



Centre for Just Peace and Democracy

Berghof Peace Support

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**Unlocking the Potential of the Kashmiri Diaspora in the
'Big' Society for Development and Just Peace**

Editorial Note

*The policy papers were produced in the context of the project *Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace*. We commissioned brief policy and background papers (mainly) from activists to get their views on how they perceive their political activism, as opposed to how outsiders view them. To generate as many policy papers as possible, reflecting diverse viewpoints, the project invited activists and academics via a “Call for Papers”. Since the majority of the papers were written by activists or by those who are both activists and academics, the papers cannot be viewed as a neutral account of the present history. Nonetheless, we believe that these are unique perspectives that are hardly recognized in the scholarly writing and should be given space for reflection.*

The views expressed are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the Berghof Peace Support or any of its constituent agencies. Any comments or feedback should be addressed to the authors directly.

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Unlocking the Potential of the Kashmiri Diaspora in the ‘Big’ Society for Development, and Just Peace. *Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace Project*, Berlin: Berghof Peace Support/Luzern: Centre for Just Peace and Democracy.

Abstract

The people of Jammu and Kashmir are homogeneous in their broader national and territorial identity, but very diverse in their cultural, linguistic and racial identities. The Kashmiri diaspora has always been recognised for their qualitative strength of mutual cooperation, self-help support mechanisms and strong links with their place of origin through family structures, business and inheritance interests in Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, the quantitative strength, contribution and capacity of the Kashmiri diaspora to influence change in the development of their chosen places of abode and origin needs recognition and in-depth study to unlock their real potential.

This paper will identify the common bonds of identity and traditions of those people in UK whose ethnic heritage comes from the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The paper will further look at the impact of the non-recognition and non-inclusion of the Kashmiri community in British ethnic monitoring systems at the national level and ask how this will influence their social mobility.

The paper particularly focuses on their role as a diaspora community and explores what role the Kashmiri diaspora leadership plays in community development in the 'big' society and what strategies they employ to influence policy and change in their current places of abode and in Jammu Kashmir? Therefore, the Kashmiri diaspora community in the United Kingdom will be the community of interest as a case study in this paper for the broader question of diaspora engagement for development and peace.

1. Introduction¹

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been a key centre of the 'silk' trade route between south and central Asia for centuries. The people living in the folds and foothills of the Himalayas are famous for their hospitality, hard work, intellectual wisdom and trade. They are fortunate being citizens of 'Heaven on Earth', but not always fortunate enough to make a decent living due to a number of reasons. Often in the history of its existence, with varying borders and rulers, this formidable land of mystic Sufis, Pundits, Gurus, Lamas and Dogras has been a centre of natural and man-made disasters and conflicts.

After the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the legacy of partition created a conflict by default that resulted in the division of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This division has created prolonged misery and unstable governance structures, and a *de facto* status quo in the region. Under the administration of two arch rivals, India and Pakistan, its key strategic position at the cross roads of South and Central Asian trade routes has brought more challenges than opportunities for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and still continues to do so. Often, Kashmiris had to immigrate to other countries to earn a decent living, where they have always maintained their distinct way of life, culture, identity and heritage.

2. Kashmiri Diaspora Community in the United Kingdom

In the 1950s and 1960s large numbers of people from Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) started immigrating to different parts of the industrialised world to take up opportunities created through the labour shortage in Europe. Through their previously established networks while working in British Merchant Navy in 1930s and 1940s, people from the Mirpur district of AJK mainly immigrated to the UK. This immigration accelerated due to the construction of the Mangala Dam in the late 1960s, which caused the displacement of over 100,000 people in and around Mirpur. People from other parts of the state, Azad Jammu Kashmir (the Pakistani administered part), Gilgit Baltistan (federally controlled by Pakistan) and Jammu and Kashmir (Indian administered part) migrated at large to the Middle East in the 70s and 80s. A new wave of immigration to the United Kingdom started in the 1980s and 1990s through family reunions, skilled migration continued in the 2000's and still continues because migrants are in search of better employment and earning opportunities given the fact that there are no considerable industrial-scale economic activity or opportunities available in the Pakistani or Indian administered parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

¹ This paper was presented at a workshop entitled "Sharing across Diaspora formations" that brought together activists and academics working with different diasporas and refugee groups, such as Kurds, Kashmiris, Somalis and Tamils, and was organised by Centre for Just Peace and Democracy, Switzerland, at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), University of London, 30 October 2010. The author is thankful to Javaid Hayat from Berghof Conflict Research for reading first draft of this paper and his valuable comments.

