

2.2 Ethiopian organisations in the Netherlands

2.2.1 Ethiopian migration to the Netherlands

Until the late 1970s, only a small number of Ethiopians came to the Netherlands mainly for educational purposes and, later, as asylum seekers and refugees. The arrival of Ethiopian asylum seekers began in 1976 and reached its peak in 1990 (van Heelsum, 2006, p. 4). Most Ethiopian migrants fled from the military dictatorship of the *Derg* regime, which came to power in 1974, while later generations of migrants (1990s to-date) came as a result of drought and economic stagnation during the late 1980s and early 1990s followed by the border conflict with Eritrea. In recent years, those who have left for the Netherlands are groups and individuals in political opposition to the authoritarian tendencies of the government as well because of conflicts with neighbouring countries.

The second most important reason for Ethiopians to migrate to the Netherlands, after asylum, is education. According to van Heelsum, (2007, p. 4) "a quarter of the Ethiopians arrive in the Netherlands to study, most noticeable at the Agricultural University of Wageningen and at the Institute for Social Studies in Den Haag." As noted by ter Wal (2005), "some came as students, and after completion of their studies decided to remain, often having married or found employment". About 50 per cent of Ethiopians legally living in the Netherlands are naturalised (de Valk et al., 2001), but this number may have increased between 2001 and 2008 since anyone with a permanent residency permit for more than five years qualified for Dutch citizenship. Marriages or family re-unification are important pull factors, and upon acquiring permanent residency, the majority of Ethiopian migrants have now become naturalised citizens in the Netherlands (ter Wal, 2005).¹⁰²

According to the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS),¹⁰³ the total Ethiopian population in the Netherlands was estimated at 10,292 (2005), and by 2008, it stood at 10,659 (2008). In 2006, there were 210 asylum applications by Ethiopians (ibid.), however, that number went down to about 70 as of 1 January 2007 (ibid., 2009). Besides those in the asylum procedure, participation of Ethiopians in the labour market in the Netherlands is relatively high compared to other groups. A 2000 survey of 117 refugees from

Ethiopia found that 17 per cent defined themselves as highly educated, 61 per cent as average and 22 per cent as having received a low level of education (van den Tillaart et al., 2000, p. 167). The same study also found that more than 50 per cent had a high school diploma or higher and that more than half of the respondents continued their education. Since their arrival, most Ethiopians have adapted fairly well to Dutch society. A study in 2000 found that 15 per cent male and 23 per cent female Ethiopians were married to a Dutch native (van Rijn, cited in MINJUS, 2006).

Another study also observed that many Ethiopians live in neighbourhoods or streets where the majority of residents are Dutch and almost one-quarter of the Ethiopian community lives in neighbourhoods with equal numbers of Dutch and other nationalities (van den Tillaart et al., 2000). The same study also noted that more than half of the Ethiopians have continued with some kind of schooling in the Netherlands after settlement. Several respondents and groups confirm these observations and emphasise that this development has been crucial for the level of integration and other interaction processes (NL_IN1). This has also encouraged mobilisation and the establishment of organisations that cater for their diverse interests within the Netherlands. Despite the integrative efforts being made by Ethiopian migrants in the Netherlands, recent migrants are far less involved with diaspora organisations (NL_IN2). This is most common among second-generation Ethiopian migrants compared to groups that came to the Netherlands in the 1990s.

Ethiopian migrants are one of the most significant Horn of Africa groups in the Netherlands and have been more visible due to the ongoing conflicts and political instability in the region. Ethiopian diaspora communities in the Netherlands come from diverse backgrounds, many of whom have formed organisations,¹⁰⁴ largely along the lines of ethnicity, religion or political affiliations (van Heelsum, 2004). Some of these organisations also use the name of their country as a title in combination with issues they address. Although some of the Ethiopian diaspora organisations tend to portray themselves as issue-oriented, or bearing the name of the country, their founders or leadership and members are often from the same ethnic group and activities in the origin

¹⁰² For more information on this discussion, see van Kessel and Tellegen, 2000.

¹⁰³ More information can be found at <<http://statline.cbs.nl>>.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed account on African diaspora organisations in the Netherlands, see van Kessel and Tellegen, 2000.

country largely target specific ethnic regions. There are, however, exceptions where the board of some of the organisations consists of both native Dutch and African migrants.

2.2.2 Immigration and refugee legislation

Policy response to the issue of migration has predominantly been restrictive since 1974 (ter Wal, 2005). During the 1970s, youngsters from one particular immigrant group, the Moluccans,¹⁰⁵ carried out a series of terrorist acts. This provided the impetus for introducing a new integration policy for all immigrant groups, recommended by the Scientific Council for Government Policy "Towards a general Ethnic Minorities Policy" (WRR, 1979). In the 1990s, Dutch policies changed with respect to the relationship between integration and citizenship. From then on, immigrants were expected to demonstrate their commitment to the host country as a precondition to obtaining such rights as entry, permanent residence and citizenship. Immigration and integration were traditionally separate issues in the Netherlands. With the recent establishment of a special immigration and integration department (IND), which operates within the Ministry of Justice, this has changed. The subsequent waves of immigrants were considered unwelcome anomalies requiring short-term and restrictive policy responses (Doomernik, 2001).

There are several pieces of legislation on migration and refugees in the Netherlands. Most relevant for this study are the Netherlands Nationality Act (*Rijkswet op het Nederlandschap*), the Dutch Aliens Act of 2000 (*Vreemdelingenwet*), which forms the statutory basis for forced and independent departure and the Civic Integration Act, which came into effect on 1 January 2007 (Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Justice, 2007). In 1985, a new naturalisation law was introduced, which allowed children born on Dutch territory to acquire Dutch citizenship (Jacobs, 1998). According to this law, dual nationality was not accepted, and naturalisation meant renouncing one's previous nationality. As a result, over fifty per cent of Ethiopians born in the Netherlands held Dutch nationality by 2000 (de Valk et al., 2001). With respect to asylum, the Dutch government is undertaking in a pilot programme for the Assisted Return of Rejected

Asylum Seekers with a number of other countries. Ethiopia was one of the few countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, which signed this agreement on 22 August 1997 (Koser, 2001).

