business women. They advocate with one voice and help each other to sell products. They call each other, ask questions and share advice. They are able to solve conflicts among themselves. I think a lot has been achieved through that program, and I think it is largely due to the expertise Pam brought to the program.*

*I wish we could get a lot more diaspora volunteers like her... and I know there are Guyanese who would like to come home and help. Cuso should definitely work on that, so people like Pam people can come and fit so well into this structure/process and give two to three years of service as she did and really make a difference."*

### ***Diaspora and the interconnected world***

Barbara says, "I think, diaspora volunteerism is a good fit and I think we've had lots of very good, positive feedback. Over the past 10 years, Cuso International has developed a good volume of knowledge and experience in lessons learned that we're trying to build on.

Organizations are coming to us to ask us for advice, to gather information on our programs. I think what we've learned is that there are certain things that are really important and working with diaspora communities and individuals, and some of the things that you worked with us on. It's important to know those communities, know who the organizations are, and be able to align with those organizations that have the same shared vision and at the same time not to underestimate the amount of time it takes to build and develop relationships. That has been a big learning curve for us and you see that in lots of the research. And I think it's very similar through all partnership building; but even more important it seems with diaspora communities. It's building trust and understanding the dynamics within those communities as well. So from my perspective over the past 10 years, I can see a real change in our approach in terms of working with diaspora communities and during the last couple of years, we've put a lot of effort into building relationships, doing outreach, identifying organizations to work with, knowing who those communities are before we kind of step in there. And we had good lessons learned in terms of working with the Rwandan community where we were steaming ahead with a development program in Rwanda without really understanding how the Rwandan diaspora community could contribute or would be interested in contributing in terms of the skills under the diaspora volunteering program. Were they the right matches, the right skills to fit the program in-country? So we need to do a lot of foundation work before we jump into new programs and we've recently done some feasibility and research in Nigeria to look at how the diaspora can best contribute to Nigeria's programming. Then we have to do a bit of work on this end to really understand where the Nigerians are at and how they can contribute, what are the different professional associations and organizations that exist, because there are some really strong ones that would make good partners for us as well. I think Cuso International is an excellent partner and we've learned good lessons around our volunteering program. We've tried to be really inclusive and open and we've made space on our assessment days and our pre-departure training to bring in the experience of the diaspora volunteers. Program officers are starting to better understand how we can utilize the experience of diaspora volunteers, even in their look-at country programs. So there is lots of good stuff going on, lots of fruitful discussion. We're just finalizing our strategy position paper for the future, and we have good questions for Cuso International about how we can continue to be a leader in this field, what we have learned and how we can move along in the changing global context. Because, my Lord, it's a changing world, right? There are many important questions about global changes, international development and things are changing before our very eyes. There's a tight focus here in Canada on trade, business and investment, but there are burgeoning youth populations around the world. How do we connect them to that big world picture in terms of youth programming. So we have lots of questions. But I think there is a real appetite to work with those changes to build positive programming and have a major impact."

### Findings

- Members of the diaspora always wanted to give back to their homeland voluntarily. There is a degree of readiness to seize any opportunity that comes their way to give back to their country of origin. Because of this readiness, they respond to diaspora volunteerism promotions with relative ease;
- The dream of going back to the homeland is often not practical, so the next option is to go back for short periods of service. Most first-generation diasporas were already successful when they were living in the homeland. Now that they have stayed in Western cultural environments and studied in Western schools, they have developed a unique capacity which international experts and volunteers or local experts do not necessarily have. They are a product of two cultures, have two languages, and two valuable mentalities. So their previous experience, connections, language, and cultural knowledge come with an added exposure to a foreign language, culture, and knowledge;
- Diasporas in most cases are well connected, both within the country and abroad. They are more familiar with technology and can better locate resources. They often know both overt and covert meaning in the language of the people and understand how the bureaucracy works. Therefore, it is not surprising that they can get things done easily and mobilize resources for the benefit of the community. Because of this too, they tend to be involved in more than one activity, that is, besides their main placement. Their knowledge and skills are demanded by many;
- Unfortunately, most diasporas fled their countries out of fear for their lives, because of dictatorial governments, civil wars, dire economic distress, and so on. They have experienced trauma both while living in and leaving the country and may have a hard time understanding that conditions in the homeland have changed, that it is now safe to return and meaningfully participate in capacity development. In our public engagement work, most of the questions coming from diaspora audience include one or another variation on the theme: “even the current government has continued repression” and “if there is no safety how can we work there?”
- Some political elements in the diaspora exploit this sentiment and threaten other members of the diaspora not to return or support the current government, as in their eyes it amounts to justifying the existing system;
- At the same time, the government is not doing enough among the diaspora to change the distorted image;
- Safety and well-being depend on how one conducts oneself. There is always danger wherever and whenever someone walks on the streets of unsafe neighbourhoods without taking adequate precautions. Moreover, governments want always to safeguard their position and status and tampering with them unwisely can have negative consequences;
- It is certain that because they have lived outside the country for some time, the diaspora might have lost their immunity to some of the common diseases in the homeland. The reality in the hostland has changed them sometimes without their being aware of the changes. Thus, when traveling in the homeland, they may experience some challenges regarding health and communication;
- But once they overcome those challenges and stay, they will be forever connected with the homeland. They keep coming and think continuously how better to support it. They

often keep their eyes open to the possibility of further volunteering and resource multiplication;

- It is important to note the resilience the diaspora has developed over time. Usually, they fled their country because they were challenged in some way. Leaving the homeland and settling in the hostland is never an easy task. It takes crossing so many physical and mental boundaries. It is not easy to be successful in the Western world. It is not easy to earn one's daily bread, pay one's bills and then to go to school to become a professional. Those diaspora volunteers who came back home to give back have been through so many challenges that, if necessary, they can tap into that reserve of resilience that they have developed. They have completed a 360-degree trip around the world, having gone back to where they started;
- With such resilience comes the knowledge of local language and culture, exposure to international experience, better local and international links and a rich store of comparative examples to draw on. Such enlightened individuals can inspire others, can become catalysts and take initiatives in development;
- That is what the data show: an almost 100 percent success rate. Even though we cannot rule out all kinds of reasons to want to go back home, the diasporas have made a difference in their homeland as one of the top-most objectives in their lives. Because the connection is still there and the communal indebtedness continues to be felt.

### Analysis

Because no one can be better informed than the local person about his or her own local reality, the Ethiopians have a proverb that encourages the local solving of local problems: "*yehagerun serdo behageru bere*" [let the local ox graze on the local meadow]. In the context of the diaspora, although the idea of returning back to the homeland and settling there sometimes seems farfetched, the members of the diaspora are characterized by a sense of collective commitment. As Brubaker (2005) stated, they are committed "to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and to its safety and prosperity" (p. 5). The diaspora undertakes this commitment either individually or collectively in various ways. A long-time Guyanese diaspora volunteer Peter Jailall is a good example.

If it were not for the qualities that diaspora volunteers bring to development, Peter would not have achieved much. He knew the power of storytelling in the Guyanese mindset. He knew how stories could inspire and instruct children to read, write, and paint. Because he comes originally from the same culture, he knew himself how to tell and edit stories. If it were not for his previous knowledge of Guyana, how would he know that turtles, turtle eggs, the sea and the beach are part of the vocabularies of children's stories? So he first talks to the children in their dialect and helps them explain the material. Then he helps them in the transition to formal English. The stories are excellent materials for children, because they love and respond to them, know them well, and because they are narrated by someone who knows the culture and the language.

Moreover, living and working far removed from one's locality presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It certainly presents its own stresses and strains, but it offers the opportunity to be exposed to different cultures, different way of doing things, and may even provide better access to material wealth. So in making the effort to overcome the challenges, volunteers have the opportunity to reach out to one's homeland or birthplace, using the unique capacities the

volunteers have developed by being out of the country for a period of time, having attended different schools, worked in different environments and conquered many hurdles on their way. Since such a process involves sacrifice and humility, one can assume that educated professional diasporas have developed these attitudes so necessary for development.

The immigration system in North America, with few exceptions, welcomes those who are at the top of the social ladder in their homeland, people who are well educated even by international standards. Discussing the Canadian immigration system, Darden (2010) states that “After Canada removed its racially-restrictive barrier to immigration, it replaced it with a class-based policy. Using a point system, Canada gives priority to immigrants who are highly educated and skilled and speak English and French.” (p. 52). These same immigrants, given the opportunity to work and learn, have the foundation and motivation to succeed.

The same trend exists in the U.S., where more educated Africans immigrate year after year to further their education. Aaron Terrazas (2009)<sup>17</sup> mentions that in 2007, 42.5 percent of the 1.1 million African-born adults age 25 and older in the U.S. had a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 27.0 percent among all 31.6 million foreign-born adults. About one-quarter (25.2 percent) of African-born adults age 25 and older had some college education (less than a BA degree) or an associate’s degree, as compared to 17.1 percent of all foreign-born adults. Discussing the Caribbean immigrants in the United States Darden, Henry and Frazier (2010) state, “Within the socioeconomic structure, West Indians in the United States have enjoyed a higher socioeconomic status than native-born Black, due in part to their greater emphasis on education, achievement and upward mobility” (p. 333).

The implications of this immigration trend for poorer sending countries are stark. According to the African Capacity Building Foundation, African countries lose 20,000 skilled personnel to the developed world every year. Regarding this bitter truth Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah (2005)<sup>18</sup> says, “All the developed world’s efforts to increase aid to these countries may not matter if the local personnel required to implement development programs are absent. Every year there are 20,000 fewer people in Africa to deliver key public services, drive economic growth, and articulate calls for greater democracy and development.”

For those who have settled and succeeded well in the hostland, going back to the homeland, of course, does not come without its challenges. As is shown in “Diaspora and their fears II” story, for example, misunderstandings occur between the diaspora volunteers and the staff of the partner organization, sometimes for simple reasons. Some words or expressions of diaspora volunteers can be interpreted as demeaning the homeland and unnecessarily praising the hostland, even when nothing of the sort was intended. In fact, there are so many things that one can compare and comment on, either positive or negative, between the two life situations. In most cases the diaspora find the homeland lacking in so many ways and cannot resist airing feelings and views on the issue. In many cases, these are the original reasons why the diaspora left the country. Therefore, there is a tendency to positively mention the hostland due to acculturation to its life style and its relatively more efficient systems. This is why orientation and training are needed, not only for the volunteers, but also for the people who manage them.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=719#12>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=324>



In summary, one can say that the diaspora have now become a political, social and economic force to reckon. The establishment of the Ethiopian National Diaspora Association (NDA) is an indication of what the diaspora can do when they come together. If given the support it needs, it will help channel the economic, knowledge, and skill transfer of the Ethiopian diaspora to their home country. As we move from emergency and survival aid to sustainable development, the knowledge of local culture and language becomes an added asset to the people who work at the grassroots level. As the diaspora move back and forth between homeland and hostland, they help in the marriage of local and international knowledge, the two-way transfer of ideas and practices for the development and expansion of new worldviews, skills, and technology.