Almost all of the researchers on South Asian communities in the UK recognise that “two-thirds of all the Pakistanis in the UK are actually from Mirpur and its surrounding areas in (Azad) Jammu and Kashmir” (Ballard 1990, 220) and, according to the Office of the National Statistics (ONS) the number of Pakistanis is up to 916,700². This means that the Kashmiri diaspora community from (Azad) Jammu and Kashmir is 603,800. These numbers do not include the population in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. There is a growing presence of immigrants, migrant workers and refugees from the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir and also from Gilgit and Baltistan in the UK. Arguably, there are around 800,000 people who have an ethnic origin and heritage in Jammu and Kashmir currently lawfully living in the UK, which makes them the second-largest total population of non-white minority groups in the United Kingdom.

3. The Challenge of Exclusion from the Public Policy Realm

Addressing the needs of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and increasing their participation in civic and public life is one of the key indicators for increasing community resilience, outreach and development in the ‘big’ society and the United Kingdom’s public policy. A number of research reports and initiatives addressing these issues at a policy level hardly mention any reference to the existence of the Kashmiri diaspora community in its own right.

Kashmiris as an Ethnic Group: Discrimination and barriers to contributing to the ‘Big’ society³

Earlier research by Roger Ballard (1990, 1991), Nasreen Ali et al. (1996) and Daalat Ali (2007) have identified a number of issues related to Kashmiri integration in the wider British society, their political and national identity and their attainment levels in education.

In a study in 2009, Peter J. Aspinall (2009, 1424) argued that

“Indeed, analyses of the use of detailed codes by local education authorities (LEAs) in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) reveal some ‘pressure’ points in the 2001 Census classification. (...) the largest group amongst the 19 local authorities using ‘Asian other’ codes was ‘Sri Lankan Tamil’, followed by ‘African Asian’, ‘Kashmiri Other’, ‘Nepali’, and ‘Sinhalese’. For 11 Local authorities using extended Pakistani Codes, the largest of these extended groups was ‘Mirpuri Pakistani’, followed by ‘Kashmiri Pakistani’”.

Both of these categories are actually Kashmiris.

A study of the public service’s data base has revealed that thirteen local authorities⁴ in England recognise Kashmiri as an ethnic minority in its own right in their local community

² See Office for National Statistics, at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=14238> (October 2010).

³ Big Society is a key policy agenda presented by David Cameron to shift balance of power from Whitehall to the neighbourhoods (see Watt 2010).

monitoring mechanisms, but there is no detailed research available for how these authorities have used their Kashmiri service user's data to inform their policies or what changes they had brought about in their council's action plans to address the needs of the Kashmiri community.

Another key data set is the 'Labour Force Survey' (Office for National Statistics 2010), which does not record 'Kashmiri' as an ethnic minority in its data. This clearly shows that Kashmiri statistics in England are not monitored in a single identifiable way. Hence, the disaggregation of data and analyses of impacts on the Kashmir community will continue to be a key challenge for all public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations, particularly in community mapping and design and in the delivery of their services according to the needs of this significant ethnic minority community in the UK.

The Kashmiri community has concerns that they will continue to suffer double discrimination due to their non-inclusion in the ethnic classification category in their own right in 2011 Census codes: Lack of opportunities for effective and wider engagement between the Kashmiri diaspora community, policy-makers and service providers has resulted in the creation of multiple barriers at various levels in accessing the services and fully participating in the 'Big' society. Kashmiri non-inclusion in the ethnic monitoring codes at the national level and the issues arising due to the discrepancies in disaggregation of qualitative and quantitative data at the local level are key challenges for all stakeholders, especially the new UK coalition government that is emphasising data presentation, localism and a 'radical shift of power from Westminster to local people'; this will change the whole Equality Impact Analysis mechanisms and race equality agenda.