The establishment of Ethiopian diaspora organisations got an impetus towards the end of the 1980s through Dutch policies that aimed at achieving full and equal participation of migrant groups within society, granting them space for cultural expression and development facilitated by the government (Human Rights Watch, 2008). However, in the early 1990s, the attitude towards migrant organisations changed (Penninx and van Heelsum, 2004) and a general policy shift began to emphasise integration into the socio-economic field. This shift was based on the assumption that too much emphasis on cultural and religious identity might hinder socio-economic integration (also see Miles, 1993; van Heelsum, 2006, p. 4; WRR, 1990).

In the 1990s, the Dutch government introduced compulsory orientation courses on the Dutch language and society for newcomers (ter Wal, 2005; Bruquetas-Callejo et al., 2006). Between 2002 and 2006, the government further changed its policy framework by introducing mandatory integration requirements aimed at enhancing social cohesion through new restrictions on migration into the Netherlands. For instance in 2006, the Dutch government introduced a selective migration policy (Government of the Netherlands, Ministry of Justice, 2006) based on the premise that migration policy should address the needs of Dutch society and the labour market. The new policy was therefore aimed at taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by migration (ibid.). This marked the beginning of another major policy shift that saw the introduction of an integration process according to different countries of origin. For instance in 2006, the Dutch government introduced an integration test for predominantly 'non-Western' migrants that must be passed before the migrant is allowed to enter the Netherlands (under the Integration Abroad Act, *Wet inburgering in het buitenland* of 2005). On 1 January 2007, the Civic Integration Act came into effect and henceforth it was obligatory to pass the civic integration examination for all foreign nationals in the Netherlands (Dutch National Contact Point for the European Migration Network, 2007). However, the overseas integration test only applies to nationals of selected countries wishing to join family members or spouses in the Netherlands (van Heelsum, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ People from a former Dutch colony in the South Moluccan islands situated east of New Guinea in the western Pacific who were resettled in the Netherlands when Indonesia captured the island shortly after declaring its independence in April of 1950.

Since 1 January 2009, a new migration system is being implemented by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). Through this policy, a new admission scheme for highly educated persons was introduced, whereby highly educated foreign nationals who have at least attained an MA degree can obtain a residence permit with a maximum term of one year in the Netherlands in order to find a job. This policy does not, however, mention asylum seekers who have the same skills but have been in the asylum procedures for more than five years, a case which is common in the Netherlands.

2.2.3 Ethiopian diaspora organisations

Four Ethiopian organisations were selected¹⁰⁶ for an in-depth analysis of actual and potential engagement in peacebuilding in the country of origin. The study period was between August 2008 and March 2009, during which a total of 20 interviews in the form of open-ended questions and in-depth interviews with several representatives of the select Ethiopian diaspora organisations were conducted. In addition, observation of Ethiopian diaspora communities and their organisational activities within the Netherlands complemented the data gathered through interviews. Additional interviews were conducted with leaders and individual members of a few Eritrean and Somalia organisations, which allowed for corroboration of information given on cross-country and joint peacebuilding activities within the Netherlands.

The relationship between Ethiopian groups, Dutch government institutions and development agencies has largely focussed on integration and welfare within the Netherlands and development in the country of origin. To a great extent, Ethiopian diaspora organisations have been able to establish themselves and function within the Netherlands due to the legislative and institutional frameworks that facilitate such initiatives. For instance, the opportunity to register with the Dutch chamber of commerce either as a foundation or an association has enabled many groups and organisations to engage formally with the state through various ministries and local authorities as well as with major Dutch development agencies. This relationship has been critical in securing the needed funding for diaspora activities within the Netherlands and for their activities in the country of origin. The relationship has also entailed a significant level of collaboration and consultation between Ethiopian

diaspora organisations and development agencies, which often includes capacity-building initiatives and funding by various ministries.

The evolution of Ethiopian diaspora organisations is not only influenced by the existing opportunities offered by Dutch ministries and organisations but also by the concerns about the situation in the country of origin. The existing repressive political environment, especially towards the opposition and ethnic groups that are resisting historical, economic and political marginalisation, and the need to provide humanitarian assistance to regions hit by drought, continue to inform most Ethiopian diaspora activities in the Netherlands. Their activities in the Netherlands are influenced by the need to address factors related to integration into Dutch society and the welfare of their communities in the cities they live in. These needs include venues where Ethiopians can meet and interact, language lessons, skills and other activities aimed at facilitating integration. The Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands is remarkably well organised through the various formal and informal groups, which can be explained by its diversity and wide range of opinions, which in turn opens up many possibilities to create new organisations.

Most members of the Ethiopian diaspora have carried with them their political and ethnic differences; hence most associations are formed around ethnic and political identities. Some of these groups, especially the established ones, have organised themselves into associations (see van Heelsum, 2004). Examples include different Ethiopian sub-nationalities such as the Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, Sidama, Ogaden Somali, and Afar. For example, out of the 53 registered Ethiopian organisations, 15 are explicitly formed around ethnic identities, namely four Oromo, six Tigray and five Ogaden-Somali organisations. About eight organisations have affiliations with political parties in Ethiopia whom they represent in the diaspora in the Netherlands,¹⁰⁷ the rest of Europe and North America. These organisations often focus on human rights issues, which are sometimes combined with development and humanitarian work in the country of origin. About twelve organisations focus on development in Ethiopia while six are religion-based and another four are business-oriented (van Heelsum, 2004). About eight organisations mainly serve community interests

¹⁰⁶ The criteria used apply to all the cases as outlined in the Introduction on p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Political organisations as used here imply political parties, non-governmental organisations, associations and groupings whose main agenda and activities are focussed on the political processes in Ethiopia. The majority are political parties in opposition of the previous and current regime in Addis Ababa.

of Ethiopians living in the Netherlands, addressing such issues as integration, culture, health and social services.