### **The diaspora volunteer journey**

#### **Stories**

##### ***Motivated to come***

*Pam says, “I approached VSO because as a child in Guyana I was taught by a VSO volunteer from the UK. She was really nice. She taught me and many of my peers. That remained in my mind. So when the time came to do something different with my life, I applied to volunteer with VSO. I did not apply to any other organization. I did not even do any research; I just applied for VSO because it stayed with me from childhood. I was recruited and then I asked for Guyana. They ask you where you want to go, although they don’t make any promises. I mentioned the countries I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to go to cold countries, because I had enough of cold when I went to Norway. So I specifically said where I did not want to go. I told them my interest to go to Guyana. Only then did I do some research. I looked for Guyanese newspapers. Then I read VSO’s secure livelihood program in Guyana. So I thought “hm, VSO is still very active in Guyana” and I had not realized that because they have left after a while. Then I contacted them again saying I would like to go there because Guyana is my home. I always wanted to go back and serve.”*

*I was asked: ‘How long have you lived out of the country by then? When did you leave Guyana?’*

*I giggled and said, “a long time ago...a very long time ago, I left the country in 1969. I finished my education in England. But I also lived in other countries. But I have always had family here in Guyana. I have maintained my link. Guyana will always be my home and as a Guyanese I always wanted to come home. But I have always come for a week or two, perhaps a month, when I was in school. I would come and enjoy life here; I would go to Barbados and spend time at the beach and then go back. That way, you don’t get to know a lot. Because this has worked for me both ways...I felt I have not worked in Guyana –I have never worked at paid jobs; I am on a stipend – I wanted to serve my country in some way. I will always be Guyanese. I eat Guyanese food abroad and buy Guyanese products; I have got a lot of Guyanese friends over there, and because of them, I wanted to come back and serve this country.*

*I also wanted to know better about myself and my heritage. So I thought this would give me an opportunity. So it really worked both ways. Before I came here I started researching my family names. Just before my father died, he told me about my Venezuelan family. And I*

*thought, 'what! I did not know I had a Venezuelan family and I had never thought I had a tie to Venezuela!' I grew up hating Venezuelans! There is this thought that they have taken a part of our land that is full of gold...there is a history of conflict between Guyana and Venezuela<sup>19</sup>.*

*I had grown up with a prejudice and bias against Venezuelans, so learning about my own Venezuelan connection came as a shock...So I decided to explore my family. I am also of indigenous Amerindian descent. Again I wanted to know more about it. I asked my parents when they were alive. My great, great grandfather was black African, probably from Ghana. So I started tracing my family history. And now, coming here, besides serving my country, I am understanding myself."*

### **Mapping 1 (Guyana)**

Choo's insight: *"It is now well recognized what the diaspora can do for a country's development. That is why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has included in its strategic plan to develop relations with the Guyanese diaspora. One of the things we have started to do is to map the diaspora in order to establish a website and an online survey, in which we ask questions about the skills, the number of years they have been out of the country, their interest to return either permanently or on temporary basis to transfer skills and technology to benefit Guyanese development. These are some of the questions in the online survey. Later, we plan what we are going to do with the data generated by the online survey. We will have specific questions on the type of skills they have and the level of interest people have to contribute. This is the first step we have taken. The second will be to map the diaspora. As part of the diaspora unit mandate, we also encourage in-kind contributions. We have, for example, an organization that approached us and said we would like to give medical equipment's, educational supplies, etc. and asked if we can put them in touch with the appropriate offices (either MoH or MoE). These are some of the things we have been doing. We were trying to streamline these contributions, to make sure that we get maximum benefit out of this. Because we do recognize that however small these contributions may be, they are very valuable."*

### **Mapping 2 (Ethiopia)**

Tewabech says, *"I believe there is a good understanding of the need for trained professionals and for competent and manageable people...who understand situations better than the layman to run projects. But we don't have enough knowledge of what skills are available outside. There is a great need to take stock of our inventory of knowledge and experience...and then share this database. We must map this and then share it with every relevant institution. The government and other institutions should respond positively when they learn about this list of skilled professionals who live outside the country. Then we can respond, 'if you think you need them we can contact them....' The flip side of this situation is that since the diaspora has been outside the country for some time, and since they have acquired certain skills and experiences, they need to find out how and where they can fit in our ongoing institutional programs. In any case, there is a need for dialogue and*

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<sup>19</sup> "In the late nineteenth century, as reports surfaced that the region [Essequibo – a disputed territory between Venezuela and Guyana] was rich in mineral and resource deposits, particularly gold, tensions between the two countries intensified" (Guyana-Venezuela Border Conflict, Centre for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, October 30, 2002, p. 2).

*interaction. ABIDE is trying to map the professionals to find out how they can support, either in-person or electronically, through short-term repeated visits, one time visits to training our trainers, or extended sabbatical leaves. Part of the mapping exercise will be to find out how they would like to engage themselves.*

*It is also important to understand their expectations in this relationship. Would they like to be given a particular status in the institutions? Or would they like their presence to be acknowledged? Do they want some remuneration?*

*This all should be articulated and expressed openly by these professionals. Then we will have a mix of professionals to engage with, people who have a variety of knowledge and competencies and expectations when engaged in various aspects of development. Unless this is done, we will be working blind and piecemeal, as we are now. For the moment, we can be proud of even this piecemeal approach, but in order to have organized and sustained engagement, we need much better information.*

*Another aspect of preparedness will be to deal with the mix of attitudes. There are areas/institutions in which people don't want to be infiltrated by professionals from the diaspora. They think that they look too glamorous, while we locals are doing the donkey work, carrying the major burden. Sometimes the diaspora professionals also have a tendency to show off and display a know-it-all attitude, that they have been in important institutions, in such and such world-renowned university, and so forth. Therefore, there has to be dialogue, a platform for systematic interaction, and a way to reach consensus about how such collaboration should be carried out.*

*We also know that there are some very outstanding professionals who can bring their institutions with them. Many diaspora professionals hold positions of authority in their respective institutions, and serve as department or institution heads, as board chairs, and can network effectively within their institutions. So when they come they come with their colleagues and have the material support of their institutions, collaboration can take place not only at the individual but also at the institutional level. There is so much tested knowledge and experience in the diaspora and these skills can be transferred here. Therefore, the diaspora can serve as bridge to others."*

### ***Challenges of coming "home"***

*Choo says, "I am not painting a picture as if everything is perfect. In any initiative or endeavour, there are challenges to overcome. This is certainly not unique to Guyana. Before we start working with IOM we had information from many African countries.*

*In Guyana, we have many people who migrated in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. These people have lived overseas for decades and it will take a long time to build trust. They still have suspicion, don't trust the system or the government. It will take a while, actually, before you can convince the diaspora. Countries in Africa have these same challenges and this is the first step, the first such initiative in the whole of the Caribbean. It is also the first in the entire Caribbean region, and when we share this initiative with our CARICOM brothers and sisters, they have shown keen interest in our initiative, not only with mapping their country diaspora, but with the idea of mapping the entire Caribbean diaspora population overseas."*

### ***Ideally***

*An executive officer for one of the partner organizations offered these insights:*

*“In the VSO, partnership starts from the grassroots, identifying their needs and what they are looking for from VSO. Looking at what I have now, I wish I had been involved in interviewing these people. There is so much detailed work involved in deploying people, so having interviewed them would have been a big help. The benefitting institution needs to be involved in the recruitment. It is not only the degrees the person may have, but also the their experiences and soft skills that the partner organization would like to have.*

*The duration of the placement also matters. Three months is a very short time. Six months and longer would be ideal. When we are absent from that critical screening activity, we, the benefitting organization really lose out. You have to know these people better. I have seen the orientation/in-country training and it could be adequate for expats. But it should be different for diaspora professionals. In fact, we were considering development of a manual for the orientation of diaspora professionals. There is somehow a wrong assumption that the Ethiopian diaspora knows everything about Ethiopia. Things move fast and realities on the ground change radically. So people must have updated knowledge of the social and political factors in the country.*

*There should also be an entry and exit interview, so that the information obtained can help in the future orientation of other volunteers. Also an honest assessment of diaspora who have been here for some time and who have knowledge of the scene here would be helpful for an organization like VSO to be able to examine the process more carefully than we do now.*

*I also feel that the entire process of recruiting the volunteers is expensive. I don't know how or why it has to be so expensive, but it is.*

*Exchanging ideas and sharing experience among the professionals themselves is very important and part of the silo nature of the organization. Even though we say we work in partnership, there are things that are handled completely/independently by VSO. But since we are in the business of exchanging ideas and sharing experience, it would be good if that took place more openly. To facilitate this kind of open discussion, I have talked with VSO, IOM, and MoFA...to develop a platform for open consultation. ..We need to believe in each other and overcome the attitude of protecting turf.”*

### ***Where is the gap?***

*Mitiku of MoE said, “We are using the Ethiopian embassies abroad to reach the diaspora. I don't think we can use other means for the time being. I assume the embassies try to convey the appeal whenever they have the chance. Moreover, our overseas embassies uploaded our request on their websites. I have checked the American one to make sure, since it is our focus area and most of the Ethiopian diaspora live there. Some government representatives also travelled to North America to engage the diaspora.*

*But we never met anyone who actually came to serve here on a voluntary basis. They go straight to the institution/university they want to serve and then return to their country of residence when they finish their service. There are also those who returned to Ethiopia for good and who are employed here permanently. We have also not met any of these people And they did not come to see us. We can only assume that things are going well for them. There are also those whose arrival and contributions here we don't generally know anything about. We have asked our institutions to report on all of them who came from abroad and*

*who are working with them. But the problem in our system is that institutions don't respond to our letters."*

### ***How we come to know***

In May 2009, when I was in Ottawa attending an educational conference at Carleton University, I was also doing other things like running the annual 10 kilometer race and visiting historic sites. One morning I walked to the Ethiopian Embassy on Slater Street to meet and consult with the Consul General after making an appointment with her. I sat across from this pleasant, respectful woman and told her of my desire to go back to Ethiopia to volunteer, as I have felt I had acquired new insights into curriculum development which I wanted to share with my colleagues in Ethiopia. She immediately told me that they do not have any volunteer or funding capabilities to send Ethiopian professionals back to Ethiopia; but she did give me the telephone numbers of an Ethiopian-Canadian called Temesghen, who is the Executive Director of the Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD), an organization working with Cuso International on a diaspora volunteering project.

I left the Embassy with mixed feelings of happiness and sadness: happy that this diplomat was such a good host and so appreciative, but sad that the Embassy at that time had no system to support diaspora volunteers.

I called Temesghen, introduced myself as a PhD student at the University of Toronto, and told him of my wish to volunteer. He was happy to be contacted and asked me to visit AHEAD's website and, in the meantime, to email my CV to him. The whole process of the screening, the training, and the deployment ended on February 1, 2010, when I landed in Ethiopia to take the ten days of in-country training (ICT) and began my volunteer work in the Medical Education Unit of the College of Health Sciences of Addis Ababa University, better known then as Black Lion Medical School.

Melat tell her own Ethiopia story as follows:

*"In summer, I went to Rome, Italy and met an Ethiopian man. I shared with him my interest in volunteering in Africa, to do some development work. Then we promised each other to keep in touch and share information in this regard. I returned to Chicago and after three months, he emailed me the link to Cuso International. I applied to different countries in Africa. At first, I did not have any specific intention of coming back to Ethiopia, even though I would not mind if that happened.*

*I wanted to have international experience too. Cuso accepted my application and after being interviewed, I underwent a very intensive day of assessment. Then I was invited for the Skills for Working in Development (SKWID). The recruitment process, when three or four people watch you is nerve-wracking. Some parts of the training make sense, but other things don't. But I liked the sessions because I got the opportunity to meet other volunteers. The presenters were very good because most of them have volunteer experience."*

### ***Quality in recruitment***

Parris says, *"The fact that the person is Guyanese makes people listen to them more attentively. Because they have this shared feeling that this person knows what I am going through and came from this life means that he/she knows what's up.*

*So I think the quality the diaspora needs to have is humility, you must remain humble. You cannot bring all your North America exposure at once. You must be in contact with the community you are serving. You have to remember that you are like them, except that you know a little more and you want to share that. You mustn't give the impression that you know it all and that they must do this and that. It must be shared work; you must listen and say, 'well, there is an example in another place I worked... we tried this way, may be we could try that, what do you think?' You let them make the decision how to move forward with new information.*

*They must sense in you an honesty that says 'I really want to help you.' In some situations, the community was able to identify with individuals' success and it came easily with a person like Pam. She was just another Guyanese—with a slightly different accent—in the way she acted with them, the way she worked with them. She gave them the sense that she was there to really help them. She always emphasized that she was there because the community had done something. 'I was like you but I travelled a little bit and now I have something to share with you.'*

*To deal with some of the groups, you really need to know something about conflict resolution. You need to be very strong in communication and networking. You have to be a strong researcher and you have to know how to get information and how to ask for it. Of course, you have to know how to transfer your own particular skills and special knowledge."*

### ***My pre-departure training***

My own experience with pre-departure volunteer training was one of simultaneous joy and pain. Most international volunteers who were with me in the training came from Canada or the U.S. and were quite well off, with academic degrees and the ability to voice their feelings freely. In most of the trainings, particularly in small group sessions, I was the only educated African among them who questioned some of their assumptions. In fact, even though some of the training topics were meant to show the challenges in those countries, they were demeaning from my perspective, as they portrayed Africa and Africans in a less human way. Either from the content or the pedagogy, there was a tendency to look down on Africa and to heap praise on the volunteers as heroes sent to save its people. The process may have improved a lot since then, but that was the impression I had at the time.

