



ST. KITTS AND NEVIS DIASPORA POLICY

GOVERNMENT OF ST KITTS AND NEVIS

DIASPORA POLICY

I. Introduction

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines Diaspora as members of ethnic and national communities who have left but maintain links with their homeland. These links can be real or symbolic. In the context of St Kitts and Nevis and for this Policy; the Kittitian-Nevisian Diaspora refers to its emigrants and their descendants, who live and work abroad but wish to contribute to the overall development of St Kitts and Nevis.

According to a 2013 World Bank (WB) Study on the Caribbean Diaspora; the number of persons who migrate almost equals the number of persons who currently reside in their home country, of which ninety percent (90%) demonstrate a keen interest in investing in their homeland. Although they reside outside their country of origin or ancestry, many people legitimately share its collective identity and feel compelled to contribute in various ways to nation building. Their support may come through individual remittances or involvement in national associations; through productive investment, including assistance to build local infrastructure; reduce poverty; build capacity and make charitable contributions that directly lead to socio-economic development.

Additionally, the diaspora populations and their community networks offer practical solutions to local challenges. This was recently realized when, in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria (2017), members of the Dominican Diaspora quickly and effectively mobilized to collect well-needed supplies and to transmit them to their home country. There are many other examples of substantial aid flows from diaspora communities following catastrophes. Thus, disaster relief is yet another means of contributing to nation-building.

Increasingly, Diasporas are being recognized as a valuable [re]source in the effort to lessen the impact of brain-drain in developing countries. Home countries are therefore encouraged to explore and create new initiatives to access and optimize the expertise, knowledge, and experience within the Diaspora. Also, governments are being encouraged to engage with their Diasporas as they provide opportunities for access to international labour markets, trade, business and cultural exchanges.

In September 2015, the international community signalled its collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to realize 17 Goals ranging from the eradication of poverty to

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renewing worldwide partnership on global commons. To this end, there is tremendous value in ensuring that the Federation works with its diaspora population to realise these Goals and to achieve its sustainable development agenda. While the government looks to its Diaspora for contributions to national cohesion and socio-economic development; there is a clear understanding of the catalytic role it can and must play, as a government, in facilitating an environment in which those contributions can be absorbed, integrated and allowed to flourish in mutually beneficial relationships.

Since this will require the government to establish adequate mechanisms to encourage the Diaspora's support and integration; the Diaspora Policy will seek to guide:

- (a) the creation, promotion of suitable diasporic partnerships for national development;
- (b) the Diaspora to realize their roles and to make meaningful contributions as legitimate participants in the development of their native country; and
- (c) efforts to animate coordinated actions that harness the varied resources of the Diaspora to promote sustainable development.

To this end, the Government of St Kitts and Nevis undertakes to develop the necessary policy and legislative frameworks as well as governance structures to enable full implementation of the Diaspora Policy.

II. THE POLICY'S VISION, MISSION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Vision

To secure long-term cooperation and partnership between the Government of St Kitts and Nevis and the diaspora to promote sustainable development.

Mission

To facilitate structured, coordinated and consistent interaction between St Kitts and Nevis and its Diaspora community.

Goal

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To ensure that national development is strengthened through the constructive engagement of the diaspora.

Objectives

- Respond appropriately and in a timely manner to attempts made by members of the Diaspora to contribute to national development;
- Outreach to and network with the Diaspora to mobilize support for increased opportunities for brain-gain and [integral] sustainable development;
- Promote cooperation between Diaspora and local institutions in-country to strengthen partnership;
- Encourage the sharing of expertise, experience, knowledge and skills transfer;
- Create a database of skill-sets and opportunities, including areas of common interest to bring the Diaspora, local partner institutions and the Government together in a structured way;
- Assist local institutions in accessing and applying the Diaspora's intellectual and technical resources to meet their business and developmental goals;
- Provide guidance and updated information on government's identified investment priorities;
- Work with local businesses and institutions to ensure strategic deployment of time, expertise and experience and/or financial resources;
- Identify areas for and encourage philanthropic contributions from the Diaspora;
- Encourage the Diaspora's input in informing and strengthening policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Ensure the development and/or strengthening of all necessary policy frameworks in St. Kitts and Nevis for effective participation of the Diaspora in national development;
- Promote nationalism, patriotism and enhance cultural connectivity among the Federation's diaspora and their descendants.