2.2.3.1 Formal structures and membership

The formation of these organisations is based on collective or individual initiatives. For instance, there are groups registered as associations (*Verenigingen*¹⁰⁸) and those that are registered as foundations (*Stichtingen*), yet they are led by a few individuals who serve as the core personnel or board members. While some of these associations have a membership that includes officials, those operating as a *Stichting* do not have members, with the exception of a board that oversees its operations. With such institutional arrangements, membership in most organisations is based on being an Ethiopian;¹⁰⁹ it has, however, been possible for non-Ethiopian individuals to be incorporated into the boards, especially Dutch individuals who are currently acting as board members of various foundations and associations. For example, DIR's (Dir biyabir Anbessa Yasir¹) board is 50 per cent Ethiopian and 50 per cent Dutch. Reasons for such choices could be strategic as well as practical. For instance, organisations working on integration such as DIR, and the Ethiopian Netherlands Network for Development Cooperation (ENNOS) emphasise the value of having Dutch people on their boards in order to facilitate the process of integration from within their organisational structures.

Most Ethiopian diaspora organisations are led by individuals who are the key person(s) of such initiatives; however, the management structures laid down in the group statutes emphasise the mechanisms of discussion and democratic deliberation. In this regard, the decision-making processes within the organisations are carried out through a formalised structure and based on procedures. Nonetheless, the activities that are undertaken within the selected activity areas often depend on the needs of the community as well as of the country of origin. Other activities are determined by policies and development agendas within the various Dutch development agencies working with these groups and government policy towards the country of origin.

¹⁰⁸ A *Vereniging* is equivalent to an association in English, the Ethiopian Netherlands Network for Development Cooperation (ENNOS), for example, falls into this category.

¹⁰⁹ Sometimes the name of the country is used to refer to a specific group/ organisation or their activity coverage, however, in practice the activities often focus on some specific region, or ethnic group from the country of origin.

2.2.3.2 Diaspora activities and peacebuilding

For the purpose of this study, four Ethiopian diaspora organisations are analysed in depth in order to understand how Ethiopians organise, mobilise and engage in different activities and what their potentials for peacebuilding are. The first organisation is the Oromo Community¹¹⁰ founded in 1980s in the Netherlands. Its main objectives include advocacy, organising conferences on human rights, organising discussions on how to change the political situation in Ethiopia, support projects and transnational linkages, and cultural events. The second organisation is DIR (Dir biyabir Anbessa Yasir), which was founded in 2000. Its main objectives are to empower Ethiopians in the Netherlands by assisting in integration, with social problems, education, and by providing judicial aid. Another objective is to bring about sustainable change in Ethiopia and to assist groups (beneficiaries) and help them to become independent. The third organisation, Ethiopian Netherlands Network for Development Cooperation (ENNOS), was founded in 2006 with the objective of offering a platform for the Ethiopian diaspora organisations in the Netherlands, facilitating co-operation between the organisations and Dutch initiatives, and the development and strengthening of the bond between Ethiopian diaspora organisations in the Netherlands and NGOs in Ethiopia. The fourth organisation is Stichting Ethiopia Millennium (SEM), also founded in 2006. Its main objectives are to promote a positive image of Ethiopia, increase public support for international co-operation, stimulate the development of Ethiopia, create awareness about issues in the field of freedom and human rights, promote friendship between Dutch and Ethiopians, and to encourage fraternisation and reconciliation among Ethiopians.

A number of opposition groups in the diaspora¹¹¹ have been engaged in the political processes in Ethiopia through formal political parties; such involvement has, however, become difficult due to the prevailing political environment in Ethiopia where activities of civil society have been restricted.¹¹² The ethnic dimension in Ethiopian diaspora organisations in this context reflects the underlying politicised ethnicity at the national level in Ethiopia, the basis upon which

¹¹⁰ For a more detailed account of Oromo diaspora, see Bulcha, 2002.

¹¹¹ Ginbot 7, as well as Sidama and Ogaden Somali groups.

¹¹² The Ethiopia government introduced a new law in 2008 that controls civil society operation in the country. It is accessible at <http://www.iccs.org/pubs/CSO_draft_received_11-07-08.pdf and <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGAFR250092008&lang=e>.

political and economic marginalisation takes place, especially when certain ethnic groups are excluded from the government and less resources allocated for development in their regions. This scenario underpins the persistence of conflicts between different groups that tend to spill over into the diaspora. Another feature of the Ethiopian diaspora organisations is their linkages to transnational networks.¹¹³ Through these networks, various diaspora groups are able to mobilise beyond the Netherlands for solidarity purposes and to raise funds for their activities.

Ethiopian diaspora activities cover a wide range of social, cultural, political and economic issues but the mode of involvement, their relationship with the regime in Ethiopia and organisational capacity varies from group to group. The majority focuses on their members' welfare in the Netherlands and community development in the country of origin. These developmental and humanitarian activities are undertaken in partnership with Dutch development agencies, which provide the financial support for diaspora organisations in the Netherlands and some of their activities in Ethiopia. Examples include organisations such as DIR, ENNOS and SEM. These claim to have partners on the ground, especially smaller community-based organisations (CBOs) and local groups. Their activities are undertaken in partnership with Dutch development agencies operating in those regions such as the Dutch Organisation for International Aid (Oxfam-NOVIB), the Inter-church Organisation for Development Co-operation (ICCO) and the Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID).