In one of the training sessions, when participants were asked to remember a particular thing that they were told or observed about the countries in which they volunteered, they actually wrote the following list: corruption, mistrust, danger, lots of things under the surface, drugs, violence, inequality of the sexes and oppression of women, laziness and useless males, heavy drinking, absence of communication, low pay, dominating concern for money, high HIV rate, abundance of aid money, highly structured and rigidly formal, inflexibility, absence of mechanized farming, indigenous culture, fauna and flora threatened, economy controlled by others, ineffective medical practice, no family planning, all-night partying, lots of dirt, questionable financial policy, xenophobia, garbage, degradation, pick pockets everywhere, terrible smells, war; one of them even wrote 'they eat horse penis.'

### ***ICT***

Clive on in-country training (ICT): *"The Canadian training is generally OK and it also deals with the generalities. The VSO Guyana office took it for granted that I was Guyanese and that I didn't need training. People who haven't been here (in Guyana) for 20 years need*

*sensitizing the same way you would sensitize any other volunteers. Things change and you can't take anything for granted.*

*Volunteers have said the ICT is a little bit too long. It takes about 10 days. There is no language barrier and the group sessions are large. There are a lot of materials to cover, but you don't have to bombard people. So there must be a better way of delivering the material than in stand-up lectures, to make it more interactive. It would be more practical if they took people to the field in small groups. Also if they distributed the session dates throughout the year.*

*It covers the main themes adequately. In some instances you bring in external experts and that incurs costs. You may use volunteers such as police to teach safety, staff for administration, and so on.*

*The other issue is the manner of delivering the training. In most cases, the training is delivered immediately after you arrive from a 12 to 24-hour flight, without proper rest or food. In some cases, even without being able to take a shower or change your clothes. If it is a light session, perhaps that doesn't matter, but I am not sure that it is the right model.*

*I arrived in the morning and was expected to come to the office in the afternoon. I had taken an overnight flight and needed to get some rest. There is certainly room to improve the training, to make it more practical and more user-friendly. Perhaps they could start with a shopping session, take people around. For the first couple of days you don't see anything. You just keep going from the office to the hotel and back."*

*Tara also has to say this on the ICT: "Given the participants' knowledge of the history and politics of Guyana, we did not necessarily plan an ICT for the diaspora. That was the advantage at the beginning. But actually we found out that they have assumptions of a very different Guyana from what the country is like now—not the Guyana they left behind. Also diaspora volunteers don't necessarily have a development perspective. So we became convinced that we needed to provide training. I would say it is challenging because you are providing training to Guyanese people who have their own views, in some cases, very strong ones. They still have the view of Guyana as they left it.*

*Also, there is a need to train the way we do it normally in Cuso, because there are certain ways we view and do development which may be different from their own."*

*From Pam's perspective: "There is room in the ICT to expand more, because the diaspora are treated as if they are foreigners or guests. It is not the Guyana I left. Education has deteriorated. The shopping situation has changed. The way people talk to you is different. So I came to a different Guyana.*

*There are some frustrating situations on every side. People leave because they are unhappy about different things, including coordination from the office. I did not come for any program office, I came for the people. I came for the beneficiaries."*

### ***Is everything ok?***

*Clive continues, "Some people are concerned about safety. A few incidents are more exceptions than the general rule. Some people who have been here for a short time were told 'Don't go out at night; don't go out alone....' I took some of them around and they found out*

*that it is perfectly safe. Of course, there is room for improvement. Very often, you cannot judge things by what you read in the newspapers. If you find yourself at the wrong place at the wrong time, of course, you may face danger.*

*People travel or volunteer partly to enjoy life. If you scare the hell out of people in the training, they are going to stay home or just walk from home to work and back. If you are scared you stay home and you feel start feeling bored and burned out. The more you go out of the city to the rural places it gets safer. I am not saying it is 100% safe. But I would say that Guyana, in general, is a safe country, especially when you get away from the downtown core. It is never zero, but crime dramatically decreases as you go out to the rural areas. I have been to Lethem, Anai, Esquibo, Berbice, I have to been bars and restaurants; I have walked the streets at all the hours of the day and night and I have been safe. I am not saying you should do that, but the situation is not nearly as bad as it sounded in the pre-departure training or as suggested in newspaper articles.”*

### ***The mentored***

Oleta speaks highly of Pam:

*“I think she brought a new level of professionalism to these women working in the organization. We should aim higher. She always encourages them to push higher and higher, to overcome their limitations. She encourages them to meet high standards. She tells you to keep trying, to aim high. She expects all plans to be implemented completely.*

*In a country where there seems to be a free ride for everything, where corruption is so high, where standards seem to be lost, it is refreshing to meet Pam and learn from her. She also has an eye for detail. I would design the label for the organization and she would coach me how to improve it.*

*So we need a person who can relate to you, a person that you don’t feel alienated by because she/he is from another country, someone who doesn’t give you the impression that they are better because they come from a ‘developed’ country, someone who does not insult your dignity. The people who come here should make a smooth transition and adapt to this country.”*

### ***My deployment***

It was only after I arrived in Ethiopia that I understood better how many organizations were involved in realizing and sustaining the DV initiative: AHEAD, Cuso International, IDRC, VSO-Ethiopia, ABIDE, Addis Ababa University, the Medical School. Each of them played an important and unique role. But at the moment, since it was the beginning of the project, the terms of reference were not well understood and it was a sort of pilot project. So there was tension and disagreement on who was to do what and how. In some of our occasional meetings in Ethiopia, arguments would arise about what each individual’s responsibility was and who was to give credit to whom. The assignment and monitoring of the work suffered somewhat from its experimental nature.

There were ups and downs in my placement. The ups were the people with whom I was assigned to work, who were very positive and welcoming. In fact, I was sharing an office with Professor Mekonnen, whom I love dearly and respect highly for his commitment to higher education and its improvement. I had an office with quite adequate furniture and equipment. The downs included the location of the office—under a hospital in a cold, dark



basement where the cleaners would sweep the floors over my head and filthy water would stream down the window, and the busy work schedule of my colleagues prevented any meaningful engagement.

Four things that were achieved, however, were, first, my daily dialogue of study, action, and reflection with Professor Makonnen about the three educational research projects he was engaged in, and second, the writing of the PhD manual for Ethiopian higher education. Besides that, there was a third, my effort to build the capacity of the office staff and, fourth and final, preparation of a post-graduate medical education program.

Aside from the main volunteer work, I was able to help VSO-Ethiopia move the DV project through the feasibility study and the development of a five-year strategic program, and serve as a cultural bridge for international volunteers.

Across from me in my volunteer placement office was my work partner, Professor Makonnen (Meku for short). On one really cold morning in that cold basement office, he seemed not to care one whit about the discomfort, as he had many more important issues to deal with on his plate. His vision is nation-embracing and always reminds me to focus on the nation, rather than on the particular school we were volunteering at. “If we devise a new curriculum for the nation” he said, “this school will also change.” I, however, believe in creating a model, starting small scale and then duplicating the model for the nation. Thus, our healthy debate for the day would start on this very theme.

I do not think many of his kind exist. I know of other retired elders who frequent the tennis court in one of the Kebeles (localities) of Bole and just while away the day. They are the elite of the country’s retired people. They live in the most up-scale parts of Addis Ababa. They take sunbaths and saunas alternatively and after a couple of beers in town, head back home in their expensive cars. They believe their careers are over and that this is their time to enjoy life. Most of their children are already in the diaspora and they send them money and gifts during the holidays. In most cases, they also have well-paying retirement plans. They may have established a business or saved well.

But there were others who were waiting for their retirement so that they could serve more, and do what their hearts were telling them to do, but who, somehow, were unable to do it because of their previous life style. So this retired professor is one of the first Ethiopian professors in the public health field who just began to realize his life-long dream: the creation of an innovative curriculum. He is now instrumental in establishing and sustaining the excellent Community Based Education program in Jimma University. Now he wants to affect the whole national education curriculum. What a pleasure and honour to work alongside him and I consider it one of the bounties of my diaspora volunteer service.

### ***Melat on her deployment***

*“On the final day of the ICT, my employer came and we had a discussion. I was based in Addis and had been assigned a home. But I fell sick because of the dust and developed an infection. So I went to the office after two weeks of break. When I got to the office, they were busy and there was no one to show me the work I was to do. So I spent the first week just surfing the Internet and reading. It felt awkward to be in such a laid back environment. And there were so many power interruptions that we could not even surf the Internet. The staffs are go out to enjoy coffee when the power is out. So we went out to cafés sometimes three*

*times a day just to wait for the power to come back on. The days end like that. Sometimes the power goes off for three consecutive days. We needed to buy power generator.”*

### ***I wish***

One of the diaspora volunteers had this to say:

*“One of the advantages being a diaspora volunteer is that you are not immediately picked out on the streets. I blended in easily; I felt comfortable.*

*I am not serving in my professional capacity. I am eye an technician, but they wanted me to go where there was a vacancy. So now I am program manager for a local NGO.*

*The people in the local organization are nice, but very disorganized. You need to have personal initiative. You need to have your own mandate in order to make things happen.*

*I am exploring opportunities to stay here, but I don’t have friends here like the ones back in Canada. Traffic is challenging. I left this country as a kid, so understanding the system takes time. But it is good that people are willing to talk. There are opportunities and the point is to find them.”*

### ***Thank you***

Mitiku from MoE says, *“I attended a workshop organized by IOM last week and one of the complaints raised was that diasporas are not recognized for their contribution. The accusation was that ‘Nobody writes even a thank you letter after the diaspora served three or six months’. We want to thank everyone and recognize their contribution. If the university recognizes them that is great, otherwise, we are also ready to provide a recognition letter.”*

### **Findings**

- Some writers think that the wish of members of the diaspora to return is just a myth, depending on appropriate conditions or opportunities. But many do, in fact, return either temporarily or permanently. Of course, the longer one stays in the hostland and lays down roots, the harder it is to return. But still that burning desire to go back finds a way to bring the diaspora to the homeland. The love of the homeland and the people are great motivators in returning. Volunteer recruiting organizations can easily capitalize on that desire in their public engagement work;
- Moreover, whether first or second generation, people want to know where they come from, where their roots lie. Understanding the past is an important aspect of present and future existence. Particularly, in a situation where you are still regarded as a ‘new-comer,’ an ‘aliens,’ a ‘stranger,’ an ‘immigrant,’ or a ‘minority,’ the desire to go back and see what one’s homeland is like, to re-examine oneself in the context of the hostland is critical. Homeland governments and people cannot do much about this, as long as immigration continues. The issue is how to positively channel this desire to do something positive and to help people build their future based on the knowledge of who they are. To understand the self means understanding everything;
- Therefore, the first step in promoting diaspora volunteerism is to take stock of what is out there, that is mapping. It is a difficult task to research the actual number and type of diaspora members, where they live and work, how they can be accessed, what organizations they are associated with, and the media they use. The research can also go further in finding out the level of willingness to return and for how long, whether they

can do it in-person or electronically—as in e-volunteering. The same type of needs assessment can be done from the homeland, where the skills of the diaspora can be used and the matching process must start in earnest. All kinds of models of volunteering are possible, such as short-term repeat visits, one-time visits of training of trainers, extended sabbatical leaves, e-volunteering, life-long volunteering, attachment—as, for example, professors in North America who can remain attached to the Ethiopian or Guyanese universities and take on responsibilities wherever they are. These latter can stay as bridges between the homeland and hostland institutions;

- Once a few countries have created a system of mapping and engaging the diasporas, other countries with large number of diasporas can follow suit. Or the initiative can be taken from the national to the regional and continental level, thereby enhancing the process of international development, where there will be an unrestricted flow of knowledge and skill in all directions throughout the world;
- In any case, not every diaspora member can be a volunteer. That is why the recruitment process has to include a screening process. Partner organizations in both the homeland and hostland need to come together, create a forum, formulate a Memorandum of Understanding, forge efficient institutional relationships, and facilitate smooth diaspora volunteering;
- Since diaspora volunteerism is in its initial stages, it is important that we experiment with different methods, materials and timing of recruitment, training, deployment, monitoring, and reintegration;
- Study, action, and reflection should characterize the processing of volunteers not only actual project implementation in the field, but also our institutional interaction. We need to document, share and build on the lessons learned. We need to be able to trust each other. We need to know that we are all indispensable in the development process and that universal participation is at the core of social justice;
- Governments must increase their activities, particularly through their foreign embassies. Currently, non-governmental organizations are taking the lead, but governments should also focus on the knowledge of the diaspora and attract them to support the development process, offering them incentives as is done with investment;
- The process from recruitment to sending them out and then welcoming them, must be speeded up significantly;
- Once the diaspora lose trust in the institutions, it is difficult to rebuild it;
- Beyond knowledge and skill, recruiting institutions must look for the quality of humility, as it is badly needed in the partner participant communities. Given the exposure, international experience and better material condition of members of the diaspora, there is easy temptation to feel that they are better than others, an attitude which poisons the whole deployment and employment process;
- The North American side of pre-departure training has a positive impact on the diaspora volunteers. It primarily serves to expose them to the etiquette of development and volunteerism. It helps them network with other international volunteers. But some of the topics about lower income countries need to be revisited. There has to be a balance between the challenges and the strengths;
- Even though the diaspora volunteers do not deny its necessity, the current in-country training for most of them has been deemed to inconsiderate—because it is done as soon as the volunteers put their feet on the ground—too long, boring, and irrelevant.