IV. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This Policy will be underpinned by several guiding principles which influence how this mutually beneficial partnership will be governed.

Engagement and Inclusiveness

On-going engagement efforts to ensure all interested individuals have equal opportunity to dialogue with Government and to participate in initiatives that advance the national development agenda.

Communication

Effective use of modern communication tools, i.e., social media, to keep the Diaspora informed and updated on policies, actions, programmes and events of general or specific interest.

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Integrity

Interaction between St Kitts and Nevis and the Diaspora will be conducted with professionalism. It will be based on trust, confidentiality, fairness, respect, and consistent with the need for data protection.

V. STRATEGY FOR DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

National engagement with our diaspora is not new. Administrations have long had a practice of convening diaspora meetings during high-level visits overseas where a large cohort of St Kitts and Nevis nationals reside. However, it is understood that there is need for a more structured diaspora engagement, which is not limited to the occasional town-hall meetings; hence the decision to establish a strategic policy to guide and ensure regular and sustained interaction. This Policy identifies the diaspora as an integral and inseparable part of the nation. Therefore, the following strategies and actions are recommended to facilitate more robust and dynamic interaction with the Diaspora:

A. Creating the right institutional structures to engage diasporas

Generally, diaspora communities interact with a broad spectrum of society. Connecting with the diaspora and leveraging their talents, skills and resources for development, involves several government departments, agencies and other partners. Therefore, to streamline the process and increase efficiency; a dedicated Department will be established as a one-stop-shop. This will allow the Diaspora to source all the necessary support and advice from within one department.

Actions:

1. Creation of a Unit for Diaspora Affairs with an appropriate operating budget. This unit will function as an intermediary between national entities – public, private and civic - and the Diaspora.

Mandate:

- Develop an integrated database of nationals abroad with details on local initiatives, priorities and opportunities for collaboration and partnership;
- Map the geo-location of the diaspora to enhance and streamline outreach;
- Develop an inventory of Diaspora expertise, professional qualifications and skills-sets;
- Organise high-level meetings to embed collaboration between Government and the Diaspora;

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- Maintain regular contact with the diaspora through diplomatic and consular offices overseas.
2. Establishment of a Diaspora Consultative Committee. This Committee will comprise a representative from the Returning Nationals Group; St Kitts and Nevis Associations overseas and government officials. It will work closely with the Diaspora Unit.

Mandate:

- Consult with the diaspora in respective jurisdictions, through the High Commissions/Embassies/Permanent Missions and Consulates General/Consulates and Honorary Consulates;
- Make recommendations to the Diaspora Unit;
- Advise on diaspora-related programs and policies;
- Promote solidarity between the diaspora and the Federation;
- Assist consular officials in the protection of Kittitians and Nevisians abroad;
- Identify potential investors in the diaspora;
- Promote a positive image of St Kitts and Nevis.

B. Creating an enabling environment through our overseas missions

The role of missions and consular offices continues to evolve to cope with the increase and the concomitant demands and responsibilities in nationals residing abroad. Usually, they are the first point of contact for diaspora members in need, and best-positioned to foster an environment of trust between governments and the diaspora communities. In addition to passport assistance and other consular services; they also organize cultural, business and trade events, and consultations with and among expatriate groups. Our overseas missions will be better equipped to assist in providing current information, guidance and training on integration and reintegration issues; and to engage in dialogue with host governments for favourable immigration and diaspora policies.

Actions: The Government commits to:

1. strengthening and enhancing capacity of Missions and Consulates in locations identified
2. expanding its diplomatic or consular footprint in strategic locations with a high concentration of nationals

Mandate

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- Organize opportunities for structured dialogue among Diaspora members, Missions, Embassies and Consulates to discuss matters critical to Diaspora integration;
- Develop outreach policies that will facilitate the involvement of Diaspora in national development; Assist the Diaspora in influencing changes in policies and capitalizing on opportunities created by policies in host countries;
- Encourage establishment of St Kitts and Nevis Associations and charitable foundations;
- Build networks of business and community leaders

C. Leveraging the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Enabled Services to facilitate effective communication

Communication is vital to strengthening the relationship between the Diaspora and its country of origin. Effective communication is necessary to build trust, raise awareness, and to create buy-in and ownership of joint initiatives and programmes. Its use will include creating mechanisms to promote dialogue on issues pertaining to national development goals and priorities.