Amnia Lone, Chair of the Women's Solidarity Forum, argued at the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Policy Forum on 15 September 2010 in Manchester that this will particularly impact on individuals experiencing multiple discrimination due to their intersectionality who will become 'even further adrift down the margin of invisibility'⁵.

The 'Big' Society agenda and proposals to make all of the decisions at the neighbourhood level will bring many opportunities and challenges for people of minority ethnic communities and especially for the Kashmiri diaspora community in various parts of the United Kingdom. This is particularly the case in those local authority areas where Kashmiris are not recognised as a local ethnic minority community or where they are not represented in large numbers e.g. rural areas.

Neighbourhood groups are not always inclusive and can marginalise minority communities, which would further exclude BAME communities from the emerging agenda. It was perceived that this is not being acknowledged in the model that is being advocated in the government's 'Big' Society plan and that such recognition is vital. According to Tony Durrant, "The lack of support and representation for some communities will mean that this will leave

4 Birmingham, Bradford, Rochdale, Oldham, Manchester, Kirklees, Leeds, Luton, High Wycombe, Rotherham, Pendle, Trafford, Hyndburn. Mapping Kashmiri inclusion in local monitoring systems (an ongoing research paper by author).

5 BME Policy Forum is a Northwest Regional Forum supported by One Northwest. The author and Amina Lone are both members of this policy forum. NW Policy Forum: September Notes, at <http://www.onenorthwest.org.uk/documents.asp?section=Key%20Documents&page=&idoc=52> (October 2010).

some of the most marginalised without support as they fall beneath the cracks” (Tony Durrant OBE, One North West).⁶

Considering the arguments by Amina Lone and Tony Durrant, it seems obvious that the Kashmiri diaspora community in particular and other diaspora communities, along with established black, Asian and minority ethnic communities will face significant challenges in their fight against racism and prejudice.

4. The Potential

The remainder of this paper will focus on the possible solutions and strategies to minimise the impacts of non-recognition and non-inclusion as a separate ethnic group in ethnic monitoring systems. It will further look at the current role of the Kashmiri diaspora leadership and explore how the community can have influence at decision-making levels to realise the real potential of the Kashmir diaspora.

In order to achieve their rightful place in the public policy realm in the UK and minimise the impact of non-recognition, the Kashmiri diaspora community and representative organisations need to establish effective strategies and working relationships with race equality partnerships and networks working in line with the principles of the Tackling Race Inequalities Prospectus (Department for Communities and Local Government 2009) by:

- Working with national and local bodies promoting race equality to help them work more effectively;
- Increasing levels of civic participation, volunteering or representation in civic or political institutions;
- Addressing inequalities of access and reducing gaps in outcomes for the ‘Kashmiri diaspora community’.

4.1 Kashmiri diaspora leadership and influence at strategic decision making levels

In the 2010 UK parliamentary general elections, Britain’s first Kashmiri-heritage female Member of Parliament (MP), Shabana Mehmood, was elected from Birmingham. Interestingly, all of the media channels reported her election as Britain’s first ‘Muslim’ female Member of Parliament (Birmingham Post 2010), but no one has mentioned her Kashmiri heritage or ethnicity. In contrast, the ethnic heritage of Rushanara Ali MP and Yasmin Qureshi MP, both Muslims, females and elected for the first time as well, were rightly identified and presented in media reports as the first British Bangladeshi and First British Pakistani female members of Parliament, respectively. Two other British Kashmiri members of Parliament, Khalid Memood MP and Atta-ur-Rehman Chishti MP, have roots in Kashmir, but are hardly ever acknowledged in the

⁶ One North West BME Voluntary and Community Sector Submission to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry into Localism. The author has contributed a collective response on behalf of Rural BME communities in Cumbria in this submission. Copy available on request.

mainstream as being members of Parliament of Kashmiri origin. Similarly, Lord Nazir Ahmad, the first British Kashmiri member of the House of Lords, is often presented as a Muslim peer in wider media circles and as Kashmiri where he chooses so.

