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SUMMARY

Hometown associations (HTAs), immigrant organizations based on a common hometown, are typically informal, voluntary groups that bring members together for social, cultural, political empowerment, and economic development goals. The literature on HTAs has concentrated almost exclusively on their role as agents of international development. Government policies, both in countries of origin and destination, reflect this view, focusing on managing development projects, reducing the transaction costs of remittances, and improving decision making in the selection of projects to fund.

Less attention has been paid, however, to the fact that HTAs also function as integration intermediaries in their country of destination, whether providing a social network for new immigrants or offering more tangible services such as language classes. Policymakers concerned with immigrant integration are not generally cognizant of the integration opportunities HTAs can offer, in part because they may be wary of organizations that focus beyond their borders.

Our analysis shows that policymakers should not consider immigrants' international development and domestic integration objectives as a zero-sum game of competing priorities. Instead, policymakers should view both roles as complementary and concentrate on enhancing associations' capacity to deliver for communities at home and abroad.

Limited, well-designed interventions by government and nongovernment organizations can strengthen HTAs' immigrant integration capacity, so long as they are done cooperatively. Such partnerships might focus on leadership training, outreach to immigrant communities, and strengthening immigrant services provided by local governments. Collaborative data collection is a first step to designing such partnerships, but HTA participation must be voluntary to ensure that meaningful relationships can develop.

Hometown Associations: An Untapped Resource for Immigrant Integration?

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I. Introduction

Immigrant organizations form based on their members' shared experiences and interests, be they professions, ethnic affiliations, or a common hometown. Manuel Orozco, a leading scholar in the field, defines hometown associations (HTAs) more specifically as "organizations that allow immigrants from the same city or region to maintain ties with and materially support their places of origin."¹ Scholars Jonathan Fox and Xóchitl Bada define HTAs somewhat more broadly as "migrant membership organizations formed by people from the same community of origin."²

Policymakers typically group HTAs under the general umbrella of diaspora organizations. Furthermore, policy interest traditionally distinguishes between concerns of *immigrant-origin countries* and *immigrant-destination countries*.

Policymakers in origin countries are interested in the role of diasporas in promoting development, for example through increased remittance flows or the return of skilled professionals. In contrast, destination-country policymakers may view diaspora organizations as signs of insularity in immigrant communities and worry that such organizations

act as obstacles to their members' successful integration. This latter view is flawed. The integration and development functions of diaspora organizations are likely to be complementary rather than contradictory because the evidence shows that well-integrated migrants are more capable of

Diaspora organizations can support both immigrant integration in destination countries and economic and community development in countries of origin.

contributing to development efforts in their countries of origin. Diaspora organizations can support both immigrant integration in destination countries and economic and

community development in countries of origin. Indeed, well-designed interventions from a variety of actors such as governments (from national development agencies to municipal councils), nongovernmental and intergovernmental institutions, and relevant civil-society groups can enhance the natural synergies between immigrant integration and economic development.

This *Insight* focuses mainly on the less-studied integration role of HTAs. First, we describe the current political context, then we identify the trends important for policy-makers and the gaps in our knowledge,

Public policy regarding HTAs remains nascent.

before finally addressing what policy options could be employed.

Public policy regarding HTAs remains nascent. If we chart policy development in the United States over the

course of a century, we find that HTAs (or their equivalent) were first ignored, then seen as hindrances to assimilation in the host country, and most recently embraced as a potential policy tool in promoting economic development. Such a perspective was narrow and remains the case today. HTAs have strong and underdeveloped integration functions. They can be helpful as institutions of immigrant socialization in the host country and they act as organized points of contact and coordination between immigrants, the host government, and other institutions.

II. The Political Context

HTAs are hardly a new phenomenon and have long been a feature of national and international migration.³ Various studies have pointed to the existence of mutual aid societies based around a common hometown among Jewish immigrants in New York as early as 1880.⁴ The number of HTAs appears to be increasing, however, as global migration grows.

While it is impossible to say with certainty how many HTAs exist worldwide, estimates suggest their numbers are growing. A sample of 25 US states showed the number of Mexican HTAs increased from 441 in 1998 to 623 five years later.⁵ Estimates for the number of Mexican HTAs active in the United States range from 600 to 3,000,⁶ while it is thought that there are at least 200 Ghanaian HTAs in the United States.⁷ The Salvadoran Vice Ministry of Salvadorans Abroad estimates there are about 268

Salvadoran associations in the United States; 45 in Europe; 12 in Central America and the Caribbean; 11 in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific; five in South America; and three in Mexico.⁸ In France, there were an estimated 300 village associations, analogous to HTAs, representing Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali in the Paris area in 2000.⁹