Particularly in Ethiopia where Peace Corps and VSO-Ethiopia provide local language training, there is a question about its effectiveness and its relevance to the diaspora volunteers. If, for example, all are given three days of rest before they start the training, they can use this period to become acquainted with local people and will understand when they come to class, how important it is for them to learn the language and culture and understand situations more deeply. In fact, in Ethiopia the accommodation and the training are provided in the same location, so that volunteers have neither the time nor the courage to go out and explore the world they are to serve in;

- The diaspora volunteers come to a country that is different from the one they left behind. Therefore, some orientation on how things have changed, how the government works and what the current mentality of the people is would be useful. In the in-country orientation, particular attention must be given to the political situation and what the government is sensitive about;
- It is certainly necessary to remind volunteers to be careful, but equally important not to frighten them so much that they are going to limit themselves to just going from home to work and back;
- Once the placement begins, the diaspora volunteers must think of sustainability, about how they will be replaced. They have to identify both young and older staff members with potential, whether inside or outside of their job circle to recruit and work with them, with the objective of building their capacity so that the work will continue when they leave. While working with older staff, there is also a high possibility of learning and working more;
- The knowledge diaspora—as opposed to some investment diaspora—have no temptation to indulge in corruption and easygoing bureaucracy. Rather, they tend to demand better customer service;
- Wherever possible, it is important to provide better working condition for the diaspora volunteers as they have a limited time within which to be used effectively;
- A close monitoring of the diaspora volunteers while at work is also essential to make sure that the placement is going well and to dispel misunderstandings if and when they occur;
- It is also necessary to think out-of-the-box and use the volunteers' time and expertise in the best possible ways. They are usually willing to offer their skills outside of their main placement, as their primary objective is to make a difference. For example, Pam was offering her service to Rotary Club, Clive was offering his talent to Ministry of Agriculture, and I was offering my expertise to elementary schools;
- The time spent to learn about the language and culture can now wisely be spent improving and transforming them;
- Local organizations, participant communities, volunteers, and the volunteer hosting organizations must work hand in hand and listen to each other. No one should be seen as asking too many questions. If they can iron out their differences effectively and work together, they can bring help to significantly transform the countries and peoples they claim to serve;
- Once the diasporas finish their placement, there should be a system of recognizing their contributions. A thank you note, reference letter, award or other encouraging steps should be taken. The diasporas must return home with a positive feeling, so that when

they come back again, they can witness the transformation they have brought about and that they themselves experienced.

### Analysis

I am deeply convinced of the truth of the statement by Shoghi Effendi (1991) to the effect that the next stage in the social evolution of humanity provides the basis for the movement of peoples across nations, either through volunteerism or paid jobs. He wrote:

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life. (p. 202)

Diaspora volunteerism can be one of the best mechanisms to address the inequality that exists among nations, because of the migration of educated people from one country to another. Therefore, understanding the process of diaspora volunteerism and hastening it may be an effective path to hastening international development.

The process can be broken down into ten closely interrelated components, which in most cases are similar to other processes, such as international volunteerism, each of which has its special feature and responsible actors:

1. *Mapping, profiling, and needs assessment*—A very important first step in the realization of the diaspora volunteerism program is the mapping of the diasporas, as challenging as this task may appear. In fact, due to its difficult nature, no individual or institution claims to know the exact number, type and location of diasporas. Therefore, from the outset it is essential that research be done to figure out who is out there. The use of employed consultants, think tanks, institutions like MPI in the U.S. or Statistics Canada are very helpful in the process. The use of a website and Facebook page like the Guyana Diaspora project, can also be useful. Along with registration of diaspora members should come listing the media they use and the organizations with which they associate;

In this regard, in the homeland there must be a well conducted needs assessment and the development of placement profiles to see if these needs match the skills available in the willing diasporas;

2. *Reaching out: public engagement and promotion*—Once the type and the locations of the appropriate diasporas are known, diverse public engagement materials must be prepared. Good examples are the materials used by the Cuso International Public engagement office in Toronto. Public meetings, lectures, holidays and events are some of the strategies they use to reach the Ethiopian diaspora;

Some diasporas, because of the political turmoil which motivated their departure from the homeland, have their own reservations and criticisms about who is doing the mapping and about the public engagement work. I have met people among the Ethiopian diaspora who asked me who is funding Cuso, in the belief or fear that the

Ethiopian government is using Cuso to tantalize or win them over. Time and again, I had to explain that Cuso has existed for the last five decades in the business of sending volunteers, that this is an entirely different situation, and that diasporas now have an important role to play in development of their homeland. In order to dispel their misconception that the diaspora volunteerism initiative is unique to Ethiopia, I tell them that such projects involving the diaspora are not unique to Ethiopia and that, in fact, some other African countries are far ahead in this area;.

Using returned volunteers and actual development worker from the field as speakers has proved to be an effective tool in engaging the diasporas;

3. *Recruitment*—Recruitment is the stage where willing individuals are screened to see if they qualify to volunteer in the homeland. In most organizations, it includes interviews and practical assessment once the person's CV is chosen for a specific placement;

Though having the right people is essential, the life style of the diaspora volunteers demand that this step be fast, flexible, and efficient. Moreover, there has to be close and repeated communication with the recruit to maintain their interest and keep them informed of any new developments related to their application. It may be effective to create an online system enabling each person to closely monitor where he/she is at in the system of volunteer placement;

4. *Pre-departure training*—This is a training many diaspora volunteers enjoy, as it gives them the chance to meet other international volunteers. In most cases, it is the first introduction to formal volunteer training and offers the opportunity to gain a better grasp of the concept and practice of development. Regardless, some diaspora volunteers have suggested that it be somewhat shorter and also cover issues specific to diaspora volunteerism;

As suggested in my earlier reports to some volunteer sending organizations, some of the content that shows Africa to be a continent rife with problems must be revisited for the following reasons:

- First, from the point of view of traditional African courtesy, one must not degrade or speak of evil about one's host. There is a proverb in Ethiopia that says, "do not cut off the hand that fed you;"
- Second, practically and spiritually speaking it is better to focus on the inspiring and positive, because African or any other low income country certainly have their challenges, but also have many positive qualities;
- Third, from the perspective of "appreciative inquiry"<sup>20</sup> and development, one needs to focus on the strengths of the community rather than its problems. We must identify what the community has and capitalize on that;

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<sup>20</sup> "Appreciative inquiry" is a system of research and action that focuses on finding out and building on the strengths of a community, rather than its problems.

- Fourth, from perspective of cause and effect, I do not think all the problems are essentially the product of laziness. More fundamentally, it can be said that lack of education and injustice lie at the root of all these problems;
- Fifth, most of the problems are not unique to or inherent in Africa. All kinds of problems existed or currently exist in the so-called 'developed countries' depending on which city, which region, which level of society or what point in time we are talking about.

Volunteers have to be trained to see strength and beauty in the countries they are about to serve in;

5. *In-country training*—This is a ten-day training offered by some homeland offices to orient the newcomer volunteers to the life, culture, and language of the homeland. Plans and specific strategies are also presented during the sessions;

Most diaspora volunteers have suggested that some sessions, such as those on language and culture, are irrelevant for them and that ways should be devised to engage them in other ways. Perhaps a separate orientation about the political and safety situation in their context could be offered;

It is also important that the volunteers get enough rest before they start the ICT. It is the first formal orientation to their host countries and therefore it needs to be enjoyable and practical;

In general, the pre-departure and the in-country training can be given to the diaspora volunteers simultaneously with international volunteers, so that they can a) develop a common vision of international development and the special way each can contribute to it; and b) intensify the level of interactions between and among the international and diaspora volunteers to enable them to begin a life-long partnership and friendship conducive to fostering global peace;

Apparently, such diaspora-international volunteer interaction is either absent or minimal both in Canada and the U.S. In the diaspora, immigrants have different tastes and choices as concerns work, relaxation and living situations, which may not necessarily correspond to those of the international volunteers, who were born, raised and reside in the same country and who may have a competitive advantage over the diaspora, who are, and are seen as, immigrants. The international volunteers generally have better social, cultural and economic capital than the diaspora and these differences often prevent them from mingling with each other. In contrast, the diaspora volunteers, in turn, might have similar advantages as compared to international volunteers, when they stay in their country of origin;

Moreover, in-country training sessions should be interactive and enjoyable, with well prepared presenters, as it is they who set the tone for the future volunteer experience. The presenters must remember that they are often dealing with highly trained professionals in their respective fields;

6. *Deployment/employment*—Deployment begins in the final days of in-country training, when the executives of the partner organization join the volunteers to be introduced and consult on immediate plans for their trips and first weeks of work. In a way, these executives are the first ambassadors the volunteer will meet and they play an important role in shaping the volunteer's views about the upcoming work and staff;

As commented on by diaspora volunteers, it often happens that what the volunteer was told or given as an assignment or title does not match what the partners were expecting. In my own experience, although I was working in education, I was assigned to a health program. Because my title was "medical educator," I was assigned to medical schools. Without doubt, I was able to be supported by the health program, but because of my background training, I would much rather have been assigned to provide professional support for an education program.

Since the initial experience of the placement is vital, the volunteer hosting organization should consider taking each volunteer to their placement and introducing them to the work place—a sort of on-the-job orientation. It help tremendously if the office can ensure a conducive environment for the volunteer to go ahead with the assigned work;

7. *Monitoring*—Monitoring is simply on-the-job support. Rather than fighting fires, it is better to establish a system where the volunteers are visited frequently, coached, and mentored. Volunteers can help each other or the staff of volunteer hosting organizations assist them. But in any case, the volunteer should not feel abandoned when doing battle in the development field. Diaspora volunteers, even though they know the language and culture, can sometimes feel the same stresses as international volunteers. Occasional educational conferences and entertainment programs can be planned, such as those which VSO-Ethiopia organizes for its volunteers;

Temesghen, President and Executive Director of AHEAD, for example, lists the following as best practices in his institution: "maintaining very close communication for the duration of the development project; asking volunteers to submit a monthly or bi-monthly progress report and a mandatory final report on the completion of the project; and if necessary and if the project budget permits, traveling to the host country to monitor progress;"

8. *Return*—Once the volunteer has completed the assignment, her/his return to the hostland should be as smooth as possible, because the first volunteer experience is not necessarily the last, and could be the beginning of a life-long mission. We cannot mistreat the returned volunteer as if we no longer need him. Her/his return flight, clearance, and training the next staff/volunteer should be coordinated. If a farewell party is not feasible, then at the very least, a certificate of appreciation should be given to each volunteer upon completion of each assignment, or even when it is only 75% completed;
9. *Reintegration*—Apparently, returning to the hostland after a period of absence has its own challenges. Establishing and settling in a new home, returning to regular work and routine take time. Physical realities such as technology can change overnight in North



America. A returned volunteer from one of the remote corners of the world needs to catch up in just about every aspect of life. But, alas, now that the volunteer is “spiritually” transformed, she/he may develop an aversion to life in a huge city. The volunteer may have become accustomed to a simpler, more contented life, and to conserving resources. That is why an immediate debriefing or reintegration strategy should be put in place.

Once again, this can be done by other volunteers who are willing to immediately welcome the volunteer and help in the reintegration, or by staff from the volunteer-sending organizations.

10. *Returned volunteers (RV): Reaching the 360 degree mark*—Cuso International, for example, has a good experience in keeping lists and addresses of its returned volunteers and engaging them as alumni. RVs are now resource people, who can help with public engagement, fundraising, training, consultancy, and research.