Despite such a high profile of achievements in civic and public life, this process started with the election of the first-ever Asian and British Kashmiri Lord Mayor of Bradford, Councillor Mohammed Ajeeb, in 1985. These exceptionally talented and hardworking political leaders do not relate themselves as role models with the Kashmiri diaspora community, especially for British Kashmiri youths, one of the largest BAME youth communities in the UK. It is frustrating to note that their 'gray' Pakistani or Muslim identity is more known in wider British public life than their original Kashmiri ethnic heritage and identity.

The lack of a clearly identifiable and recognisable leadership, capacity-building infrastructural support organisations and an effectively working national diaspora network, contributes to the situation that the Kashmiri community has very little influence at the strategic decision-making level. However, a number of Kashmiri activists and organisations are working towards changing this by holding numerous meetings, seminars and gatherings. Sometimes members of parliament or EU members of parliament are invited to the meetings, which happens more frequently if elections are upcoming. Often, however, there are no follow-up activities except some press statements in the ethnic media. This dilemma of part-time activism and politics leads the Kashmiri diaspora community nowhere; every time they take stock of their activities or efforts, they go back to square one.

In order to make their activities effective, the Kashmiri diaspora community organisations and their leadership need to understand the key roots to influence Parliament and local decision-making structures.

4.2 The Kashmiri diaspora community's role and influence in U.K Development Aid

The Kashmiri diaspora has been playing a pivotal role in sustaining communities and supporting economically disadvantaged family members within various parts of Jammu and Kashmir. After the 2005 Kashmir earthquake,⁷ the Kashmiri diaspora community members in various parts of the world and in the UK were at the forefront of the mobilisation of emergency aid and volunteers to support the victims and survivors. However, their efforts were not sustained in the long-term through continuous involvement in livelihood and development projects.

However, diasporas have a great potential to contribute to development in their homelands as Kuznetsov (2006) argues that members of expatriate community have three resources that position them to make a unique contribution to the development of their home countries: unusually high motivation to have a significant influence on the course of events in spite of and against all odds; knowledge and expertise of both global opportunities and local particulars; and, frequently, financial resources to act on new opportunities. When these resources combine, usually as a matter of pure luck, the contribution of Diasporas can be spectacular, as the experience of China and India indicate.

⁷ New world Encyclopaedia, Kashmir Earthquake 2005, at http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/2005_Kashmir_earthquake (September 2010).

This is not happening in its entirety in Jammu and Kashmir due to the barriers created through bureaucratic barbed wire of Indian and Pakistani control in all of the matters related to international trade, investment and partnerships and the lack or non-existence of capacity-building infrastructural support for Kashmiri diaspora networks, groups and individuals.

To enable and release the potential of the Kashmiri diaspora to contribute to sustainable development in Jammu and Kashmir, one needs to analyse their role in influencing public policy and input in setting the UK's international development intervention priorities. There are few studies available on the political and social mobilisation of the Kashmiri diaspora in the United Kingdom (Ali et al. 1996; Sokefield 2009), but research about their role in influencing policy and making change through UK development aid and links with UK Aid Network⁸ is very limited in the available literature.

In order to increase strategic influence in the UK and work towards making Kashmir a key focus in its foreign and international development aid policy, the Kashmiri diaspora needs to recognise its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, they are one of the most active ethnic minority communities in the civic and public life of England and Wales and, to some extent, in Scotland; but, on the other hand, they are not engaged or involved in consultation processes in setting UK development aid policy and priorities for the South Asian region.

4.3 The Kashmiri diaspora's role in community development in their country of origin

Ballard (2003) argues that despite their 'capital' richness 'Mirpuris' otherwise sophisticated and successful entrepreneurial capabilities have not led to more successful and sustainable outcomes in their home base'. He further argued that Given that the majority of British-based Mirpuris remain in active communication with their kin back home, they also visit them as frequently as their finances allow. As a result, the best part of 5,000 free-spending visitors from Britain now arrive in Mirpur every month, and between them remit somewhere between £500 million and £1 billion back home each year. All this has had a far-reaching impact on the District's local economy (Ballard 2003, 62).