More visibly, HTAs are emerging in communities where they did not previously exist, as immigrants increasingly move to new destination countries and new destination regions within traditional countries of immigration. In the United Kingdom (UK), Tanzanian and Cameroonian HTAs, traditionally found in London, have been established in cities beyond the traditional immigrant gateways, including in Slough and Leicester, according to findings from an Economic and Social Research Council-funded project.¹⁰ Similarly, according to data on Mexican associations collected by Mexico's consular network and analyzed by sociologists Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, Xóchitl Bada, and Luis Escala-Rabadán, Mexican HTAs are being established in new immigrant-destination states such as North Carolina and Georgia.¹¹

The evolution and trajectory of Mexican HTAs are instructive for broader evaluations of the field because they are greater in number than for other nationalities and have, almost certainly as a result, attracted more scholarly attention. Mexican

HTAs originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and originally focused on community organizing, battling social and job discrimination, offering members loans, providing health care, attenuating the costs of deportation, and repatriating the remains of migrants who died abroad.¹²

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the growth of the Mexican-born population in the United States, the number of Mexican HTAs has grown rapidly in

recent years. For example, between 1998 and 2003 the number of Mexican HTAs in California grew from 240 to 329. As Figure 1 illustrates, the number

HTAs are emerging in communities where they did not previously exist.

Figure 1. Top Ten US States with Mexican HTAs, 1998 and 2003

State	1998	2003
California	240	329
Illinois	82	170
Texas	73	48
New York	15	27
Pennsylvania	5	11
Arizona	5	9
Washington	7	7
Colorado	4	5
Oregon	3	4
New Mexico	0	3

Source: Directorio de Oriundos en los Estados Unidos, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1999 and Programa para las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (2003) in Rivera-Salgado, Bada, and Escala-Rabadán (2005).

of HTAs in the top ten US states where the Mexican born live grew from 434 in 1998 to 613 in 2003. These ten states were home to approximately 85 percent of the Mexican-born population resident in the United States, according to the 2000 US Census. Although this data is incomplete, including only HTAs that have registered with Mexican consulates, it is indicative of broader trends.

Much of the recent growth of Mexican HTAs in the United States is due to the convergence of several political and economic events which have occurred on both global and local levels. They include:

1. *Structural adjustment, the US Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and the temporary reestablishment of cross-border circularity.* In the late 1980s, Mexican immigrants began establishing HTAs in great numbers, a phenomenon directly related to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), which provided legal permanent residence to over 2 million Mexicans living without authorization in the United States, as well as the effects of structural adjustment programs in Mexico. During the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, the Mexican government reduced public spending, causing local infrastructure investments to dwindle. At the same time, the 1986 legalization allowed many Mexican migrants to freely visit their hometowns and witness firsthand the economic hardships and serious infrastructure

needs their communities faced. Many Mexican immigrants established HTAs in the United States to fund basic improvements in their rural hometowns.¹³

2. *Migrant responses to controversial immigration legislation.* HTAs have developed a political presence in destination countries, particularly at the state and regional levels, by using federations to consolidate their domestic political efforts in response to controversial immigration issues. One of the earliest civic mobilizations of Mexican HTAs in Southern California was in response to Proposition 187, a hotly contested 1994 referendum that aimed to exclude unauthorized immigrants from access to a wide range of public services including education and health care.¹⁴ (The referendum was approved by voters but overturned by a federal court). More recently, California HTAs have mobilized against California Assembly efforts to limit the use of consular identification cards and in favor of comprehensive immigration reform. It is probable that similar trajectories will play out in new immigrant destinations across the United States — and, indeed, other places where immigration restriction efforts are undertaken.

3. *The Mexican government's proactive approach.* Mexico began taking a more active approach in engaging its diaspora and promoting the formation of HTAs with the 1990 inauguration of the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (Programa

de Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior, PCME). Under the PCME, HTAs became the principal interlocutors between the Mexican government and Mexican-American civil society. Mexican HTAs' importance increased with the involvement of the Mexican Ministry of Social Development (Secretaría del Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL) in the Three-for-One program that provides federal, state, and local (and in some cases private) matching funds for HTA donations to small- and mid-sized development projects in their communities of origin.¹⁵ More recently, the Mexican Education Ministry (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP) inaugurated a similar matching-fund program for HTAs that fund educational scholarships to secondary and post-secondary students in their communities of origin.

Although many of the factors cited above are unique to the Mexican experience, Mexican HTAs appear to be on the leading edge of broader trends among other countries' associations. However, extrapolating conclusions from the Mexican example should be undertaken with care. Three reasons stand out. First, the municipal level forms the basic unit of governance in Mexico and is the level at which local development typically happens; second, the rural origin of many Mexican migrants is likely to lead to a greater "hometown" identity; and third, the Mexican government has so far managed to

balance the challenges of providing assistance to HTAs without imposing bureaucratic hurdles.