### Cost

#### Stories

##### *New initiative new cost*

Nana says, “*I don’t think there is any particular difference between the costs of diaspora volunteers and other kinds, as this is a function of their status. I do think that whatever variation exists is more related to how proactive and purposeful the organizations are in applying resources to this work. I know that we do significantly more recruitment, marketing, public engagement, and partnership building within the diaspora program, than perhaps for any other program that we are involved in, because it’s a relatively new area. Our focus right now is to get it well established within the diaspora communities, so that people are aware of the program’s existence and the opportunities it offers. We want to achieve high visibility as we believe that the interest is there in the diaspora communities for these types of engagement with their home countries. I think volunteering is one of the most tangible ways for people to express a connection with their country of origin. So if we are visible and relevant, those people who are ready at any time to volunteer in their country of origin, they will think of our organization and our program first.*”

##### *Cost saving*

Ephrem from HIDA says, “*The volunteers are usually from within the community and they live close to the children we support. That is good in that the children and the volunteers cross paths frequently and check on each other. Because we don’t pay them and they are staying in the local community and give almost 24-hour protection, it is highly cost effective. Studies show that 50 percent of the Ethiopian population belong to Edirs, which recruit the volunteers according to a set of criteria.*

*In order to prevent burnout of volunteers, we graduate them each year with colourful ceremonies and recognition and new volunteers follow. They are part of our organizational structures and their career development is encouraged whenever opportunity allows it.*

*VSO helped us to systematize the volunteer work, helped us create better structures, to set up and develop volunteer policy and a manual. They helped us to achieve organizational maturity, get us involved in training, in recruiting volunteers, even recruiting their own staff. They cover costs for some of our travel.... The manual for volunteers helped a lot to organize the work of volunteers. Our activities in recruitment and termination are now more systematic*

*VSO-Ethiopia itself benefitted from this partnership. They talk to me whenever they need our support.”*

### ***The benefits***

*Ephrem again, “The Diaspora is a great untapped potential. Why I do say this? We have had experience working with five or six diaspora volunteers. Many of them contact us to come and help. They ask to volunteer. So we ask for their CVs and see where their expertise can be put to good use. Some funds are spent on fundraising and grant proposal writing and they help in raising funds as well as friends for that purpose.*

*They also help to lobby by serving as good will ambassadors. They promote our vision and mission, in the process sponsoring children with only US\$20 per month. There are now about 500 children being sponsored, the largest share of whose costs are covered by P2P Canada. They help with program updates and evaluations. They build the image of the organization and do public outreach abroad. We have Friends of HIDA in Canada, England and Sweden. P2P Canada and P2P Sweden raise fund for us, sponsor a child, support in kind, and donate books. Prominent people such as Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, and Brad Pitt came and visited us as part of their international development work.*

*We know that if we had to cover the expense to get all the volunteers’ expertise, it would be beyond our means. What we do know is that they are willing to come, that there is a demand. But we have still not put in place the mechanisms to bring and support them here. We have taken made a beginning, taken some initial steps and hope that the process will develop. It must be systematized.*

*We work with diaspora volunteers both through VSO-Ethiopia and other channels. We have so many partnerships. We will be taking training in Kenya in volunteer management.”*

### ***The calculation***

*Tesfaye from MoFA (Ethiopia) says, “Knowledge and skill transfer is specified by sector, such as education, health, water and sanitation. These were the three priorities. ENAHPA has helped a lot in the health area through voluntary actions. There are a few others who came and worked in the universities. We did some needs assessment in nine universities and 14 colleges—excluding AAU and the Civil Service University, as there are many diaspora already coming to them. We compiled the type of needs we have and sent them to our foreign embassies and they then work to recruit and match the needs with available diaspora volunteers. Of course, we have a modest benefit package for volunteers, covering their guest housing, flight, and a small US\$300 stipend. However, the funds have been exhausted as the demands made by volunteers increased.*

*It is difficult for the government to cover these expenses. UNDP provided funds in the amount of US\$900,000 for the past three years, a clear indication of how expensive the project is. Now that the project is known, and also the willingness of the diaspora to serve*

*has become clear and increased, we have run out of funds. Many of our universities have benefitted from this program, as it is their faculties that have the training and a graduate curriculum. So, although the government supports the initiative, it is not feasible to continue the operation because of the lack of funds.*

*We also have another program with IOM on institutional capacity building. There is a South-South experience sharing and also training for Regional bureaus. We also have an Institutional Development Fund (IDF) grant from the World Bank based on our presentation of a US\$400,000 project. We are aiming to build a very good independent website for the diaspora. We have already screened contractors who can build and launch it during the next diaspora policy inauguration/launch. We ask every diaspora community to open an account on the site.*

*We know there are many diaspora volunteers who want to come and that we must do much more to welcome them, facilitate their work, and provide more incentives. We are hampered in our activities by a severe shortage of funds, which are usually time limited. Reaching out to the diaspora and engaging them requires longer time periods than the funds are available for. By the time the diaspora volunteers are ready to come and serve, we have usually run out of funds.*

*Many of our public universities have the physical infrastructure, but not the software capacity to function. Block courses and curriculum development would be ideal support services to come from the diaspora. We have observed in Hawassa University that highly qualified professors teach undergraduate course in an engaging way.”*

### ***How much does a DV’s talent, time and energy cost?***

Patrick De Groot, the secretary of Rotary Club in Guyana, says, *“I would say 99 percent of Guyanese have never seen the interior of Guyana. It is when they come back for vacation after they have emigrated that they go to see the interior. So in a way, let alone the international community, Guyanese are strangers to the way of life in the interior. Pam being an enthusiast and originating from here was able to blend in easily, even in the interior. It takes a lot of commitment to do what Pam is doing. She understands the people’s way of life. When other international volunteers come here, they have to make major adjustments to the way of life here. So, being Guyanese and growing up here helps you to make an easier start.*

*I don’t think this diabetes test and program in a community would have succeeded if it weren’t for Pam. It would have taken us a lot more time and energy to get it done. She knew everybody; she found accommodations and made meal arrangements in the community. She made it really simple for us, because of the previous work she had already done there. Everybody knew and respected her.*

*Today Pam and I are going to meet the Minister of Health and she was instrumental in arranging the meeting. She will go to three other village communities and find out what their needs are, aside from medical issues. We will try to furnish things like text books, exercise books, whatever they need.*

*Pam enjoys what she is doing and that is so important. I know the volunteer stipend is only just enough to help you stay alive. But it is difficult to just survive and still be helpful.”*

### *Effectiveness*

Tinebeb said the following, *“It depends how shared the vision is in the organizations. At the national level, there is an understanding that building human capacity is a major strategy for development. In fact, the invitation for the diaspora to come and serve is rooted in the need to develop human resources. This may not be a shared view among all grassroots partners. Most of the partners we work with tend to demand money rather than human resources. The skill-sharing concept is growing. When I see who the organizations list as partners, they usually don’t include VSO as a partner, because they want money, not people. We go to the partners with people. Of course, the assignment of volunteers is cost effective and, moreover, the volunteers are there just to contribute their talents. So, although some partners don’t realize it, that has to be part of the financial calculation.*

*I found it is more effective when you take volunteers who have small grant money. When you work with people, you have to take into consideration their emotions, their commitment, their enthusiasm, and expertise. That is more difficult than dealing with money, over which you have more control. Moreover, there is a time issue; the maximum time given by volunteers is two years, with possibility of extending. So, in order to have any effect in this short time period, the volunteer has to be highly dedicated and focused. As challenging as that may be, it has multiple advantages. There is interaction with human elements, though it requires strategic thinking. Because development is a two-way street, the volunteer also learns from the process. In the process of interacting, things happen and people realize their potential; they start to learn the best means to move forward.*

*I feel that working through people, sharing skills is a very good strategy for development. But we need to have very good plans in place. We have to work in line with the country’s greater development plan. However, there is as yet no defined path for development as such. Thus, we need to continually come together and reflect on our actions, success and failures. We have to involve all development participants in a consultative process.”*

### **Findings**

- Since diaspora volunteerism is a relatively new initiative in both volunteer sending and hosting countries, there are initial extra costs incurred to establish mechanism for promoting it. Once the program is well established, these costs will either be lowered or may no longer exist;
- One of the objectives of volunteerism itself is to perform important jobs at a lower cost. Since international and diaspora volunteers are paid local salaries, they live among and stay within close reach of the local community and have longer contact hours with the people. The longer the contact, the more transformation and the lower the cost;
- Diaspora volunteers come from places where volunteerism is institutionalized. Therefore, they can help in transforming traditional volunteerism—as people do help others everywhere in the world on a voluntary basis—into institutionalized, structured volunteerism which will save money for many organizations;
- Diaspora volunteers have proved effective ambassadors to represent the institutions they are placed in, whether during their actual placement or after they have left. They help in fund raising, mobilizing resources and creating good will beyond offering their own expertise. Excellent examples are P2P, ENHAPA, St. Stanilaus College Alumni Associations.

## DIASPORA AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Although it could be argued that it hinders their effectiveness, almost all of the work by diaspora associations in North America is done on a voluntary basis, thus creating more resources to be channeled to the partner organizations in the homeland;
- UNDP, IOM, World Bank (through IDF), EU, and AU are excellent resources to cover some of the costs incurred in implementing diaspora volunteer programs, reducing some of the costs borne by North American governments and volunteer sending organizations. Special funds could be instituted where members of the diaspora who are unable themselves to volunteer may instead choose to deputize others financially;
- Diasporas' understanding of local languages and culture and the networks they have in the community help them to carry out many services at significantly lower cost;
- Sacrifice is easier when someone understands and realizes what a difference their involvement in the community can make;
- The work done by volunteers saves considerable money that would otherwise have to be paid to experts;
- Volunteers can create cost reduction mechanisms or generate funds while in the community.

### Analysis

According to Eldenburg and Wolcott (2005), it is important for managers to use cost-accounting techniques to help them make a variety of decisions including those involving the development of organizational strategies, creating operational plans, and monitoring and motivating organizational performance. But they also add that managers must “recognize ethical dilemmas and consider the well-being of others and society when making decisions” (p.2). Given the nature of volunteerism as a promoter of the well-being of others, volunteer managers need to look at the humanitarian and development side of the issue when decisions about cost. Volunteerism is not only non-profit, but it also involves loss and sacrifice. Therefore, while the question of how to cover cost is still an open one, it seems unethical to compromise the diaspora volunteerism initiative due only to the lack of funds.

Current activities regarding the recruitment and deployment of diaspora volunteers did not incur extra cost from all partners, as compared to those incurred by international volunteers. Of course, there were some tailored outreach projects in North America. In any case, this is still a part of the population which the public outreach work needs to cover. But given their benefits and extra community work they perform, the costs they incur are lower. In fact, I would suggest that they be supported financially when they perform extra community projects outside of their regular volunteer placement. Available data show that diaspora volunteers have proven to be effective ambassadors representing their placement institutions, whether during their actual time volunteering, or after they left. They help in fund raising, mobilizing resources, creating good will beyond offering their own expertise. P2P USA and P2P Canada, both Canadian and American Chapters of Ethiopian North American Professionals Association, Inc (ENAHPA), Guyana's St. Stanislaus College Alumni Association are fine examples of what diaspora volunteers can do, whether in the homeland or the hostland.

Besides the amount of work that can be done by volunteers to reduce cost, members of the diasporas and their organizations can raise fund to cover portions of their cost.

Another model that can be explored in future endeavours is the merging of diaspora business volunteer interests and development. The executive director of a partner organization in Ethiopia shared with me their vision of developing business plans that involve all interested partners. For example, VSO-Ethiopia rents its office, while ABIDE is housed in AAU for the time being. The National Diaspora Association is also another institution that rents its facilities. These and other development organizations can come together, pool their resources, interest other diaspora investors and can build a high-rise office, making some space available for business. Both government and non-governmental organizations should be open to experimenting with different models for sustainability and reducing cost.

Moreover, as findings indicate, understanding by the diaspora of the local language, the bureaucracy, the culture, and the networks they have in the homeland community all help them to accomplish things at less cost. Most diaspora volunteers, including myself, were able to do extra work in a short time because of these factors.