This is not only true for Mirpuris in District Mirpur of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), but also for the majority of the people from other parts of AJK and Gilgit Baltistan, working in the Middle East, Europe, Canada and the USA. They brought in high amounts of 'capital', but no tangible economic regeneration or entrepreneurial activity is happening in their locality or in the wider AJK or Gilgit Baltistan region.

After the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, the latest example of the lack of infrastructural development in the AJK is the Azad Jammu and Kashmir government's inability to act according to the needs and requirements of the people in earthquake-affected areas due to Pakistani authority and control on all infrastructure development projects through ERRA.⁹ A large amount

⁸ The UK Aid Network (UKAN) was formed in November 2004 to co-ordinate policy and lobbying efforts as part of MAKE POVERTY HISTORY. UKAN's members decided to continue working together, and UKAN is now an important means for UK NGOs to work together for more and better aid, at <http://www.bond.org.uk/pages/uk-aid-network.html> (October 2010).

⁹ Earthquake Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Authority, at <http://www.erra.pk/> (October 2010).

of capital from international donor agencies and the Kashmiri diaspora community has been invested in a number of projects, but failed to bring about any significant developmental change.

Sardar Aftab Khan (2007)¹⁰ argued that after living more than half a century in a close and controlled setup people are now seeing light at the end of the tunnel for an open society where they could be master of their own destiny. They can design and manage development projects themselves with direct assistance from NGOs. This new progressive making of civil society is a threat to the old guards of his master voice. That is why they are trying to roll back the INGOs from the area so that they can again influence the people of Bagh through development schemes and charity donations for their power game.

International donor agencies could work more effectively if they would involve or consult Kashmiri Diaspora community organisations and activists for development projects in Kashmir.

One of the major improvements after the 2005 earthquake in AJK is access to information and communication technology. This could be utilised as a golden thread for bringing in much-needed community development and capacity-building infrastructural support. The use of social-media and internet technology could help in transferring knowledge and transforming the local agriculture economy, tourism, the arts and crafts industry and internet-based business and employment opportunities. Kashmiri Diaspora community in different parts of the world and in the UK need capacity building support to form effective partnerships with international development agencies for a variety of projects.

5. Connecting Diaspora Community Networks

In the age of social and community networks, a diaspora community cannot progress and achieve its objectives in isolation. Mendizabal, Ramalingam, Schenkenberg (2008) have identified different forms and six functions of a network. The six functions, filtering, amplifying, providing, convening, community-building, learning and facilitating could be further disaggregated into two categories: 1) agency and 2) support.¹¹ On the basis of their model, a network of diaspora community networks who share similar goals could be developed. A network model for the Kashmiri diaspora could be developed through a number of activities in each function.

1. Filtering and Amplifying:
 - a) Advocacy and support for individuals who promote new, little-known, or little-understood ideas and issues, giving them weight and making them more widely understood;
 - b) Influencing decision-making policy and practice; organising and managing information;

¹⁰ See <http://sudhnuti-ajk.blogspot.com/2008/01/after-earthquake-understanding-bagh-ajk.html> (October 2010).

¹¹ An agency bears responsibility for pursuing a particular change in policy or practice; a supporting role is one in which the agency itself remains with a community group or network.

2. Convening and Community-Building:
 - a) Helping individuals start and develop groups; promoting and sustaining the values and standards of individuals or organisations;
 - b) Connecting people and giving voice through networking and partnerships; bringing together different, distinct people or groups of people;

3. Investing and Providing, Learning and Facilitating
 - a) Promoting equal access to public services, skills development and training opportunities; offering a means to give Kashmiri diaspora groups the resources they need to carry out their main activities;
 - b) Increasing employability and enterprise; helping members carry out their activities more effectively;