Ethiopian diaspora engagement with the country of origin, i.e. the strategic positioning in relation to the government in Addis Ababa is critical in determining the extent to which diaspora organisations are able to implement activities on the ground, as well as the nature of and choices regarding such activities. This is true more so in terms of 'peacebuilding-related activities', which is a sensitive area in the context of Ethiopian politics and democratic dispensation. Because of this, most groups, especially the more prominent ones such as DIR, ENNOS and SEM are mainly engaged in indirect peacebuilding activities. Those in the opposition, such as the Amhara group Ginbot 7,¹¹⁴ the Ogaden Somali and the Oromo community in

the Netherlands, among others, engage directly with opposition groups in the country of origin, in the region and in the diaspora through transnational links. They are explicit in their perspectives on peacebuilding, but they cannot access their regions, or undertake any activity on the ground, even for humanitarian purposes.

The example of the Oromo Community in the Netherlands is crucial to understanding the ethnic undertones of engagement with the country of origin, political activism and fragmentation within the various diaspora groups. The Oromo Community in the Netherlands has its roots in the Ethiopian student movement, which was formed in Europe during the 1970s. According to one respondent, this movement was initiated by the Oromo students' union in Europe, whose earlier initiatives in Germany and other European countries gave birth to the Oromo Committee Netherlands (OKN). OKN's main objectives were to raise awareness for the Oromo cause through political and economic engagement and to collect materials and financial resources for Oromo refugees in Sudan, Kenya, Djibouti and Somalia (NL_IN3). The Oromo Community in the Netherlands currently has a broad transnational network in Europe, which covers Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States. The two main foci of these transnational linkages and networks are political/military, and humanitarian issues. An example of a humanitarian effort is the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), which is headquartered in Germany but has branches in other European countries and in the Horn of Africa, while its military and political activities are based in Eritrea and other locations in the Horn of Africa (NL_IN4).

Due to the situation in Ethiopia and the inability to freely engage in direct peacebuilding activities, most Ethiopian diaspora activities are targeted at their communities residing in the Netherlands and largely focus on recreational activities such as sports and cultural events. These activities are less controversial and therefore have the potential to stimulate and reinforce contacts and co-operation and could be replicated at the national level in Ethiopia where divisions and conflicts still exist. However, implementing such nationwide activities would largely depend on the political environment in Ethiopia. The groups also act as points of convergence and shared background with, for instance, the Eritrean and Ethiopian Somali groups, even though interaction is sporadic and most of these events are only held annually. Efforts to

¹¹³ For a detailed discussion on diaspora transnationalism, see Mercer and Martin, 2009; Mercer et al., 2009; Sorensen, 2007; Portes, 2001.

¹¹⁴ Ginbot 7, means May 7 in Amharic, and is used in memory of the election day of 2005.

work with similar groups from the Horn of Africa seem to focus mainly on cultural inter-country activities, however, some Ethiopian diaspora groups claim to address peacebuilding through joint activities with Eritrean and Somali organisations (NL_IN5). These activities are only undertaken on a small scale as compared to developmental, humanitarian and welfare activities in the Netherlands, as can be observed from organisations' activities such as DIR, ENNOS, and SEM. To what extent these strategies work or contribute to peacebuilding between Ethiopia and Eritrea or between Ethiopia and Somalia at the diaspora level is also not clear and requires further investigation. One factor for such lack of clarity could be the fragmentation among Ethiopian diaspora groups, which is manifested by the deep divisions along ethnic, generational and, to some extent, ideological lines.¹¹⁵

2.2.3.3 Peacebuilding: Challenges to constructive diaspora engagement

Initial findings from the four Ethiopian organisations and individuals interviewed point to a complex mix of internal dynamics within the organisations themselves, policy and priorities of donor agencies, competition for resources and social capital both in the Netherlands and in Ethiopia. The difficulty to make choices for peacebuilding-related issues and activities is largely informed by the lack of strategies in addressing the policy positions and resource allocation priorities of the Dutch government and development agencies that operate in the Horn of Africa. As noted by Ionescu, "despite these initiatives in diaspora engagement, the existence of institutions targeting Diasporas does not necessarily guarantee that resources and capacities devoted to diaspora policies are sufficient and sustainable" (2006, p. 37). Therefore, joint strategies and collaborative initiatives by various Ethiopian diaspora organisations could facilitate access to sufficient resources devoted to peacebuilding both in the Netherlands and in Ethiopia.

Another important aspect that delimits and shapes diaspora activities is the fragmentation within diaspora communities. These divisions are due to different agendas, strategies and internal conflicts. As noted by Smith, "diasporas involve a complex of always shifting power relations" (2007, p. 5). Fragmentation of the diaspora groups (Mohamoud, 2006), therefore, has an impact on their potentials to contribute to peacebuilding in the country of origin. The divisions within the Ethiopian diaspora community, especially regarding their relationships with the government 'at home', have led to a carefully chosen set of activities that are to be implemented in the country of origin (NL_IN5). Consequently, the political situation in Ethiopia, in terms of divisions, suspicions and repression of certain groups along ethnic lines and political beliefs, also affects the diaspora. The result is a big rift and conflicts within the Ethiopian community in the Netherlands. These divisions are not only between different groups, but also within communities sharing the same ethnic identity. While groups such as DIR, ENNOS and SEM have claimed to work on peacebuilding through some of their activities in the diaspora, especially the cultural events, such undertakings are not evident in the inter-group relations, as noted during interviews with organisations such as the Oromo Community and during the review of published activity reports and documents.