### **Back to the hostland**

#### **Stories**

##### ***Welcome to the world of volunteerism***

My reflection: Welcome to the business of volunteerism where you will be affected eternally. You will never be the same person. You are not going to sleep well. Whether in your new placement or after you return, you are going to think about social justice, conservation, capitalism, on and on. Our volunteer sending organizations can rightly say “We sent you for the purpose of supporting poor people alone...but you come back as a revolutionary.” Who is to blame? Innocent fighters against poverty in lower income countries are now turned into strong fighters against the negative consequences of materialism. People committed to social justice are a different breed, who not only feed people, but also ask why people are hungry in the first place.

##### ***A life-long connection***

Nana says, “*In some cases we send second or third generation Canadians who have never been to the country of their parents before. I think it leaves a very profound personal impression on them to have actually have made a reconnection with their roots, seen the places where their parents and grandparents grew up, maybe even make connections with extended family. The impact is usually more profound on diaspora volunteers than ordinary volunteers, who don’t have any personal history in that country. Beyond that, I think that it usually sows the seeds for continuing engagement. So for the people that we send overseas, it’s not the end of their engagement with that country. When they come back, we see more of them wanting to volunteer again, to continue to support the partner organization that they worked with in an independent fashion, and make that relationship an ongoing one. We hope that it becomes a lifelong engagement between the diaspora volunteer and the country.*”

##### ***An interconnected world***

Tinebeb says, “*So far, the experience is that both the pre-departure and the in-country training are the same for the international and diaspora volunteers. The advantage of this is that it creates the sense that development is an international concern. Though the Ethiopian diaspora is coming to Ethiopia, they will know that the problems of development are similar*

*to those in other countries. Their vision becomes world-embracing, characterized by an attitude of international solidarity and global brotherhood. Because Ethiopians have been and will continue to be part of the international volunteer movement. The Ethiopian diaspora have travelled across different parts of the world and served as volunteers. So coming back to Ethiopia is part of the global experience.”*

### ***Finding meaning in life***

Mekbib used to have a tax office in Toronto. He had a degree in economics from Ethiopia. He emigrated as a teenager, trying to live the American “dream.” He fled the country through Kenya and later came to Canada. But settling and starting a new life was not easy. He was mired in the dilemma of most professional immigrants: whether to start a job just to feed himself or to take time, to upgrade, so as to be able to join the Canadian professional workforce.

It needed one long painful year for him to decide to study Accounting and start living. But he still could not focus. He wanted his “life” back. He found himself neither in the future, in the “American dream,” nor able to have the comforts of the old country. He was suspended between going back and pushing forward.

Like the forefathers of Canada, he believed he had to become a forefather to the next generation.

Mekbib then heard about “somebody” named Solomon who travelled to Ethiopia and did some volunteer work and who had returned to Canada. He remembers hearing this name. He did not attend the public meeting prepared for the Ethiopian diaspora professionals. But a young woman who attended the meeting told him about the website and my story, which subsequently inspired him.

After visiting the website, he applied for the Monitoring and Evaluation position in one of the partner NGOs through Cuso International.

Now we are sitting together in Addis, chatting over coffee. It is like a movie actor and his ardent fan meeting. We started to wonder how such a seemingly minor action could have triggered so many chain reactions. My small speech in the meeting inspired someone in a Canadian city and the person volunteered. Now he has begun his journey. Like many of us, he will find his life will never be the same. He has realized that there are actually real live people with HIV/AIDS. There are actually people who spend nights without eating. There are actually people who have lost everything because of HIV and who desperately need the support of people like him. His time, energy, knowledge matter terribly for these people. And these people give a sense of purpose to his life. He started appreciating what he has in multiple ways: first, what Canada has offered him, but which the people of his old country have been deprived of. Second, he did not realize how much he knows or what he can do to make a difference in people’s lives until he came in contact with this volunteering venture. For him, life was establishing a tax office and collecting money from customers at the expense of spiritual and true career satisfaction. There was no fulfilment in his life.

### ***Back in North America***

Melat says, *“The experience makes you humble. The return is bitter-sweet. It makes you grateful for what you have. I am not expecting to get any money out of this. In a way, it helps you to serve with purity of motive.”*

*You will learn to save and to spend cautiously. You may miss some of the things you were used to in North America. It was easy to get everything. By staying there, I could have earned some money, but you gain a lot here.*

*It is slow-paced here and you may not want to stay longer. Things are expensive here and you need to have a lot of money to live a comfortable life here. Professionals may not want to work for so little money, so volunteerism is a good option.*

*I have an Internet connection and paid 500br (about 1/6 of my stipend) in order to be able to Skype my family back in the US frequently. So my friends and family ask me how I am handling the money shortage. At first, it was really difficult. Then I learned how to manage. When you are used to getting around and know where to go for services, you have to spend a lot of money. But now I have got used to the life style here and in some ways I don't want to go back. But I also miss my parents and some aspects of my life back home. So that's why I say that going back is bitter-sweet.*

*I bet when I go back I am going to fight with everyone about everything—because I learned to save here. Even my new friend from Canada who is now living with me sometimes laughs at me because of how much I save—even peanut butter jars! I know in few weeks she will understand why I do those things.”*

### ***Back to England***

*Pam says, “I am ready to offer my expertise to VSO if they want to promote diaspora volunteerism. I am flexible.*

*I enjoyed being a diaspora volunteer. If I can motivate other diaspora, that is well and good.*

*In Guyana, I worked in rural community development and with women; building capacity within the women's groups, helping them to make their products market ready and assisting them to find markets for their products.*

*When I return to England, I am moving to a new location.*

*What have I learned about myself? I have learned that you don't need to amass a lot of wealth to be happy in life. I have seen how Amerindians lead a simple life. On the other hand, I have also seen a great deal of corruption. I have realized that I can't go along with that. I really need to sit and reflect. I wanted to get a piece of land in Guyana, but I don't want to give a bribe in order to get it.*

*I can come back for business, but I can't handle the corruption and the crisis here. So I have enriched my personal life by creating lasting friendships. I have learned so much. The door is always open to come back. But Guyana is expensive, especially land.”*

### ***My return***

I am one of the first diaspora volunteers to participate in the joint pilot project and stay for the longer period of six months. Back in Canada, I continued to serve as a returned volunteer (RV) in order to engage the public on the importance of international development and diaspora volunteering. This effort led me to different places and helped me meet different people across Canada and the world. For example, in October 2011, I was part of a panel from Cuso International that presented at the annual conference of International Volunteers Cooperation Organizations (IVCO) held in Mombasa, Kenya. The conference was held to



share experiences and innovative ideas on volunteerism among large international volunteer-sending and volunteer-hosting organizations and corporate partners. My part of the presentation was on diaspora volunteerism. I spoke about my personal experiences as a diaspora volunteer and on my research work as an RV with Cuso International and AHEAD's public engagement office. The panel highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges of diaspora volunteerism. The conference and the panel discussion demonstrated that diaspora volunteerism is an immense project and can and should be explored further.

Again in November 2011, I was one of the panelists in the Coffee-House Speaker Series prepared by the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), an organization committed to improving health in Africa. The topic of this series was the impact of international volunteerism on development. Based on my personal experience, education and research in the areas of volunteerism and development, I shared a list of the characteristics of development and how international volunteerism fits in the picture. Given that development work needs committed individuals who are willing to spend time in local communities, I argued that the unpaid nature of their stay and their life style make volunteers great candidates for this work. Added to this, knowledge of local culture and language possessed by the diaspora volunteers make volunteerism a worthwhile endeavour. I also did research on the profile of diaspora individuals, media and organizations of Ethiopia and Nigeria commissioned by Cuso International.

Tara: *"Once they complete their assignment, they can promote Guyana for business opportunities when they return to their country of residence...One of the advantages of short-term volunteering is that they can create a link with other institutions; it is a life-time relationship and the person will keep coming or next time may come back for a longer period of time."*

Tinebeb says, *"We need to take care of the diaspora volunteers, not just make them feel comfortable here. They are our goodwill ambassadors when they return to their diaspora friends. We want them to be engaged in positive public outreach and inspire others to follow suit. That is why we need to refine the system here."*

Endesahw says, *"The fact that I volunteered may bring me some credit in the work environment, since volunteerism is a valued part of Canadian culture. I hope it will positively affect my career development. Particularly, the federal government will have some jobs for me in a country where multiculturalism is also promoted and my experience should matter. We have developed so many soft skills: discipline, hard work, resilience, networking. In any case, we will continue to be involved in development work in various capacities."*

### ***Lessons from Canada***

A reflection in one of my journals reads as follows: "One can learn a lot just by living in Toronto, Canada alone. There are all types of diverse people living and moving in a narrow space, respecting each other under one rule of law.

This made me think that world citizenship is not only inevitable but also the only option left to us. As can be witnessed in Canada, it is possible to gather in peace and harmony under one flag and leadership, even when we all come from different countries and traditions. Here in Toronto, I often meet individuals from all over the world whom I have grown to love and respect, not for their country of origin or social status, but for their strength of character. In fact, the more I know them, the more my belief in the oneness of the human family is

reinforced. Deep down we are all human beings. We all love and want to be loved. We all need respect and are ready to offer it back to those who have given to us. Most interracial friendships and marriages build far more on strength of character than on other more transitory commonalities. Strength and quality of character must be given priority in the process of employment, recruitment, promotion. Of course, we need academic achievements and excellent skills. But these are like a soulless body if they are not founded on strength of character. And apply this to Ethiopia, I have this gnawing question: why do different ethnic groups in one nation fight, when we have the example of Canada, where people from different parts of the world live peacefully together in one country?" Anyone going back to Ethiopia takes this lesson from Canada and offers it as an example.

### ***Less of a consumer***

Clive honestly believes that volunteers are a different breed of people. He says, "*because these are people who leave their homes, apartments, jobs and say 'I am going to Africa, to this place where I have never been. I will not be paid, as I am volunteering. Before I leave, I know that the stipend will not be enough for luxury, but will only cover the basics of daily life'. But regardless of these things, you want to go, you want to contribute.*

*The volunteer experience helps you to be less of a consumer. We usually buy things that we don't need. Coming to Africa or the Caribbean, you realize that most of what you have in Canada is useless. You learn to live a simple life. It is actually fun... Do you need 10 pairs of sneakers; do you really need a television set in every bedroom?*

*Some people develop patience, become much more tolerant. Some become humble, as they travel and come in contact with many kinds of people. They learn about and come to notice that most people are simple, humble. It makes you a better person in the society.*

*When you return to Canada or back to any big city, it becomes difficult to blend into the old life style. You can't just rent a limo and party the whole night because you have seen and experienced so much that the previous life styles now seemed irrelevant and over-the-top.*

*I want to do more volunteering, may be go to Africa.*

*I have kind of revised for whom and what I want to work because of my volunteer experience, at least for the next five years. It is about sharing the opportunities you were blessed with. Because everybody has the same potential but lacked the opportunity to develop it."*

Endesahw again says, "*One of the contributions is that as an Ethiopian-Canadian there is a benefit for Canada, both in terms of increasing its profile in the UN or international level as a humanitarian country; it also increases its chance of being elected in the executive circle of these organizations and gives it a voice, as its ideas are backed up by practical contributions. For the Ethiopians in Canada, my work in Ethiopia will serve as an advocacy tool, as promotional material, as inspiration for change, to help them live a purposeful life.*"

### ***We need more research***

Nana says, "*I think that with regard to diaspora volunteers, I think it's a good question that you raised about how their experiences affect their lives and engagement with their local communities back here in Canada, and how they are translating that experience in their life in Canada. This is something that I believe is worthy of consideration, but we haven't done*

*any specific work to date to capture that aspect. What tends to happen is find that the individual program advisors who manage the volunteer journeys of these diaspora volunteers continue to have a personal relationship with them when they come back, with the result that, through more or less informal channels, they get to know what they're up to, where they're going, what they're doing. That's more on an ad-hoc, personal relationship basis. But as an organization, we should be doing a survey to capture the translation that has occurred from the placement into their lives once they have resettled in Canada. That's a piece of work that needs to be done."*

Barbara says *"You know it's an interesting question Solomon, because I don't know, and I have talked to Nana about some of this, and part of the DfD(Diaspora for Development) project is to debrief all of the diaspora volunteers that came back to get an understanding of their experience and what they felt were their significant contributions. So that's a piece that we'll work on. We haven't done that explicitly. We do final reports, but that's a piece that we've been talking about to gather more of that experience. We also have the Bob Ward Fellowship that will focus on diaspora this year, so hopefully that's going to help us to figure out what questions we need to be asking and what are the additional rich contributions that diasporas bring to development work. It certainly is an area we need to focus more on."*