III. Hometown Associations: The State of Knowledge

HTAs promote a social, economic, and cultural identity among their members that crosses national borders. The organizations exemplify transnational ties because they directly link one locality to another.¹⁶

Unsurprisingly perhaps, HTAs' organizational structure takes many different forms. Nevertheless, it is possible from the literature to identify several broad trends in how HTAs develop.

HTAs promote a social, economic, and cultural identity among their members that crosses national borders.

Hometown Associations Mature over Time

HTAs begin as informal, volunteer-driven organizations. As migrants

from the same hometown migrate to the same communities or areas, they tend to seek out their co-nationals and establish informal bonds. Over time, these informal relationships can develop into an association with the

purpose of maintaining ties with the home community, establishing a social support

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network in the country of destination, and sharing experiences. HTAs frequently form following a natural disaster in the town or country of origin. For example, many Salvadoran HTAs were established in response to devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998.¹⁷

HTAs are thus spontaneous voluntary social networks based on place of origin that may coalesce into more formal organizations at the initiative of their members and leaders. Experience illustrates that public policies can influence the trajectory of HTAs but the majority grow because they fulfill an essential role in addressing the concerns of individual migrants.

Over time, the informal organizations can develop into formal associations and even more elaborate hierarchies. Once a membership group has been established, HTAs collect dues or raise funds through cultural activities (such as festivals) which are then directed to services and projects, including small-scale hometown development projects. In select cases, individual HTAs have united to form federations.

In the UK, the Greater Sylhet Development and Welfare Council — which focuses on the welfare of immigrants from Sylhet, Bangladesh — was founded in Birmingham in 1993 to unite several smaller community groups. In the United States, the first formal federation of Mexican HTAs, the Federation of United Mexican Clubs (Federación de Clubes Mexicanos Unidos), was formed in

1972 by HTAs from the Mexican state of Zacatecas. There also are federations by destination state, such as the Federation of Michoacano Clubs in Illinois. This type of structure can also lead to wider networks of migrant organizations. The Confederation of Mexican Federations in the Midwest (CONFEMEX) was created in 2003 and comprises nine federations of Mexican HTAs. One year later, CONFEMEX helped found an umbrella organization, the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC).

Mergers provide benefits because federations are able to make a larger impact than any single HTA. They have greater leverage with their home governments and ensure a wider network for members as well as greater resources for activities. At the same time, some federations may be co-opted by other organizations such as labor unions or civil-rights groups.

Hometown Associations Develop New Functions over Time

HTAs often link newly arrived immigrants with established predecessors. While HTA members include new immigrants primarily concerned with settlement in the destination country, HTA leaders tend to be relatively established, long-term immigrants who create associations with a view to contributing to economic development in their hometowns and preserving cultural traditions in their new communities.

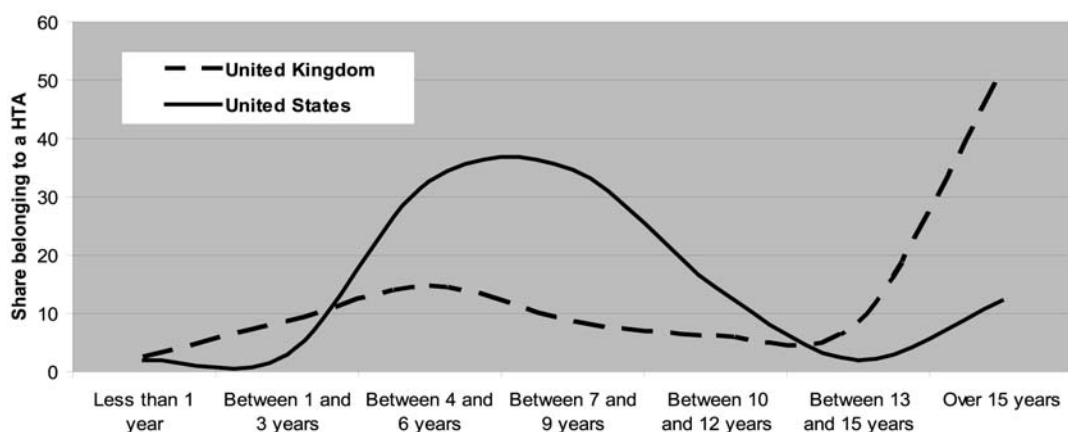
Survey evidence indicates that newcomers join immigrant organizations to seek advice on employment, housing, and immigration in addition to maintaining cultural practices in their new country.¹⁸ Ghanaian HTAs in Toronto, known in Canada as township associations, serve new immigrants by assisting members in finding housing, employment, and even providing small loans for needy members.¹⁹ Similarly, Cameroonian and Tanzanian HTAs in the UK provide members with burial and bereavement services. While a critical mass of immigrants — that is, a significant numerical presence or concentration of migrants of the same origin — is important to HTA formation, it is alone insufficient. Professor Roger Waldinger finds that Latino immigrant participation in civic associa-

tions such as HTAs decreases over time — 12 percent of recent Latino immigrants to the United States are members of civic groups compared to 5 percent of Latino immigrants who have been in the United States 20 to 29 years.²⁰ At the same time, Orozco finds that belonging to an HTA is positively associated with the length of time living outside of the homeland and the longer the time abroad, the more likely a person is to join an association (see Figure 2).²¹

HTAs nearly always expand their scope of operations to address concerns in both the countries of origin and destination. Mature HTAs appear to nearly always focus on

Mature HTAs appear to nearly always focus on both development and integration objectives.