ICT platforms are useful in enhancing the delivery of communication for the benefit of the Diaspora. The use of innovative technologies and social media platforms provide for the ease of disseminating information, gathering data, and an online forum for networking and open dialogue; therefore, bridging the geographical gap between the Diaspora and Capital. Innovative technologies and social media have played a key role in informing, guiding, educating, connecting and galvanizing diasporas into action as well as bridging distances and changing diaspora relations with their home countries.

Actions: The Government commits to:

1. developing and operationalizing an interactive Diaspora web portal and offer online consular services through the relevant line Ministries, missions and consulates.
2. increasing the use of technology to enable virtual interface between Diaspora and government representatives

D. Developing mechanisms to facilitate return and reintegration

Diaspora engagement should also encompass those members of the Diaspora who opt to return to their country of birth or ancestry at retirement or earlier. The Government should also seek to provide incentives for retirees and others to attract them and encourage their return to contribute to national development.

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Actions: The Government commits to:

1. developing policies that allow for ease of mobility, transfer of assets, investments in business or any other entrepreneurial ventures by diaspora members;
2. providing concessions for importing personal effects and creating seamless processes for clearing them upon arrival to the country
3. developing a framework for the transferability and portability of social security benefits
4. negotiating bilateral instruments to facilitate the transfer of Social Security and retirement benefits
5. developing a resourceful and efficient Returning Nationals Unit under the aegis of the Diaspora Unit

Mandate

- create a reintegration program to include debriefing and counselling as needed
- develop a brochure with relevant information to guide the returnee

E. Developing mechanisms for engagement with Diaspora Youth and engender a sense of identity and belonging

Many countries are now experiencing dramatic increases in their youth populations. Youth possess a cornucopia of talent and offer great promise for national development. It is imperative that governments begin to reach out to the youth in the Diaspora to harness their creative minds and untapped potential for sustainable development.

Actions: The Government commits to:

1. developing initiatives to attract, incentivize, and maintain the interest of the youth in their country of origin or ancestry;
2. promoting culture as a way of shaping their cultural identity and connection with St. Kitts and Nevis; this will also take the form of organizing seminars to assist young people to understand the country's culture and history;
3. encouraging young people in the Diaspora, who are entitled, to acquire citizenship by descent and to heighten awareness of citizenship rights and process in St Kitts and Nevis;
4. engaging with Diaspora youth and create avenues for joint initiatives and to encourage youth participation in governance and development.

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F. Creating Conducive framework to encourage contributions to development

Empirical evidence has shown that diaspora members have long contributed to development of their home countries. Governments intend to tap into this by introducing relevant policies as well as the requisite legislative and regulatory framework that encourage greater participation of Diaspora members in the development of St. Kitts and Nevis.

1. Tax incentives

The government will explore possibilities to:

- Waive customs duties and fees on household goods of returnees
- Exempt diaspora investments through provision of reduced tariffs on imported raw materials and equipment

2. Portable benefits

- Assist in facilitating portable benefits especially in relation to pensions and medical and life insurance benefits.
- Negotiate social security agreements bilaterally or as a part of regional agreements

3. Flexible citizenship laws and residency and visa requirements

- Allow for dual or multiple citizenship
- Introduce flexible residence and visa requirements

4. Special property rights

- Allocate lands and properties for purchase by members of the Diaspora

5. Laws in relation to political rights

- Update legislations relative to the rights of members of the Diaspora to vote from overseas

6. General laws or policies in recognition of the diaspora

Introduce legislation that officially acknowledge the Diaspora as an important component for national development. This will demonstrate to the Diaspora that they are valued at home and motivate a more active role in the development of their homeland.

VI. AREAS FOR MAXIMIZING DIASPORA INVOLVEMENT

Diaspora communities do make contributions to a variety of areas and sectors. It is imperative, therefore, to better integrate these contributions and to optimize this impact into development processes.