### Findings

- The process of volunteerism has a lasting impact on one's personality. It makes people more concerned about social justice and equity. It inspires them to do more, to take individual initiative. Having a large population who have been volunteers makes a great nation, people with the culture of communality, who take care of each other;
- The pre-departure and in-country training and in some cases working together with international volunteers forges solidarity among citizens from different countries. People will come to a consensus on the potentials, challenges and methods of development and that consensus will ultimately have an impact on the direction of international development;
- Most volunteers find purpose and meaning in life because of their volunteer experience. They understand their role in life and start to believe more in themselves and their power to make a difference wherever they are. They continue to be involved actively both in the homeland and hostland development affairs. They know they can make a difference in the lives of others. The more there are people with high aspirations in a country, the more the country becomes noble;
- Volunteers become humble and grateful, two qualities needed to lead a happy and healthy life. As we have said earlier, volunteers must be humble in order to succeed in community projects. Since they work in modest conditions, they realize what abundance and waste means when they came back in their hostland. They try to lead their lives without indulgence, without spending too much. They encourage their families to do the same;
- They have developed greater expertise and experience in community development and can transfer that knowledge to the North American context;

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- The diaspora volunteers continue to serve as a returned volunteers to engage the public in the importance of international development and diaspora volunteering; sometimes they volunteer again. Their life becomes committed to making a difference;
- They can do research, become a member of a think tank on immigration, integration, curriculum design;
- They can promote business among the homeland and the hostland and in that capacity be more trusted, as they are considered ‘insiders;’
- In a country with a multicultural policy, diaspora volunteers can play a role in helping coordinate the different elements of society, bridging the gap between their ethnic community and other communities;
- As a new global village and world citizenship emerge, transnational people can take the lead and easily accept the outcome. In a way, they are already a citizen of two countries, two worlds. Fanatical patriotism does not have a place in their hearts, as they know the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to one nation or the other;
- Volunteers generally are a different breed. They have demonstrated detachment by leaving everything behind and are adventurous in wanting to tread a path that is not well trodden. They have demonstrated good will through their willingness to accept a life that is different from what they have been accustomed to;
- Even people with purely technical knowledge become interested in development concept and practice, when they become involved not just for the purpose of employment and income generation. Their work becomes part of a larger process of international development. They continue to explore how technology and business can be harnessed for the benefit of the poor. When we have more people with expertise, who live a simple life and continue to think how to create a better world for all, the world becomes a better place for all. The countries who now send volunteers abroad become champions of international development, as a result of all the practical examples and benefits shared across a wide range of stakeholders;
- The impact of the diaspora volunteer on the hostland society upon their return from volunteering must be studied much more closely.

### Analysis

Andrew (2007) discusses the reality that “ethnocultural diversity has changed the lives of Canadians, particularly Canadians living in the largest cities. In this way the integration of “new Canadians” has not been entirely one-sided, although clearly Canadian society has required and wanted new Canadians to change more than it has changed.” (p. 122). She goes on to mention the very wide acceptance across Canada of the value of multiculturalism and how slowly Canadians are adapting to the food tastes and celebrations of new Canadians. Looking at how Ethiopian restaurants are becoming famous in major cities of North America, such as Washington and Toronto, we can see clearly the role the owners, who are usually members of diaspora, play in breaking down cultural, language, and employment barriers.

It is too early to clearly see the impact of DV on the adopted countries (Canada and the US), as there are small numbers of diaspora volunteers who actually went out to serve, have now come back and are active in North American society. However, from the little information we have, it is positive. There are signs of their growing contribution to humanitarian work and public engagement.

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Contact with a new environment with the objective of transforming it works both ways. As Paul Scheffer (2011) suggests, the diaspora volunteers have a role to play in both societies. In North America, they bridge the gap between earlier settlers and newcomers. They symbolize success, hard work, stability, vision, prosperity for all, and the value of education to both the immigrants and the older populations. While in the host country, they also relate better to the adopted countries. Generally, in their work and neighbourhood, they spend time and undertake activities with the old residents. Given specific training, they can inspire those around them to build a truly multicultural society.

As for the benefits the diaspora volunteers receive from their work, Temesghen includes increased awareness of the complexity and challenges in achieving development objectives and the realization that development objectives as conceived in donor countries might not necessarily be related to the realities on the ground.

Professionals, who otherwise might have enjoyed a profitable business environment or whose focus was only their routine work, now begin to think of social justice and prosperity, how technology or their particular profession is situated in the development context, and what they can contribute to it. They start to see how professions such as nursing or information technology fit in the big picture of development.

Returned volunteers have a sort of informal alumni network through the organizations they have been volunteering working with. They actively participate in public engagement work. Some of them even volunteer again.

A few of the following steps to engage the returned volunteers would enhance their contribution:

- Monitoring what they are doing and how they are doing it through research or a formal reporting mechanism
- Providing them with opportunities to make presentations to the business and development community about the opportunities existing in their country of origin
- Involving them in e-volunteering
- Showing appreciation for the diaspora volunteers for demonstrating that development needs rapport and trust with the community. Beyond offering technical expertise, a development agent must be able to converse on family issues, local history, and geography—even understand and laugh at local jokes.

Moreover, as participants have suggested, there is a need to develop a database where the identity and contribution of the diaspora can be described and accessed, and to design the monitoring tools to determine how much the diaspora volunteers themselves contribute in kind and in cash.

### **Challenges for DV**

Before presenting the recommendations to bridge the gap between theory and practice or the desired goal and the action leading towards the goal I will try to give a summary of the challenges facing diaspora volunteerism.

**Volunteerism in general**—Although people in both Ethiopia and Guyana have a tradition of volunteerism, it is not well structured or institutionalized, as it is in most higher income countries. Initiatives to create national and youth volunteerism are only now emerging. Much

appreciated and welcome are the current efforts of Ethiopia's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and Cuso International to create a systematic local volunteer effort (VSO-Ethiopia), along with HIDA's efforts to engage academia and the youth in the concept and practice of structured volunteerism. According to Tinebeb from VSO- Ethiopia, they "prepared a sort of conference where academic discussion on development and the role of volunteerism takes place. There were different papers addressing the issue and much learning." She then suggested that, "It is not enough or satisfactory. The vision sharing has to continue." She lists a number of questions that require answers in the Ethiopian context: the role of media and the private sector in volunteerism, creating and sustaining interest among youth in volunteerism, and incentives for those involved in the volunteerism initiative. When they have laid a solid foundation of volunteerism, the involvement of diaspora volunteers in the country's national development will be made much easier.

Another important challenge is placement matching. According to Nana, "one of the challenges is that some of the skills that we have in the diaspora and the interest that is expressed to us, we are unable to respond to, for the simple reason that those may not be the specific skills that are being requested of us at this point in time. To give an example of Ethiopia, where we are supporting education and health: those are the two main areas that we are working in and so if someone is an engineering professional and they express an interest in volunteering, we would like to get them involved, but it may be very difficult to find a fit between their skills and the actual needs we are trying to meet."

**Diaspora Volunteerism**—Most research participants agree that diaspora volunteerism is in its earliest stage of development and will take time to grow. The process is probably going to be slow for any number of the following reasons:

- The long period they are asked to stay in the field; according to Daniel Becker of the Peace Corps in Ethiopia, "many organizations are not interested in developing short term volunteerism (one week or one month)." In fact, he concludes that, even for international volunteers, "there is a high drop-out rate; only 15–20 percent reach their two year mark." This is true in the sense that, as someone else expressed it, "The first year you think you know everything, in the second year you realize that you know nothing, and in the third year it is time to pack and leave." Even though we cannot simply discount the contribution short-term volunteers make to international development, in most cases a two-year placement (the minimum time most volunteer sending organizations require) is relatively short. One can argue that development initiatives require a stay of more than two years. Staying in the placement for a longer period and staying connected through other means becomes imperative;
- Volunteerism is sometimes not successful and the impact imperceptible and unsustainable because there is not enough time to understand the people, the language, the development context;
- The life the volunteers led in North America, often involving school-age children, mortgage payments, a guaranteed job has many complex obligations, both social and financial; this makes it difficult for mid-career individuals to volunteer for more than a very short tour;
- A shortage of financing in placements where their volunteer work entails extra expenses;

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- According to Nana, great sensitivity is required in order to engage the diaspora in national (homeland) development. *“Most people travel to North America or the global North for economic reasons; but there is a significant segment that travels or who had had to leave the country as exiles because of political or other sort of socio-political turmoil; thus, people in that category may have adversarial relationships with either the government or the country as a whole. We don’t see this all the time, but this attitude is demonstrated when we go out and speak about this work. We sometimes get really strong pushback from people, who tell us to demand an end to the corruption, oppression or harassment before they will even think about going back to help. These are underlying realities in the diaspora which we must be mindful of.”*

*It is critically important for us, as a development organization, not to be aligned with any government, or to be seen as a proxy for the government. We will do our development work regardless of the government in power. But, as mentioned earlier, this question often arises when speaking with diaspora groups who have a political history with the country they left behind and who tend to think that, since we are working in the country and supporting various ministries (e.g., education and health), we must be serving as a mouthpiece for the government. We have had experienced that attitude on the part of some segments of the diaspora and it is vital to be crystal clear and specific about what it is that we do and our relationship with the government;”*

- The socio-cultural attitudes on the part of local people in the homeland towards the incoming people from the diaspora. The local people strongly associate the diaspora with affluence or success and, as a result, the diaspora volunteers are faced with many requests which they cannot meet. Volunteers are there to offer their time and skills and sometimes this creates tension;
- The smaller pool from which to draw highly trained professionals, whose expertise is much needed both in the hostland and in the homeland;
- The limited capacity to conduct outreach work in North America to engage all the diaspora groups;
- Lack of adequate training for the staff of both volunteer sending and receiving countries and organizations in shifting their mind set from international to diaspora volunteerism. Staff members are already occupied with recruiting, training, sending/welcoming, monitoring, reintegrating the international volunteers. Incorporating the demands of a new program requires a new level of interest and new strategies. I remember that on a number of occasions, I was not allowed by security guards to enter into the compound of VSO-Ethiopia. They always saw volunteers as “white” people, who have the right to enter the compound without questions being asked;

In some cases, and as witnessed by a research participant in Guyana, the bias of local people often means that they tend to give a warmer welcome to international volunteers (i.e., of European background) than to Guyanese volunteers. At times it is frustrating to the diaspora volunteers when they see that, because they look like the local people, they are not as welcome as the foreigners, even if they have equal or better skills;

- Lack of differentiation between the knowledge diaspora (KD) and the investment diaspora (ID). Governments sometimes doubt the political motives of the knowledge diaspora. One of the reasons for the eager support of the ID is that they will always have

interest in Ethiopia because of their own investment. It is expected that they will not speak against the government as long as they have economic interests protected by the government. Endesahw says, “the KD come only with one laptop and when they are not happy, it is easy for them to go back and blame the government in bad governance. The government always want the KD to be its good will ambassadors so one wrong move from a KD can contaminate the prospect of involving KD in development;”

- Lack of a mechanism, strategy, or good will to bridge the occasional wide gap between the sophisticated, scientific and technological knowledge of some members of the diaspora and the low level of scientific and technological development in the home countries;
- At a basic level, as Evelyn, the Chief Planning Officer in the MoE of Guyana confirmed, there is a lack of strategy regarding coordination and planning. There is not enough needs assessment, or where it exists, it is difficult to match those needs with the available skills in the diaspora. Barbara says, *“As sometimes occurs with international pioneers, there are problems matching the right volunteers with the right skills. So just because we’re reaching out into diaspora communities doesn’t always mean that we are reaching the right people. In our experience in the U.S., it has not been easy to recruit the volunteers because we haven’t done some of the ground work to understand those communities. For example, they don’t know what Cuso International is, so we have now begun working side by side.”*
- As with most other development projects, sustaining diaspora volunteerism is challenging. A good example of this difficulty is the effort made by the diaspora alumni of St. Stanislaus College of Guyana to establish a computer room in the college. The success in bringing large number of computers and opening a computer lab was not matched with the training on how to use, repair and maintain them, as there were not enough spare parts and not enough electrical power to run them.

Such challenges indicate that development is interrelated and movement on one strategy or line of action demands that we move in all directions, using all resources, addressing all sectors. In addition to the challenge of establishing coordinated networks, everyone has to understand the vision, must have the skills, knowledge and the right attitudes to move things forward.