Figure 2. HTA Membership and Duration of Residence Abroad



Source: Manuel Orozco, "Diaspora and Development: Some Considerations," (presentation at the George Washington University conference, The Role of Diasporas in Developing the Homeland, Washington, DC, June 16, 2006).

both development and integration objectives. The various development roles have been expansively documented in the literature; the role of HTAs in integration less so.

Integration services or activities generally include (a) welfare services, (b) assisting with legal services, and (c) educational opportunities, such as scholarship programs and language classes. A common theme is that HTAs serve as social networks for migrants, be they established immigrants or individuals new to the destination country.

Collecting reliable data on the associations is an exceedingly difficult task

Among Ghanaian HTAs in Toronto, the main motive for establishing the associations was generally to contribute to economic development in Ghana, but the associations have an additional objective of bringing together Ghanaians through

various social activities, including parties and meetings.²² Similarly, the Baniabazar Association of London and the Baniachang Association of East End in the UK formed to provide support for schools and mosques in Bangladesh, fund infrastructure repair, provide scholarships for students, and assist with disaster relief; however, they have expanded their focus to provide leadership on issues such as voting rights and racial discrimination.²³

Ixim, a Mayan immigrant association in Los Angeles, differs from the majority of HTAs in that it was formed with a specific focus

on integration rather than development projects. Ixim was initially established by a group of Q'anjob'al Maya immigrants to help other Mayan immigrants adapt to life in Los Angeles. Legal advice and workshops on health matters were among the services offered. As the association grew, leaders expanded their focus to include work in the origin country — helping fund the construction of a soccer field in members' hometown of San Miguel Acatan, Guatemala.²⁴

IV. The Knowledge Gaps

Collecting reliable data on the associations is an exceedingly difficult task considering the small size and informality of most HTAs. Although a number of scholars and some nonprofit groups have conducted surveys of HTAs in specific metropolitan areas such as New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Montreal, Toronto, and London, these data are not comparable due to different parameters. For example, specific surveys may focus only on one country or origin, limit the universe of associations to a specific time frame, or only be interested in associations involved in certain activities. Also, HTA numbers are in constant flux — associations form and dissolve on a continual basis.

Various governments have created specialized agencies to address the needs of their diasporas. However, the creation of such an agency does not always translate into a meaningful partnership. For example, the Haitian government established its

Ministry of the Diaspora in 1994, yet the ministry remains limited due to its small budget, with the minister generally unable to make official trips outside of Haiti without additional funding.²⁵ Where they are endowed with sufficient resources, diaspora agencies have launched effective efforts to systematize knowledge on HTAs, including:

- *Mexico.* The Institute of Mexicans Abroad (Instituto de Mexicanos en el Exterior, IME) — a division of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, SRE) — began a Directory of Mexican Clubs and Hometown Associations in 2005. At the time, SEDESOL, the Secretariat of Social Development, maintained data on HTAs registered to participate in Mexico's Three-for-One program. Starting with SEDESOL's information, IME expanded the database through three phases: (1) Mexican consular officials invited clubs and HTAs to register, and only those organizations that expressed interest in being listed in the database were included, making the process entirely voluntary; (2) IME then began to contact unregistered Mexican HTAs they were able to locate on the Internet, expanding the database to include associations outside of North America; and (3) following the initial task of registering HTAs, IME posted the directory on their website, allowing new associations to enter their information online.²⁶ The list was initially published in December 2006 with 570 associations. Currently, the

directory contains data for about 850 associations in 24 countries.²⁷

- *El Salvador.* The Salvadoran Vice Ministry of Salvadorans Abroad, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has compiled a directory of Salvadoran associations. Similar to the Mexican database, most of the information collection is performed by consular officials and the database is linked to El Salvador's HTA matching-fund program, United Hands for El Salvador. The database is available online, although all submissions must be sent via post or electronically to the Vice Ministry. The database includes an estimated 268 Salvadoran associations around the world.²⁸

A number of other developing countries, including Colombia and India, maintain similar databases.

