



## **Comic Relief Submission on the Contributions of the Diaspora to International Development**

*Prepared for the UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, October 2013*

### **1. Introduction**

Comic Relief is one of the largest grant makers in the UK, raising millions of pounds annually from the UK public. We tackle the root causes of poverty and social injustice through providing grants to UK based organisations working in Africa and the UK.

We are pleased to highlight to the United Nations High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development the great opportunities there are for supporting the African diaspora, and diasporas more widely, to achieve positive change in their countries and regions of origin. We have extensive experience of funding UK-based African diaspora organisations working on international development in Africa. This submission provides a summary of our experience.

### **2. Comic Relief's Funding to African Diaspora Organisations**

Comic Relief has been providing grants to African diaspora organisations in the UK since 1999. In 2009, in partnership with the UK Department for International Development and support from Baring Foundation, Comic Relief launched the Common Ground Initiative (CGI). The CGI aims to support the contribution of UK based African diaspora organisations to international development. In addition to providing funding for projects which contribute to socio-economic development in Africa, the initiative enables Comic Relief to support the capacity development of UK based diaspora organisations by providing organisational development grants and supporting a Peer Learning Programme. The CGI also facilitates opportunities for African diaspora to engage with and share their expertise with policy makers, and increase the awareness of and contribute to the body of knowledge on the role the African diaspora play in international development. The CGI has a total value of approximately £38 million (\$57 million).

Since 1999, Comic Relief has supported 74 individual diaspora organisations, through 181 grants across 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, totalling £48.5 million in funding. A recent internal study, based on a sample of 75 diaspora grants, showed that over 800,000 individuals had directly benefitted from the work the diaspora organisations undertook in partnership with local African civil society organisations. This number is a very small snapshot of the total number of people who have benefitted as a result of Comic Relief's funding to African diaspora organisations, but indicates the reach that diaspora-led development initiatives can have.

The Africa-UK programme was established in 2011 as part of the CGI. Africa-UK enables decision makers to capitalise on the immense expertise and knowledge of the diaspora within the UK. Africa-UK is currently delivered by AFFORD (African Foundation for

Development) and has provided opportunities for over 3,000 members of African diaspora communities living in the UK to engage in development debates in the UK with policy makers, International NGO's, and the business community. Some diaspora organisations have been involved in 'mainstream' campaigns: most recently a consortium of organisations were involved in the UK IF hunger campaign, and their participation culminated in a submission to the UK Prime Minister for the 2013 G8 summit.

### 3. Comic Relief's Learning

Since 1999 period Comic Relief has had a positive experience of funding and supporting diaspora organisations. We have found that diaspora organisations make immense contributions to socio-economic development in Africa. In particular:

- Diaspora organisations bring their intellectual, political, social and cultural skills and resources to bear on development initiatives they support in Africa;
- Diaspora groups tend to develop relationships with local African civil society organisations which display high levels of trust, flexibility and empowering processes that provide good quality support to local organisations and good value for money;
- Some diaspora organisations bring a paradigm of development that is different from mainstream NGOs, bringing fresh perspectives and ways of working that draw on the unique bridge that diaspora organisations form between the UK and countries of heritage.

Many of our diaspora grantees have received repeat funding, highlighting the quality of the work they support in Africa, the strength of the relationship between the diaspora organisation and their partner(s) in Africa, and Comic Relief's on-going commitment to funding diaspora organisations.

In 2012, Comic Relief commissioned a study to assess the achievement of a sample of 75 diaspora grants which were awarded between 1999 and 2012. The key learning is outlined below.

- The diaspora organisations sampled directly contributed to **positive change in the lives of 808,116** people living across Africa. The development interventions by these diaspora organisations focused in three programme areas: **Women and Girls, Enterprise and Employment and People Affected by HIV and AIDS**. This highlights the ability of diaspora organisations to tackle sensitive cultural issues effectively as well as their focus on business and job creation to tackle poverty in African countries.
- Comic Relief's diaspora grantees supported local African civil society organisations to **increase access to basic services, improve livelihoods and income for project beneficiaries and increase awareness and knowledge of peoples' rights**.
- In addition to project level outcomes, the study found **capacity development** is a key impact of diaspora organisations' work. African partners reported stronger financial, reporting, leadership and governance structures, as a result of their relationships



with their UK diaspora partner. Some African partners have become facilitators themselves and now support capacity development of other local organisations.

- The study reinforced the experiences of Comic Relief that **relationships** between diaspora grantees and partners in Africa are **equitable and based on mutual trust and understanding**.

#### 4. Recommendations

Comic Relief urges states to take note of the input from civil society through the informal interactive hearing held by the President of the General Assembly in New York on 15 July 2013.

Based on our experience as a grant maker we propose the following recommendations:

- All actors **recognise the vital role** that the diaspora play in the development of their countries and regions of heritage. The UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development has an important role to play in emphasising the positive contribution diasporas make to development in their communities and regions of heritage.
- Building on Comic Relief's Common Ground Initiative and other similar initiatives, we call for a long term **international grant funding scheme** with capacity building and advocacy support, dedicated to diaspora organisations involved in development work in their countries of origin or heritage

#### 5. References

Binaisa, N. and Oeppen, C (2011) *'The African Diaspora in the UK and their role in development in sub-Saharan Africa'*

Comic Relief (Forthcoming) *'Review of Support to Diaspora Organisations 1999 - 2012'*

#### 6. Websites

[www.comicrelief.com/apply-for-a-grant/programmes/common-ground-initiative](http://www.comicrelief.com/apply-for-a-grant/programmes/common-ground-initiative)

[www.africa-uk.org/](http://www.africa-uk.org/)

#### 7. Contact

Ruth Talbot  
Policy and Programme Manager  
[R.Talbot@comicrelief.com](mailto:R.Talbot@comicrelief.com)

Comic Relief's Common Ground Initiative Team  
24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

