

Forum for African Immigrant Organizations **Workshop on Transitional Networking**

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During this workshop several points were raised: challenges in establishing transnational networks, advantages in doing so, and recommendations on how to proceed.

Challenges

- a) The political turmoil and tensions between groups in most African countries makes it difficult to establish networks or connections with some organizations from certain parts/regions of these countries. Sometimes these tensions among various ethnic groups and countries are exported to locations outside Africa. As a result, there are always suspicions between some members of different organizations, a good example being the lack of cooperation between groups/organizations from the Great Lakes region where countries like Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been embroiled in war.
- b) Locating people to work with in countries which have been experiencing political instability for a long time like Rwanda, DRC, Sierra Leone and Liberia can also be very difficult. Most of the people from these countries, at times, find it difficult to associate freely.
- c) Some organizations have been viewed as belonging to certain political factions or aligned with certain political camps and this has influenced the way they are perceived by certain bodies or people with whom they want to establish ties. At the same time, labeling compromises an organization's ability to work in a particular country or region as it sometimes leads to a hostile reception from the host government and/or its people.
- d) Differences in cultures and languages can also impose serious limitations on co-operation among organizations. For example, people from Lusophone Africa might find it difficult to communicate and interact freely with people from Anglophone or Francophone Africa while non-Muslim members of organizations might also find it difficult to relate with their Muslim counterparts.
- e) General lack of information on certain parts of the continent, especially those countries that are not well developed economically and have very little access to modern means of communication like the internet.

Advantages

- a) Being in a cosmopolitan place like New York City not only makes it possible to meet people from different parts of the African continent but also a bit easier to make contacts. The

availability of almost every African country's embassy in nearby Washington, DC, at the same time, enables individuals and organizations to access some of the helpful information they need for networking.

- b) The availability in New York of modern means of communication in the form of the internet means that people can also connect easily by simply visiting certain web-sites which have information on NGO activities, etc.
- c) The presence of a large African expatriate business community in the New York area also makes it easier for people to form new business connections that cut across states and regions.

Recommendations

- a) Creation of websites/resource centers where people can access information on the activities of different African organizations, essential contact groups and individuals for networking.
- b) To have activities or functions where individuals can educate each other about the languages and cultural particularities found in different parts of the continent. This will particularly be useful to those who want to venture into countries or regions other than their own.
- c) Given the high level of politicization of civil life in most African countries, African organizations need to find a way to work with communities and other groups without being accused of belonging to or supporting different political groups.
- d) Because of the high level of abuse of aid, African organizations also need to establish mechanisms for proper accounting of the material and financial aid given.