This regrouping of Mendizabal, Ramalingam, Schenkenberg's (2008) six functions into three working areas will obviously need further discussion among all diaspora communities, Kashmiri diaspora organisations and 'active citizens'. However, Kashmiri diaspora community members and their organisations could use this model as a base to start participation in the 'Big' society in the United Kingdom. This will provide them with an opportunity to link in and integrate with the wider community and enable them to channel wider expertise and knowledge for the development of their community in the UK and their place of origin.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The way forward for all of the Kashmiri Diaspora community representatives, activists and their respective organisations is that they review their organisational propositions, develop a Kashmiri Diaspora community strategy and come up with a specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and time specific (SMART) action plan for themselves and enter into partnerships and networks where possible for common objectives under a common 'compact'.¹² This will provide them with the key tools to influence strategic decision-making levels in the 'Big' society and help them in unlocking their potential for development and just peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

Kashmiri diaspora community organisations could also use a range of available mechanisms and forums as part of larger civil society networks to influence and shape the policy in their country of residence and could become a key channel for linking international development initiatives, enterprise, education and business networks in their country of origin, Jammu and Kashmir. Every Kashmiri can spiritually, mentally, electronically or physically

¹² Black and Minority Ethnic Voluntary and Community Organisations Compact Code of Good Practice: May 2008, at http://www.thecompact.org.uk/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=100321 (October 2010).

participate one way or another in a variety of community activities. To bring about the desired outcomes as a result of this engagement, either individually or collectively, every member of the Kashmiri diaspora community needs to identify his/her area of expertise and how he/she could volunteer or become a part of initiatives for human and capital resource development required for bringing just peace and development in Jammu and Kashmir.

To start the development of a Kashmiri diaspora community strategy and a SMART action plan, the Kashmir Development Foundation (KDF)¹³ will start a series of workshops and community engagement exercises from December 2010 onwards. Hopefully this will provide a base to establish a network of networks within the Kashmiri diaspora community in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Recommendations

- The Kashmiri diaspora community, despite all the odds, has demonstrated through their resilience and desire to achieve equality in socio-economic status, inclusion in cultural heritage of British society through ethnic monitoring systems as a distinct ethnic minority community so that they could become an equal partner in every sphere of life in the UK. The contribution of the Kashmiri diaspora as a distinct community in the economy and cultural heritage of the United Kingdom needs recognition and the inclusion of Kashmiris in the UK has to be extended to all relevant levels and quarters.
- There is a need for a comprehensive study on issues around socio-economic status, inclusion and inequality in accessing public services. Kashmiri diaspora community involvement in initiatives addressing underrepresentation and discrimination, tackling inequalities and promoting community cohesion is important for their development and strategic influence in the United Kingdom.
- The Kashmiri diaspora's aspiration, determination and willingness to be an active partner in efforts for conflict transformation, development and peace needs recognition and sustainable support to realise this potential to bring just peace and much-needed development in Jammu and Kashmir.
- A properly constituted, professionally managed and run Kashmiri diaspora capacity-building infrastructural support network of networks is required to design, develop and deliver a lasting change for the benefit of all stakeholders.
- To increase sustainable investment and economic regeneration within Azad Jammu Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, one of the key policy recommendation as part of this policy paper is a transit trade agreement between the government of Azad State of Jammu and Kashmir and

¹³ Kashmir Development Foundation is a Kashmiri Diaspora development NGO based in UK and working in Pakistan administered Jammu and Kashmir, at www.kdfajk.org (October 2010).

Pakistan. This will enable Kashmiri businesses and traders, tax-free export, import and trade of all goods to, from and within AJK, Gilgit Baltistan. This would also create further opportunities for trade across the 'line of control' under current movement of goods and transport arrangements between AJK and Indian-administered Jammu Kashmir. Consequently, this would become a key link for bringing in much needed peace, development and economic regeneration through direct international trade and prosperity in the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir.

- The Kashmiri diaspora community consists mainly of Kashmiri refugees and migrant workers from AJK, Gilgit Baltistan and Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir in Europe, Canada, the USA, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Their needs, aspirations, contribution and role in the Kashmiri diaspora formation needs further research and study, as they have direct contact, interests and influence in the civic and public life in Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, they could play a significant role in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and development.
- Another key development would be working in partnership with other diaspora communities to share knowledge, learn from good practices and work jointly on issues in areas of mutual interests and cooperative development. This could be achieved through thematic communities of practice, strategic development and management of diaspora networks.

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