The Dutch government's priorities of its foreign relations and security policy as well as development aid programmes of Dutch development agencies working in the Horn of Africa are also a significant factor influencing/ framing diaspora group activities. Most notable here are two policies: first on development aid, humanitarian relief and civil society support towards the regime in Ethiopia, second on resource allocation for diaspora activities, such as eligibility for access to funds, areas which are funded and the diaspora organisation's capability of implementation. For example, calls for grants sometimes prove to be too competitive or technical for small organisations run by volunteers to competently bid for (also see Trans and Vammen, 2008). In this context, the degree to which Ethiopian diaspora organisations in the Netherlands are able to engage in active peacebuilding is greatly impeded through the structure of the current system. The situation is further complicated by the competition that exists between residence country organisations that also undertake similar activities in the Horn of Africa. In this context, these organisations compete for the same resources with diaspora organisations,

¹¹⁵ "Due to the influence of the student movement in the 1960s and 70s against feudalism that Haile Selassie's government symbolised, most Ethiopians in the diaspora follow a left-wing ideology. Upon their return from scholarships to then East European countries and the Soviet Union and influenced by left-wing ideology in West Europe, the Ethiopian People's Revolution Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AMSO) were formed and the students joined the liberation struggle" (interview with first-generation member of the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands, 14 March 2009). Some of these ideological positions were carried on to the diaspora, including in the Netherlands, where many had migrated to, when the Mengistu government became dictatorial.

yet they have a highly developed organisational capacity and sometimes also advantages in terms of language or other specific institutional knowledge, which allows them more access to grants. Therefore, to be able to engage proactively and contribute to peacebuilding in their countries of origin, diaspora organisations will need "passive or active support from host and home countries" (Smith, 2007, p. 14).

It is important in this context to consider the role of transnational links in the peacebuilding initiatives and processes. Discussions on effective diaspora engagement in peacebuilding need to take into account the intricate and intertwined nature of efforts on the ground, such as the support by individuals and organisations in the diaspora. While much attention has been given to organised groups/ diaspora organisations, there is hardly any knowledge of what individual actors are capable of doing.

While explicit engagement in peacebuilding mainly applies to a small number of Ethiopian diaspora organisations, there are less explicit and covert initiatives by individuals from the diaspora, working independently or in collaboration with some organisations.¹¹⁶ Efforts range from providing capacity-building to local community organisations to providing relief and essential services like schools and health care by organisations such as DIR. Their ability to undertake activities on the ground despite the difficult political environment exhibits the potential these organisations have for peacebuilding. These efforts, however, need to be observed at different levels, both in the host country and in the country of origin, involving multiple actors from diverse backgrounds to ascertain their viability and potential for peacebuilding (Bercovitch, 2007). It is therefore imperative to ask to what extent both the more common implicit initiatives (provision of essential services in conflict situations or in regions that are marginalised) and the few explicit diaspora peacebuilding initiatives (such as advocacy for human rights and democratisation processes in Ethiopia) could converge to produce constructive results in the overall national or regional peacebuilding efforts.

Women are less represented in the leadership and management structures of the majority of diaspora

¹¹⁶ For instance, a Dutch-based diaspora organisation whose membership is mainly determined by actual work on the ground shows the evolution of unique strategies of diaspora engagement in peacebuilding at the local level. Some involve individual initiatives while others entail donor support to the various initiatives through diaspora organisations.

organisations in the Netherlands. This also holds true for organisations directly involved in peacebuilding-related activities. There are, however, some Ethiopian organisations that are purely established for women's issues and run by women. These groups are organised along geographical lines (with reference to the various cities in the Netherlands) and tend to be specialised on specific gender issues and transnational networks and less on peace-related activities.

In comparative terms, the activities of a Dutch-based Somali diaspora organisation, the Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA)¹¹⁷, and the Ethiopian DIR show that it is possible with good organisation to access a wide range of resources, and establish links with various actors at different levels. DIR's experiences also point to the strategic engagement with an authoritarian regime in the country of origin. For instance, they are able to remain neutral, but work on community projects, organise events, and facilitate exchange programmes as well as other community development projects for vulnerable groups such as the handicapped, ex-combatants, ex-prostitutes, and students, despite the strict conditions for civil society operations in Ethiopia.

2.2.4 Diaspora perceptions of peace and conflict

Diaspora perceptions seem to shape the kind of peacebuilding activities they are likely to engage in (either explicit or implicit). Interviews with Ethiopian diaspora organisations in the Netherlands revealed that these perceptions also play a significant role in the choice of their activities, their manner of implementation and their view of the added value of such initiatives in their origin country. The outcome of our analysis of peacebuilding and constructive engagement by the four Ethiopian diaspora¹¹⁸ groups in the Netherlands suggests that their perceptions of peacebuilding are informed by different factors. For instance, their long-distance perspective¹¹⁹ is shaped by a distant look at events and developments in their origin country, especially for individuals and

¹¹⁷ Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA) is one of the most prominent Somali diaspora organisations in the Netherlands and is actively involved on the ground in southern Somalia through service delivery and other forms of peacebuilding activities in the region.

¹¹⁸ For a broader definition of diasporas, see Sheffer, 2003.

¹¹⁹ See Anderson (1998) for a detailed discussion on diaspora's long-distance perspectives.

groups that cannot safely return to or enter Ethiopia. Positions on peacebuilding would therefore be different if Ethiopian diaspora organisations received direct information from 'the ground', which is why the perspectives of partner organisations or those working with diaspora projects on the ground are so important.¹²⁰

The many years of absence from Ethiopia are therefore likely to have an impact on perceptions of peacebuilding, even if some still manage the occasional visit to Ethiopia. The perceptions of Ethiopian diaspora organisations are also influenced by the environment in which they live in the Netherlands. This environment is mostly shaped by discourses and discussions, interactions and internal dynamics within the wider diaspora community, which translates into diverse interpretations of how organisations perceive peacebuilding and activities they link to it. For instance, while the Amhara, Oromo and other marginalised groups point to the lack of peace as a result of the conflict with Eritrea, or oppression and human rights violations in their regions, Tigray groups seem to have no problem with these issues. Therefore, issues of human rights, democracy or peacebuilding in Ethiopia will vary depending on the ethnic background of the group being interviewed.