## Recommendations

***Views and practices of development***— There is an increased awareness of the importance of diaspora volunteerism for national development. The following are a few recommendations that can be acted upon by institutions and responsible communities and individuals.

***National policy***—Setting a policy to guide diaspora-related initiatives, promoting and monitoring its implementation. Such a policy must ensure that the knowledge diaspora has a role in knowledge, skill, and technology transfer and provide the framework within which every actor



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should play a part. When the policy is in place, it is important to think strategically how to best use the time and energy of diaspora volunteers. Based on some of the findings of this research:

The diaspora can be engaged in capacity-building efforts that aim to improve the effectiveness of the health and education sectors by networking with institutions, well known physicians, professors, and individuals for the transfer of knowledge and for bridging humanitarian assistance that will improve the quality of life for the neediest people;

The diaspora can help by mobilizing and coordinating material resources from overseas organizations and individuals to equip institutions of higher learning and local development organizations;

The diaspora can e-volunteer to assist the transfer of knowledge by identifying best practices and introducing proven processes, procedures, and international standards and by developing software that will improve efficiency and effectiveness in all sectors;

Promoting diaspora volunteerism and providing vital information through embassies and media available in the countries where the diaspora reside;

Diversifying the age- and skill-groups by encouraging the second and third generations of diaspora to volunteer;

Encouraging the diaspora and facilitating their continuous engagement, both in the homeland and the hostland on projects that benefit both ends.

***Interactions among stakeholders***—Once policies and strategies are set, appropriate institutions and structures should be established in both the homeland and the hostland to meet/select/engage individuals and other partner organizations, help them develop volunteer placements, train personnel that work with the diaspora to welcome, facilitate and monitoring their work within the partner organization. Guyana, for example may need to create an organization like the Ethiopian ABIDE which focuses solely on diaspora engagement. Ethiopia can strengthen ABIDE itself or the diaspora units in VSO-Ethiopia and other organizations. Such institutions can learn from organizations such as the Migration Policy Institute and the Mosaic Foundation in the U.S. and Canada, respectively.

New and existing departments, universities and diaspora and immigration studies need to collaborate in generating and applying knowledge related to diaspora engagement. They should serve as centres of excellence in researching, documenting and disseminating diaspora-related findings. Members of the diaspora themselves should be included in the process of this consultative process of generation and application of knowledge. Creating or strengthening national diaspora associations and resource centres also helps in getting members of the diaspora together for common purpose.

Once the structures are in place, the next step is to create a system or forum where the different stakeholders and organizations working in the diaspora area come together to share experience, learn from each other, and coordinate their plan and activities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can take the lead in coordinating all the elements and then delegate various tasks to other institutions as appropriate. Both the homeland and hostland institutions should consult thoroughly on the issues at stake and open efficient communication channels. In this process, every partner organization deserves an equal vote and the relationship must be reciprocal. A program manager in HIDA jokingly put it this way, “if partner organizations need me to answer

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every phone call they make to my office, I expect the same from them; to answer every phone call I make.”

In situations where many institutions interact around the diaspora volunteer, there has to be a system of arbitration, not only among the institutions, but also between the diaspora and the institutions. There must be clear steps on how to deal with any conflicts.

***Building a model for interaction***—A good model of interaction to be emulated is found in the way Accenture, Cuso International, the rural women of Rupunnuni, IICA and diaspora volunteers interact and work together. Accenture sends experts and funding so that the women become more self-sufficient, independent entrepreneurs. Cuso International supplies the volunteer experts who live with the community to train, mentor, and monitor the field work. IICA provides its expertise on rural development. This system of interaction is working relatively smoothly and some developments are being recorded and demonstrated through:

The empowerment of the rural women, manifested through organizations, strategies, constitutions, exposure, and above all, sustained income;

Accenture, which uses its funds, experts, and networks to provide and expand the market for the rural women. It fulfil its consulting role by offering the product/the market to the business partners with whom it works to secure products so that everyone benefits from the process;

Volunteers continuing to contribute to sustainable livelihood projects, knowing that their energy and talent will not be wasted once they are gone. When and if they return, they can continue working as development consultant/staff, either for Accenture, Cuso International, the government, or any other organization that needs their experience;

Putting pressuring on the government to revise policies and rules about community- or women-driven businesses, ownership and involvement styles, manners of profit distribution, etc.

***Diaspora volunteers***—Diaspora or international volunteers who willingly travel across continents to offer their time, energy and skill need to be shown great respect. Even if we cannot make their life comfortable, we need to make sure we do not make it unnecessarily hard for them, as, for example, was done to a volunteer who travelled to Ethiopia to teach in one of the public universities and who was forced to pay for the copies of course materials for her students.

Ethiopia has begun to provide a Person of Origin ID, known as the Yellow Card, to prove people of Ethiopian birth with a benefit package. This is helpful, because there are so many Ethiopians who have become citizens of their adopted country for different reasons. But we understand that these people want to come back to their birth country either to settle or to help assist with development. The package serves to remove some of the requirements imposed on foreigners with regard to owning property, starting a business, and getting a work or residence permit. They are not required to have a visa when they enter their birth country; they can make investments, although they cannot work full-time in the Ministry of Defence and Security and cannot participate in party elections. The Ethiopian government also gave permission to members of the diaspora to have three types of bank account; a foreign currency account (Diaspora account), a current account (up to US\$50,000), a fixed-term account (blocked for at least three months). In either of the first two accounts, they may deposit U.S. dollars and withdraw in the same currency to help them with daily transactions. The third type of account is a *birr* account (non-repatriable) into which they make deposits in U.S. dollars, but withdraw funds in Ethiopian *birr*.

***The diaspora volunteer journey***—Once we have a sound policy and strategy of diaspora engagement, there have to be ways to reach the diaspora to make this preparation known. Sufficient and varied promotional materials must be ready and all kinds of media employed to invite the diaspora to volunteer. A survey of what media professional members of the diaspora use should be carried out and utilized for promotion. Both my experience and the views of other diaspora volunteers confirm that there remains much to be done in promoting the program in the target group.

We know the promotion is going well when enough members of the diaspora, both in numbers and quality respond to the requests to fill volunteer positions. Then it is up to the volunteer sending organizations to provide timely and clear answers to applications, whether positive or negative. People want to use the brief window of opportunity they have in their regular life and need to know whether their application is accepted or rejected. In the event an application is received positively, the recruitment, training and placement process must proceed more quickly.

Both volunteer sending and hosting organizations should work in tandem, as in most cases the pace of one sets the pace of the other. Thanks to technology, the two institutions should keep in touch and schedule transportation and ICT together with greater flexibility than is presently the case. Documenting lessons learned, monitoring the actual project, preparing exit/return strategy, and finally the resettling mode should be worked out carefully.

Some partner organizations suggested that whether in the pre-departure or ICT, training should focus on the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required to perform the specific volunteer assignment. The volunteer can sometimes be put in touch with a team of other professionals who can give advice on the best method for discharging the assignment. Either returned volunteers or professionals willing to volunteer virtually can become members of the professional team. Aside from clear job descriptions, the team of volunteer professionals can give continuous on-the-job support.

In terms of developing volunteer assignment, an alternative idea suggested by research participants is the possibility of welcoming assignments developed by volunteers themselves. This may include what they want to do and with which organization they want to work. This makes things simpler, because in some cases, the diaspora volunteers have a better understanding of what they can offer and of the organization best suited to use their expertise, as long as there is an agreement on the need.

***Cost***—At one public meeting of the diaspora, I remember someone suggesting that the diaspora cover the costs of the volunteer journey. There are already diaspora communities who raise enough funds to send material and human resources to the homeland. It is quite feasible that the diaspora volunteering program can be supported financially by the diaspora. A deputization mechanism could be explored, enabling financially able members of the diaspora to cover the cost of a professional diaspora volunteer for a period of time.

Another strategy to reduce cost is the virtual participation that was enthusiastically suggested by many members of the diaspora in our public gatherings. Once the system of e-volunteering is set up, ticket and living costs can be eliminated.

To reduce or eliminate cost means that institutions or the country must become independent. In the words of Temesghen, project sustainability is possible through the “ability of the home

country to achieve capacity-building which would enable it eventually to initiate, manage and determine its own development.”

***Back to the hostland***—Either the volunteer sending institutions or another relevant agency must make sure that there is appropriate data on returned diaspora volunteers and explore ways to utilize their volunteer/development experience to promote the well-being and prosperity of the hostland. Ultimately, the hostland is the source of sustenance to the diaspora who chose to settle there. Their challenge is to make a better life not only for themselves, but also for their children who are born and raised in the hostland. They may want to have a sort of alumni gathering where they can come regularly to consult about their concerns. In volunteer sending organizations where they have formal reintegration seminars, there should be a formal session to consult on how best they can be involved in development work in the hostland.

One recurring suggestion that emerged from research participants is the way diaspora volunteers can expand the business interests of the hostland to the homeland. The same qualities of knowledge of the language and culture that suited them for development work can be put to use in promoting the business interests of the hostland, using their connections, resilience, and professional skills.

Universities and colleges can be used as the centres of excellence in the generation and application of diaspora volunteerism knowledge. They can document and disseminate research, create partnerships, and engage the community in diaspora volunteerism and related issues. On the other hand, the diaspora volunteers can be used to teach, train, advise, offer seminars, develop curriculum, and evaluate programs in courses of on development and immigration.

As discussed earlier, the short term diaspora volunteers can remain life-time volunteers, either by working voluntarily with Canadian organizations, or by sustaining their own volunteering activities through e-volunteering, where they can offer online courses, provide mentoring or coaching of junior lecturers, supervise graduate theses, carry out peer review and edit journals, co-research with homeland professors, and maintain social media. For example, a diaspora volunteer who resides in the U.S. recently announced that his online Ethiopian Scientific and Academic Network (ESAN) has 6000 members. This is a wonderful example of sustained involvement in international development.

## Prospect

It is my earnest hope that the stories and the analysis presented here will be helpful at multiple levels and ultimately inspire governments, institutions, and other members of the diaspora to do a better job in every way possible. In my view, the smooth movement of diaspora volunteers across the homeland and the hostland is the beginning of something larger to come: a united world, ready and able to share all kinds of knowledge and skill with all its member nations and citizens. There is no doubt that the good will enkindled by international volunteers by travelling to other nations has laid the foundation for systems and mechanisms enabling increasing numbers of members of the diaspora to volunteer in their homelands. As more volunteers arise to travel all across the world, and as the systems facilitating this movement are refined, the irresistible next stage in our human evolution will be assured: the free flow of skills, knowledge, technology, goods and services among all the peoples of the world.

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## Appendix I: Source of data

No.	Institutions	Country		
		Ethiopia	Guyana	Canada
1	Ministry of Education (MoE)	✓	✓	
2	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)	✓	✓	
3	VSO-Ethiopia	✓		
4	Cuso International-Guyana		✓	
5	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	✓	✓	
6	Peace Corps	✓	✓	
7	Alliance for Brain-Gain and Innovative Development (ABIDE)	✓		
8	Ethiopian Diaspora Association (EDA)	✓		
9	Hiwot Integrated Development Association (HIDA)	✓		
10	Professional Alliance for Development (PADet)	✓		
11	Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU)	✓		
12	Ministry of Health (MoH)	✓		
13	University of Guyana (UG)		✓	
14	Aranaputa Processors Friendly Society in the Rupununi		✓	
15	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)		✓	
16	Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED)		✓	
17	Rotary Club of Demerara		✓	
18	New Era Consulting Inc.		✓	
19	Nations University		✓	
20	AHEAD			✓
21	Cuso International			✓
22	Returned volunteers			✓



### Acronyms

AASTU	Addis Ababa Science and Technology University
ABIDE	Alliance for Brain-Gain and Innovative Development
AAU	Addis Ababa University
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education and Development
AU	African Union
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DfD	Diaspora for Development
DV	Diaspora Volunteer
DVP	Diaspora Volunteering Program
EDA	Ethiopian Diaspora Association
ENAHPA	Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association
GUYD	Guyana Diaspora Project
HIDA	Hiwot Integrated Development Association
ID	Investment Diaspora
IDF	Institutional Development Fund
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KD	Knowledge Diaspora
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
P2P	People to People
RV	Returned Volunteers
RDV	Returned Diaspora Volunteers
SKWID	Skills for Working in Development

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UG	University of Guyana
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VSO	Volunteer Services Overseas