Far fewer destination countries have attempted to compile data on HTAs, perhaps as the result of organizational barriers within government. Diaspora policy has typically been assigned to international development agencies in destination countries. For example, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has an elaborate diaspora policy, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) also work with diaspora groups. They are often limited in the scope of their domestic operations, however. Collecting data on

what are often considered domestic civil-society groups may not be within the mandate of development agencies. Therefore, data collection may correspond better to the responsibilities assigned to interior ministries or local government authorities who typically do not play a role in development or immigrant integration.

Nevertheless, there are examples of destination-country development agencies carrying out data collection efforts on diaspora associations. France offers perhaps the most prominent example of a country which has developed a systematic approach. In 2000, the French Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DGCID) and the European Union Commission on Cooperation and Development (CCD) jointly funded a study into *Organizations de Solidarité Internationale* Issues de l'Immigration (OSIMs), which are immigrant associations that maintain a focus on development projects in their home countries. Researchers expanded their list of potential OSIM contacts, provided by CCD, through French consulates in sending countries. Notably, of the 568 OSIMs investigated, 293 were village associations, which have members from the same village or a set of neighboring villages in their country of origin.²⁹ These can be considered the francophone equivalent of HTAs.

Admittedly, privacy laws in some destination countries may limit the extent to which domestic actors, and especially local

government, can collect information on civil-society groups. Furthermore, migrants may distrust the intentions of any effort by destination-country governments to collect information. In order for any data collection effort on civil-society groups to be effective, a mutually trustworthy relationship must first exist and participation should be incentivized but voluntary.

V. The Current Concern: Hometown Associations as Agents of Development

It is clear that HTAs already play twin pivotal roles in linking migrants with development efforts in their countries of origin and facilitating their integration into their destination societies. At the same time — and significantly from a policy perspective — it is also clear that they face organizational, capacity, and funding challenges that policymakers are only partially addressing.

The following examples are representative of current policies from the perspective of governments, nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, and private initiatives. They illustrate how existing policies toward HTAs are overwhelmingly focused on only one of their roles: development concerns in the country of origin.

- **Government initiatives in the country of origin.** HTAs generally work closely with local government authorities in their communities of origin; however, few origin-country governments have targeted

programs for HTAs. There are notable exceptions. As previously described, the *Iniciativa Ciudadana Tres-por-Uno*, or the Three-for-One program, is a matching-grant program implemented nationwide by the Mexican government in 2001. All Mexican states participate in the Three-for-One program, which in 2006 co-funded projects with 723 HTAs in 34 US states. Projects carried out under Three-for-One vary, but official SEDESOL statistics indicate that the majority of projects are public infrastructure (see Figure 3). The government of El Salvador operates a similar matching-fund program for migrant HTAs.

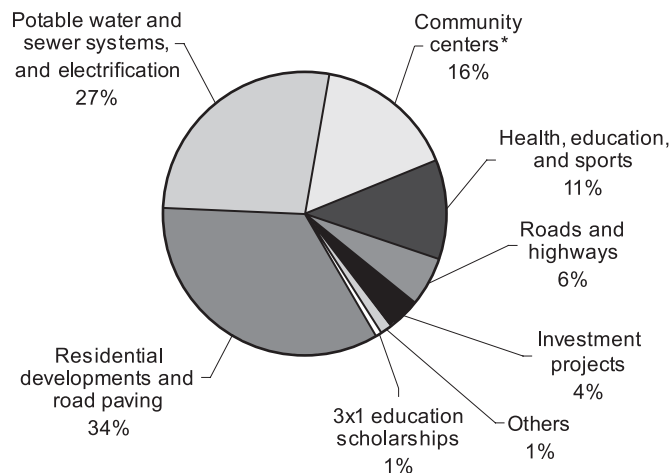
HTAs and international development agencies include the following:

- *Direct funding of HTA projects.*
USAID has funded studies examining HTAs' development role and has a number of partnerships with associations from El Salvador, Guyana, and Mexico. Similarly, in 2008 the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) launched a matching-fund pilot program for Pakistani HTAs in Norway that contribute to development projects in Pakistan. The

• Destination-country development agencies.

International development agencies in destination countries have taken an active interest in partnering with HTAs to fund projects, both directly and indirectly, through broader associations. In particular, development agencies may view HTAs as reliable partners — especially in countries with weak governance structures. Some typical types of engagement between

Figure 3. Tres-por-Uno Funding by Project, 2002 to 2007



Note: Includes projects funded through October 10, 2007. * Community centers include senior centers, orphanages, rehabilitation centers for the disabled, cultural centers, personal and family mausoleums, museums, libraries, and women's centers. Total number of projects = 7,353.

Source: Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL), 2007.

program, which partners Pakistani HTAs with professional nonprofit groups (NGOs) in Norway, will match HTA contributions in full and has been initially funded for four years.