Within the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands, much of the politics and practices are largely conducted by groups barred from direct participation in the current Ethiopian political system. Some of the members of organisations such as DIR, ENNOS and SEM, Oromo Community, Ogaden Somali, Sidama and Afar have often had personal or ethnic group disagreements with the regime at different times, before and after moving to the Netherlands. For this reason, many of these organisations or individuals tend to frame the homeland conflict in categorical and hard-line terms (especially the groups in opposition). This hardens the confrontation between government and some diaspora organisations or within the various Ethiopian diaspora communities (NL_IN7). These confrontations spill over into the diaspora community and undermine the possibilities for a compromise between the government and opposition groups, and between the groups themselves. For instance, various factions within the Oromo Community have differences based

on positions they have often taken within the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and ways in which they view their role in the political process in Ethiopia.

To a great extent, the Ethiopian diaspora perception of conflict in their country is also influenced by ethnicity. Since politics in Ethiopia is often associated with ethnicity and the ruling elite, the political problems affecting the country and its various groups are largely viewed through an ethnic prism. As the government in Ethiopia has incorporated some people from the marginalised regions in its ranks, some groups in the diaspora who have ties (ethnic and political) with the regime, such as the Tigray, seem to have no problem with the political environment in Ethiopia. However, there are also critics of the government from within the same group. In contrast, those from the marginalised regions such as the Oromo, Sidama, Afar and the Amhara, constitute the main opposition front within the diaspora in Europe and North America. Nonetheless, there are pockets of individuals within these communities who support the Tigray government for reasons that are rather of a personal than national nature. Many individuals who would like to invest in Ethiopia opt to co-operate with the government, or organisations that wish to be allowed to operate in the country use a 'neutral' position towards the regime as a means of obtaining the permission to operate (cf. NL_IN8).

Most Ethiopian diaspora organisations are also founded along ethnic and political identities. This illustrates that these differences have been transferred from the country of origin into the country of residence (van Heelsum, 2004). A review of activities in the origin country shows that in cases where diaspora organisations focus on particular issues, the geographical location of their activities in the country of origin largely reflects an ethnic and regional bias. For this reason, many Ethiopian diaspora organisations argue that peacebuilding is only possible in the context of justice, development of marginalised regions, education and dialogue between groups (NL_IN9). In response, organisations such as DIR and the Oromo Community in the Netherlands emphasise the importance of dialogue between various groups within the country and in the diaspora. Their argument is that regardless of their political affiliation and differences, most Ethiopians in the Netherlands perceive the political environment in the country of origin as hostile (NL_IN10). They view this situation as a hindrance to participation in the political process of the country of origin, but also as an obstacle to the

¹²⁰ As noted during an interview with one informant, "some people working with diaspora organisations have never returned to their homelands, due to insecurity, hence they can only work through contacts in neighbouring countries and through partnerships with local communities, but all from a distance" (NL_IN6).

direct implementation of development activities on the ground.

The prevailing political environment in Ethiopia is therefore seen as determining factor of such aspects as resource distribution, often experienced in the form of political and economic marginalisation in ethnic regions such as Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR), Gambella, Benishangul and Afar. Diaspora organisations and individuals from such areas feel obliged to assist through monetary and other forms of remittances. However, because the operations of civil society organisations in Ethiopia are under strict regulation, Ethiopian diaspora organisations that are not in good standing with the government tend to support their sister groups and individuals in the neighbouring countries where they live in exile (NL_IN11).

Organisations that are based on ethnicity, such as the Oromo, Amhara, and Ogaden Somali groups, often focus on the human rights situation in the region of origin. However, the extent to which their activities target peacebuilding largely depends on their perception of peace as a concept. For instance, some groups claim that peacebuilding in Ethiopia is only possible within the context of broader political reform involving various groups in Ethiopia. The exclusionary tendencies of past and recent regimes tend to obstruct peacebuilding between various groups within the country, such as between the Tigray, Oromo, Amhara, Sidama and Ogaden Somali and Afar groups. Peacebuilding between these groups in the Netherlands has not been possible either due to internal divisions and lack of trust between different groups. Despite their differences, they have taken a common stand towards the current government in terms of demands for democratisation and respect for human rights. For this reason, some groups put a lot of emphasis on reconciliation efforts in the diaspora, which they claim can be replicated in the country of origin (NL_IN12).

Engagement or expression of views that are not favourable to the regime expressed by members of diaspora organisations are a sensitive matter as it is commonly acknowledged/ perceived that Ethiopian government agents and informants are quite active in the Netherlands. As a result, suspicion and mistrust reigns between various groups regardless of ethnicity. Most of the organisations contacted pointed out that taking a hard stand against the government is likely to put any group with opposing views in a divide,

which was initially characterised by ideology, but is now increasingly shaped by ethnicity and other contested issues, such as religion and class. Religion is becoming an issue for Ethiopian diaspora Muslims who feel marginalised because of their faith. For this reason, an Ethiopian Muslim organisation was founded to champion their interests both 'at home' and abroad. Class, on the other hand, has been a major problem for the other ethnic groups previously ruled by the Amhara, which had occupied the highest social strata in Ethiopian society. For such reasons, different Ethiopian groups defend their positions using counter arguments, which exacerbate the sensitivity of terminology such as human rights, democracy and peacebuilding in Ethiopia. As a result, a number of organisations use alternative terminology in their discourse to camouflage their activities aimed at peacebuilding, or as a creative measure in order to be allowed to operate on the ground.