- *Funding intermediaries and federations.* The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) works with organizations like the Association of Canadian-Haitian Organizations for Development (Le Régroupement des Organismes Canado-Haïtiens pour le Développement, ROCAHD), a federation of Haitian hometown associations in Montréal. CIDA co-funds small-scale development projects in Haiti.³⁰ In the UK, the Department for International Development (DFID) funds events for the charity AFFORD, which aims to assist African diaspora organizations with their development goals in their countries of origin through capacity building and leadership development. AFFORD's Helping Africans Influence London (HAIL) program, for example, focuses on supporting African communities' involvement in London and national politics by bringing together various actors, including policymakers and African

immigrants. AFFORD also maintains an online database of African diaspora organizations in the UK.³¹

- *HTAs in co-development policy.* Under the aegis of its official co-development policy, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides up to 70 percent of funds for development projects in Mali and Senegal that are designed, carried out, and co-funded (at a minimum of 30 percent) by diaspora organizations and their communities of origin.³² The French government also oversees a Support Program for Migrant Solidarity Organizations (Programme d'Appui aux Organisations de Solidarité Issues des Migrations, PRA-OSIM), administered through the nonprofit Coordination SUD. This program gives technical assistance and provides co-funding for development projects for these organizations. Any applicant organization must contribute at least 15 percent of total project costs from its own resources and the government can contribute a maximum of 50 percent.³³ Umbrella organizations that count village associations as members receive the bulk of funding through this initiative.

- **International organization and government partnerships.** In April 2004, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) of the United Nations and the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) established a \$7.6 million fund for micro-finance and investment remittance projects. MIF contributed \$4 million and IFAD contributed \$2 million, leaving HTAs, microfinance institutions, and credit unions to contribute \$1.6 million for projects in Mexico, Honduras, and Haiti.³⁴ In April 2003, USAID and the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) launched a joint initiative intended to link Latin American and Caribbean immigrant groups in the United States with development projects in their countries of origin. The pilot initiative began with training workshops for three immigrant groups and is working with partner groups from El Salvador, Haiti, and Mexico. The projects include the effort of the Washington, D.C.-based National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians (NOAH) to create fruit-tree grafting and seedling projects in Haiti, and the work of the California-based Organization of Migrants for Ayoquezco (OMA) with their hometown in Mexico to enhance edible cactus cultivation.³⁵

- **The nonprofit sector.** Some development-oriented nonprofit groups have partnered with HTAs as well.

Through its Linkis program, Oxfam Novib (the Dutch branch of Oxfam) has provided development funding to diaspora organizations based in the Netherlands. Oxfam Novib approved 559,877 euros in 2005 for a three-year project carried out by Hirda, a Somali organization based in Amsterdam. In 2007, Oxfam Novib provided a three-year grant worth 364,969 euros for an Ethiopian organization, the DIR Foundation.³⁶

- **The private sector.** The private sector has also shown interest in working with HTAs. The Four-for-

One program — a partnership launched in 2005 by First Data Corporation, the owner of remittance industry

giant Western Union;

the government of the state of Zacatecas; and Mexican HTAs — adds an additional tier of matching funds to donations made by Mexican HTAs under the Three-for-One program, up to \$1.25 million yearly.³⁷

Ultimately, it is difficult to analyze the impact of HTA development efforts.

Ultimately, it is difficult to analyze the impact of HTA development efforts. The ambiguous relationship between HTAs and development — much like the relationship between migration and development — suggests that while HTAs can help alleviate poverty in countries of origin, they rarely have the capacity to promote sustainable development. While HTAs'

total financial contributions to their communities of origin are often cited, such figures may obscure the actual impact of such investments. Policy initiatives that concentrate solely on the development impact of migrants' transnational activities, including participation in HTAs, fail to capture the full scope of contemporary migration dynamics. For example, efforts to increase migrants' access to financial services were originally framed in the context of facilitating remittance flows to the origin country, but also have important implications for migrants' economic mobility in the destination country.

It is important for policymakers to recognize that fully integrated migrants are best

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positioned to contribute to their home countries' development efforts, and conversely, that development in origin countries has positive outcomes for destination countries. Indeed, transnational activities are necessarily rooted in the destination countries as much as they are in the origin countries.

Examining the role that HTAs play in immigrant

integration can provide a framework to analyze their strengths, and outline possible synergies between integration and development objectives.

VI. Rediscovering an Old Truth: Hometown Associations as Integration Intermediaries

The academic literature describing HTAs is extensive, but it mainly focuses on the development impacts of HTAs. Few studies have examined the complementary nature of HTA activities in both origin and destination countries.³⁸ Yet due to these synergies HTAs are a unique forum to foster coherence on diaspora policy issues and to advance inter-governmental and international civil-society dialogue on diasporas.

Although few public policies have focused on HTAs in their capacity as integration intermediaries, there are clear areas where the associations support immigrant integration. Firstly, HTAs can help new immigrants cope with the initial period of settlement, and while it is rare that the organizations provide direct support services to migrants, they serve as natural points to disseminate information on available services. Secondly, HTA membership may be a first step toward active citizenship in the destination country — particularly for migrants with limited proficiency in the destination-country language. Also, HTAs offer members the chance to become involved with a community organization and the opportunity for leaders to hone their organizational skills.