Examples of Ethiopian organisations that take this 'neutral' position in their discourse include DIR, ENNOS and SEM. Since the 2005 elections, in which opposition parties participated and won in major parts of the country, the Ethiopian government has become more repressive and has curtailed the operations of civil society groups and opposition parties through the new civil society law (Amnesty International, 2009). As a result, diaspora groups have been careful about what issues to discuss and which activities to implement.

Since 2005, the use of terms such as human rights, democracy and peacebuilding has become problematic and, as a result, many organisations opt for less controversial topics. Peacebuilding from these groups' perspectives is informed by their perceptions of the political situation in the country of origin. They therefore attempt to work on less controversial issues, such as cultural activities, youth programmes, seminars on regional conflict or invite speakers from the country of origin for direct interaction with the diaspora (NL_IN13). These conferences act as platforms for dialogue, although they can also create friction with the government, especially if the speakers are anti-government scholars in the diaspora.

2.2.5 Networking and co-operation

2.2.5.1 Local, national and transnational networks

Different respondents noted that the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands has an influence on the political processes at home. This influence is exerted through collective diaspora political initiatives such as advocacy and lobbying of host country institutions and policies. In response, the Ethiopian government has been reaching out to the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands in various ways, especially through its embassies (Lyons, 2006). These responses are underpinned by the fact that the diaspora has become a critical political actor that is spread throughout many locations and is highly connected through a complex web of transnational networks.

The Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands generally has transnational links. These links, however, vary from group to group, especially in terms of capacity to mobilise and gain visibility and significance in the settlement country. Their potential to connect at the transnational level is also determined by the political opportunities in the residence countries. There are those that are engaged in transnational politics and are intensely focussed on specific issues 'at home' as well as their identities in terms of their ethnic backgrounds.¹²¹ Some of these groups have links with similar outfits outside the Netherlands, both at the EU level as well as in North America and Australia. Many Ethiopian diaspora organisations also recognise that through transnational linkages they have the potential to mobilise international resources for peacebuilding and community development, especially those groups that come from the marginalised regions.

Groups that are not able to operate within Ethiopia have, therefore, resorted to transnational activities such as the use of the media (Internet, FM radio broadcasts in residence countries). A number of respondents have emphasised that some of these transnational activities have the potential for broader outreach and programmes that target peacebuilding. These strategies and tools are also used for advocacy and in an attempt to influence policy in the country of settlement and beyond. Furthermore, the transnational links within the diaspora and with like-minded groups in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries have played a significant role in the political process since 2005. These contacts have brought networks and access

¹²¹ See the examples of Oromo, Tigray and the Amhara groups.

through which diaspora support trickles down to the village level within various parts of Ethiopia.

2.2.5.2 Ethiopian diaspora politics, alliances and fragmentation

Ethiopian diaspora politics are inseparably linked to the early Ethiopian student movement, established by groups sent out on scholarships in the late 1960s and 70s to further their studies in North America and Europe. Examples include the Ethiopian Students' Association in North America (ESANA) and the Union of Ethiopian Students in Europe (ESUE). These movements have since fragmented along ethnic lines, hence the many factions and sub-groups in the diaspora. Within the various Ethiopian groups (organisations and associations), mobilisation takes place along political lines, in which political parties operating in the diaspora align with each other or against others based on their political affiliations and, to a greater extent, their ethnic backgrounds.

Among the groups covered in this study, their views with regard to politics and other developments in Ethiopia vary markedly and are determined by the objectives of the respective organisations. While DIR, ENNOS and SEM have opted for a more neutral or less antagonistic position towards events in the country of origin, the Oromo Community has a more critical view. However, within the organisation, there are also divergent views which lead to further fragmentation. The Oromo Community in the Netherlands, just like its counterparts in other countries, is characterised by social, economic, political and religious differences. These divisions have also been noted in the major Oromo groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) (also see de Waal, 1994), whose public activism is rather limited in the Netherlands, compared to other European countries, despite having a strong following within the various factions.

The current regime in Ethiopia is composed of a coalition of several parties and these parties are also represented in the diaspora in the Netherlands, other European countries and the United States. These representations are mainly branches or organisations set up specifically to mobilise support for the government. 'Opposition parties' are also represented within the Ethiopian diaspora in the Netherlands.

Ethiopian diaspora politics is greatly influenced by the relationship with the government (doing business with it, opposing it or being neutral). Anyone wishing to

implement projects in Ethiopia is obliged to work with government bodies. In cases where some groups have opted not to be critical of the regime in Addis Ababa, different segments of the Ethiopian community in the Netherlands accuse them of selling out or collaborating with the regime for personal or sectoral interests and not for the national interest (NL_IN14). Because of the Ethiopian government's activity within the diaspora, generally aiming at neutralising the opposition, diaspora organisations perceived to have links with Ethiopian scholars and other dissenting voices are often subject to scrutiny when planning to implement projects in Ethiopia (NL_IN15). Diaspora organisations inviting such groups are suspected of associating with left-wing or socialist political ideologies even if they invited scholars purely for their intellectual capacities or as authorities in that particular field. Still, many Ethiopian people in the diaspora hold the same views, oppose the current government and encounter difficulties when engaging in matters such as peacebuilding from the distance. However, some organisations and individuals find ways of accessing their regions to implement projects—initiatives that are crucial for devising new strategies of engagement and involvement in Ethiopia and for contributions to peacebuilding.

Other implications have been the lack of consensus for collective action and clearly identified issues over which various groups, especially the pro-democracy diaspora Ethiopians, could take a unified position. The suspicions, intolerance and continued fragmentation along political lines, have therefore meant that Ethiopian diaspora groups in the Netherlands do not have a forum for dialogue and broad consultation on issues affecting their country of origin.