Partnerships for social service support

Migrant associations and ethnic community-based organizations provide a safe and familiar setting for migrants to gain basic

assistance in adjusting to their new communities. In some cases organizations may offer services directly, such as Alianza Dominicana, a Dominican community organization in New York, which offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, citizenship education, health services, and day care in addition to a number of other services.³⁹

HTAs vary in terms of size, operation, and objectives. The majority, however, do not have the expertise or capacity to offer courses themselves. Some social services, such as legal aid, may be the logical purview of country-of-origin governments through mechanisms such as consular networks whereas destination-country governments may more efficiently administer other social services such as ESL and citizenship education. Still other services, including education, workforce training, and health care, may be best served through collaborative efforts between both governments and the associations. Ultimately, the most appropriate role of HTAs in social-service delivery may be to institutionalize a function that many already perform — that is, to serve as de facto migrant information centers. Given that both consular agencies and municipal governments are faced with limited publicity budgets despite often offering a wide array of services, partnerships with HTAs may be a productive means to reach their intended clientele. This already happens in many cases. In a typical example, Princeton University's 2005

Comparative Immigrant Organization Project (CIOP) recorded a Michoacán HTA in Southern California working with the Mexican consulate to offer legal aid services, one of the primary services the association provided to its members.⁴⁰

Civic participation: HTAs and migrant mobilization

Involvement in HTAs can encourage civic involvement on a wider scale. Individuals who work with HTAs can gain valuable experience in organizing and HTA agendas can expand over time to focus on political and community action in communities of destination. For instance, a recent study focused on the Chicago area (Illinois is home to more than 170 HTAs registered with the Institute of Mexicans Abroad⁴¹) found that the majority of HTA members belonged to, on average, four other nondiaspora community organizations.⁴²

Involvement in HTAs can encourage civic involvement on a wider scale.

Similarly, HTA involvement can bolster political participation. One study of Dominican HTAs in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood found that association membership was a strong predictor of political participation because involvement with HTAs gave immigrants the skills to participate in US politics.⁴³ Immigration issues frequently provide the motivation for participation in destination-country politics.

Immigrants are able to focus their political goals through HTAs, ensuring a voice significantly louder than any one person. HTAs took part in nationwide demonstrations for immigrants' rights in spring 2006. Later that year, Mexicans for Political Progress was formed in Chicago. This political action committee has endorsed and raised funds for political candidates, and participated in voter registration and election volunteering.⁴⁴ CONFEMEX has been an increasingly active participant in US politics, getting involved in immigration and education reform and civil-rights debates.⁴⁵

VII. Policy Options and Cautions

Small, well-crafted interventions (with the voluntary cooperation of HTAs) should be made where they can enhance the effectiveness of HTA-provided integration services. Based upon the existing policy initiatives toward HTAs as well as knowledge of the multiple roles that HTAs play, collaborative policy options include:

- **HTA capacity building.** HTAs rely on the work of volunteers who are frequently new to management and community organizing. In order to build HTA capacity, outside actors could provide training for HTA leaders in areas such as laws governing nonprofit incorporation, nonprofit management, and accessing municipal services. Training HTA leaders could lead to the professionalization of association management and perhaps advance formalization. While municipal

government or local nonprofit groups may be best suited to provide training, consular officials' participation could also prove useful.

- **Incentives for federations or organizational collaboration.** Local governments and foreign ministries may not have the financial capacity to deal with the vast number of HTAs in their communities or that are part of their diasporas, respectively. Federations and umbrella organizations therefore have an important role in such instances because, while many HTAs would like to appeal to donors and governments for support, it is not feasible for individual HTAs to do this. Major development agencies such as USAID, DFID, or CIDA are not able to provide funds to individual HTAs for small-scale development projects. Establishing federations, especially if they have nonprofit status, can give HTAs leverage with such donors.

However, many HTAs do not create federations and not just because of inadequate resources, but also due to lack of time, organizational experience, or interest. Furthermore, creating federations may institutionalize a “homeland gaze” — an outcome that destination-country policymakers intent on integration may be wary of encouraging. It may be more appropriate to incentivize collaboration through coalition building between HTAs and other community organizations.

- **Partnerships for information dissemination.** While most HTAs are unable to provide a wide range of social services, they can be pivotal points of contact between existing social service providers and migrants. When they are well informed, HTAs can direct members to appropriate services, including job placement, language, vocational training, health care, and legal assistance. Indeed, the Mexican Secretariat of Health is considering leveraging HTA networks to provide health insurance to Mexicans in the United States.
- **Reaching out to nontraditional actors.** NGOs, community organizations, and local governments can explore opportunities to accelerate HTAs' integration work by identifying the most promising intervention points. Such sponsorship would come at little cost to government, but could have a significant impact on HTA operations. Local governments are uniquely positioned to take on this role because HTAs are community-based. Furthermore, local government actors have a more in-depth view of their communities' needs. By the end of 2006, for example, the Monirinki program of Vantaan Järjestöry (Vantaa Association Circle) in Vantaa, Finland had partnered with 12 immigrant associations to provide support and training to enhance their function as voluntary associations. More notably, the Monirinki program assists immigrant associations in forging relationships with the municipal government and other organizations.⁴⁶
- **Learning from past experience.** HTA policy is a relatively novel policy field, and accordingly in-depth cross-national studies of existing policies are lacking. Developing a thoughtful, policy-relevant research agenda on HTAs will be essential to evaluating outcomes and informing decision making. Comparable experiences working with migrant civil society may prove instructive. In particular, the refugee resettlement process provides an example of how destination countries can work effectively with migrant associations, for example local government cooperation with ethnic community-based organizations in the United States.⁴⁷ HTA engagement could facilitate immigrant or refugee integration services and strategies.
- **Collaborative data collection.** The paucity of data on HTAs complicates any policy design or implementation efforts. Collecting data on HTAs creates greater opportunities for partnerships to develop. From the HTA's perspective, getting word of its existence in a directory, be it with a government agency or NGO, increases the likelihood that donors and potential partners will be aware of the association. For organizations and governments that aim to work with HTAs, obtaining reliable information about the number of associations and contact information can be very difficult. Data collection could be carried out by local governments, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions or, as shown by the Mexican and

Salvadoran examples, consular networks. However, any HTA registration should remain entirely voluntary and safeguards should ensure that associations will not be co-opted.

Policymakers have a seemingly universal preference to view HTAs as development agents, yet in reality associations perform a more complex role, adapting to the needs and interests of migrants in both the destination and origin countries. As such, and due to their flexible, ad hoc nature at the intersection of policy in countries of origin and destination, HTAs offer a valuable opportunity to achieve greater coherence among different policy arenas involving migrants.

As this *Insight* argues, the initial step is to pursue complementarities between development and integration objectives. However, working with HTAs — or any diaspora groups — can also prove challenging. It is essential that policymakers recognize the limitations of HTAs, including:

- **Establishing meaningful partnerships.**

Essential elements of successful origin-country government initiatives to engage HTAs as development agents include: interest and commitment on the part of both parties, and an established degree of mutual trust. Governments may be unconvinced of the return on investment in informally organized HTAs that are difficult, if not impossible, to hold accountable. In this respect, larger and more organized HTAs, or association

federations, may be more successful at attracting home-country government interest. Conversely, HTAs may be skeptical of the motivations of interested governments, often jaded by historic political cooption or perceived (and real) corruption among bureaucrats and politicians. While government-matching schemes and funding programs can attract participation, financial investments are not a panacea. It is important to progressively build institutional and personal relationships.

- **Recognizing the limits of Hometown Associations.**

In thinking through policy options for accelerating cooperation with HTAs, it is important to recall what HTAs are, and what

they are not. They are volunteer organizations, spontaneous migrant networks, and an expression of meaningful contacts with the country and community of origin. HTA members (and leadership) are very rarely experts in

either development or immigrant integration. HTA staffs have jobs and other responsibilities, and associations typically lack the resources necessary to undertake expansive projects or programs. Since many HTAs raise money to fund hometown projects, the initiatives are often chosen by the HTA members

Hometown associations can complement, but cannot substitute for other efforts to engage migrants in development, integration, and civic engagement in particular.

themselves. Living abroad, members may have different priorities and perspectives and may not necessarily pursue projects that best meet their hometown's immediate needs. In some cases, such as in Haiti, this is in part because there are no local officials who help gear HTA funds toward local needs.⁴⁸ With respect to integration, HTAs generally do not have the capacity to provide services and are limited to an intermediary role between existing service providers and migrants.

Just as migrant-sending countries cannot rely on their diasporas alone to lift them into economic prosperity, hometown associations cannot be considered the sole place where policymakers look for possible inter-governmental collaboration. Hometown associations can complement, but cannot substitute for other efforts to engage

migrants in development, integration, and civic engagement in particular.

Governments, nonprofits, and other organizations seeking to work with hometown associations must ensure that they do not supplant or interfere with the vital services these associations provide to immigrants. Rather, policymakers should concentrate on creating thoughtfully designed approaches that complement and strengthen the hometown associations' capacity.

Partnerships between governments and hometown associations have the potential to leverage the resources of all parties, whether in immigrant-origin or immigrant-destination countries, to achieve their individual objectives. In the end, such partnerships are in the interests of the immigrants and their countries of birth and of choice.

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