2.2.6 Concluding remarks

The use of the term 'peacebuilding' in the context of Ethiopian diaspora engagement in the country of origin is very controversial since many groups have divergent views on its meaning and application in the diaspora discourse. These divergent views and interpretations are also informed by the fragmentation within the Ethiopian diaspora often along different ethnic and political lines. This fragmentation is, however, largely caused by personal and group differences as well as the continued operation of the government within the diaspora community. Government infiltration is widely believed to include 'divide and rule' strategies to keep the diaspora in a disunited state. Another effect of government involvement is that people who

disagree with government politics may have problems entering or investing in Ethiopia (NL_IN15).

Under the current political situation¹²² many Ethiopians are strategically or selectively opting for non-confrontational modes of engagement. Nonetheless, there are divergent views that motivate each group to adopt the kind of strategies they are using. Initial findings from the groups that were contacted during this study point to a complex mix of internal dynamics within the organisations and of different perceptions about the situation 'at home'. This is mainly rooted in views about the legitimacy of the current regime in Addis Ababa, the dashed hopes after the revolution, which many in the diaspora had participated in and supported financially, as well as the heavy handedness with which the government deals with opposing views. Those groups that fought for the liberation from the Mengistu regime have since re-grouped and returned to their ethnic enclaves, fighting the regime from different diaspora locations through the support of opposition groups within the country. These are aspects that are worth pursuing in an in-depth analysis.

One notable aspect during this study is the success of diaspora organisations, which largely depends upon their organisational structure and systems. The type of organisations migrants set up is related not only to the institutional and political opportunity structures available in the country of residence, but also to the characteristics of the groups involved and their different stages of settlement (Penninx and Schrover, 2001). Most diaspora groups and organisations are engaged in development co-operation, which entails involvement in smaller projects in Ethiopia. These are activities aimed at bringing relief to one's region or to friends and family left behind. Others have been politically engaged, seeking to contribute to the transition and transformations taking place in Ethiopia. It can be argued that the diaspora potential for peacebuilding varies markedly and largely depends on the type of organisations involved and the kind of issues and processes they focus on. In this regard, various Ethiopian groups have been instrumental in the processes that either contribute to or hinder peacebuilding in Ethiopia. This is more so in situations where the diaspora organisations take sides with the regime in the origin country, thereby supporting the *status quo* and the continued

¹²² A regime with dictatorial tendencies and prepared to crack down on those perceived to be opponents with brute force as witnessed in 2005 when opposition groups and students were arrested and several people killed during protests in Addis Ababa.

suppression of other groups or individuals who are seen as holding divergent opinions. By taking into account the concerns of those groups whose focus lies on the political system and process but also equity through community development, it can be argued that diaspora groups have a potential to contribute towards peacebuilding, through input into the democratisation processes and positive economic development within the local communities in their origin country (Lyons, 2006). This was clearly evident by the diaspora involvement in the 2005 general election in Ethiopia.

In terms of diaspora potential for peacebuilding in Ethiopia and in the greater Horn of Africa, one observation to point out from our findings is that peacebuilding in the region requires an understanding of the contextual differences, which also shape the perceptions and activities of the various diaspora organisations. For instance, Somalia is different to Ethiopia and Eritrea as it lacks a strong state in the respective contexts. This scenario therefore determines whether the diaspora organisations can gain access to their respective countries for direct engagement. It also shapes their perceptions, strategies and forms of engagement as shown in the case of some Ethiopian and Somali diaspora organisations in the Netherlands (NL_IN16 and NL_IN17). These organisations can also operate in the neighbouring countries and hence play an important role in what has been referred to as a distinct 'third level' between interstate and domestic politics (Shain, 2002).

Comparatively, Eritrea and Ethiopia have strong states (system and institutions) whose actions have been the cause of conflict in the region and within their respective countries. For this reason, diaspora organisations from the two countries argue that peace creation is a precondition for peacebuilding both within their countries and with neighbouring countries. Through such strategies, they have become important transnational actors (Turner, 2008). However, the question is how these initiatives can be extended to further their impact. How can the operational space be widened to allow for more active and explicit engagement?

Another significant observation are the differences in internal dynamics within the various diaspora organisations (cf. Munzoul and Manger, 2006) and how these differences are reflected in the country of origin. While there are both significant cultural differences and similarities between the various organisations

under study, the differences in their members' attitudes towards external relations in the diaspora are quite remarkable. The Ethiopian organisations have a 'closed door' attitude towards members of other groups. This attitude can be both explained by the different political affiliations (opposition to or support of the regime) and the suspicions towards other diaspora organisations, which are linked to the perceived government infiltration of the Ethiopian diaspora through agents and affiliated diaspora organisations that propagate its policies. For these reasons many do not trust those from outside their ethnic grouping or political positions.

Also significant to note is the difference in the kind of partnerships developed in the Netherlands between Horn of Africa diaspora communities for various activities. While Ethiopian and Somali organisations have partnerships with Dutch development agencies, Eritrean ones only have connections to organisations within their own community and to a great extent rely on transnational linkages. Transnational linkages are a common feature among various Ethiopian diaspora groups but much stronger at the organisational level in the Oromo Community in the Netherlands.

Ethiopian organisations work closely with Dutch development agencies, which provide financial support and other resources that enable them to undertake activities both in the host country and countries of origin. The differences within and between various groups, however, have implications for cross-country engagement and for regional peacebuilding, even though they are concerned about what takes place within each other's borders.

Antony Otiemo Ong'ayo is a Research Fellow at Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, and European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). Until 2009, he was the research co-ordinator at the African Diaspora Policy Centre in Amsterdam. Antony holds an MSc degree in Politics and Development, BSc degree in Political Science from Stockholm University and a Diploma in Labour Studies and Management.

His research interests are migration and development, land governance, peacebuilding, of state institutions, civil society and state relations.