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Government will study policy and programmatic options that can facilitate and increase the participation of the Diaspora in government's prosperity agenda.

A. Human capital

The huge human capital available among Kittitians and Nevisians in the diaspora ranges from health, education, sciences, information technology and other important sectors, which are vital for national, sustainable development agenda. Moreover, a country's international competitiveness and economic growth are heavily dependent on the availability of a skilled and productive workforce. Like other countries; many of St. Kitts and Nevis' most talented tend to emigrate in pursuit of greater opportunities for themselves and their families. The Government will therefore take steps to leverage diaspora knowledge, experience, skills and financial resources to complement those at home for accelerated national development.

Actions: Government commits to:

1. identify and recruit qualified nationals from the diaspora to serve in key position in local institutions;
2. create an environment conducive to the temporary and/or permanent transfer of such resources necessary to build capacity;
3. seek volunteer services and expertise from the Diaspora in priority areas within the Federation;
4. offer material and non-material incentives in exchange for services;
5. encourage joint partnerships between the diaspora community and local actors/agencies including the private sector and civil society;
6. twin communities across borders to facilitate exchange of personnel.

B. Economic capital

I. Trade, Investment and Entrepreneurship

There exists great diasporic potential for growing the home economy in trade, investment and entrepreneurship. The Lack of investments tends to stymie sustainable growth in developing countries. Investments in small and medium size enterprises or foreign direct investment plays a significant role in

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reducing poverty and in creating economic dynamism. These types of investments have the potential to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation.

Diaspora communities, based on their ancestral links with the country of origin, are often less risk-averse relative to starting or engaging in business activities in their country of origin or ancestry. Moreover, their knowledge of the local political, social, economic, and cultural climate, as well as their personal association, could give diaspora members an advantage over others when investing in or starting businesses in their countries of origin and ancestry. Recent research suggests that diaspora entrepreneurship contributes to national development by creating businesses and jobs; by stimulating innovation; creating social capital across borders; and in channelling political and financial capital toward their countries of origin.

Actions: The Government commits to:

1. create a one-stop-shop for investment information;
2. heighten awareness about opportunities for investment amongst the Diaspora;
3. simplify procedures and processing time for opening accounts with financial institutions in St Kitts and Nevis;
4. encourage diaspora community to explore suitable markets for major export commodities
5. facilitate ease of doing business in the Federation
6. Provide incentives such as tax rebates and waivers on duties of certain goods and services;
7. lower import barriers, and;
8. provide information about local business regulations and laws.

II. Remittances

The potential impact of remittances on recipient households and on the macroeconomic stability of a country continues to attract the attention of governments, the private sector, civil society and the international community. As the most obvious link between migration and development, remittances have been shown to contribute as much as twenty (20%) to the Gross Domestic Product of some countries. The Diaspora, therefore, represents an important source of foreign exchange.

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Actions: Government commits to:

1. work with the financial institutions through which migrants transmit funds to negotiate lower transaction fees/transfer costs;
2. explore developing or encouraging the development of alternative and cost-effective channels for remitting monies;
3. educate the Diaspora community on policies that have been put in place to facilitate cheaper, more efficient and secure channels for remittance flows.
4. create the necessary monetary policies that will facilitate the transfer of resources from the Diaspora into the Federation.

III. Tourism

With the closure of the Sugar Industry in 2005, tourism has become the major contributor to the Federation's GDP and economic growth. To further the growth of this industry, the diaspora community will be encouraged to become "tourism ambassadors" for the country, by promoting the country's tourism products and services among their friends, families, co-workers and associates. The current Policy acknowledges the important role the Diaspora can play as "ambassadors". Similarly, the Diaspora is a potentially important consumer market for tourism-related products.

IV. Philanthropy

Members of the Diaspora also make monetary donations for altruistic purposes to their homeland, in addition to remittances to families and friends. This can be important in securing socio-economic transformation and policy development. It is an established fact that people of varying economic means make meaningful contributions to philanthropic causes. Hence, Government intends to leverage such donations to increase their impact on the development of infrastructure and services.

VII. ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONSIDER IN RELATION TO THE DIASPORA COMMUNITY

A. Rewarding and recognizing Diaspora participation

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Each year, nationals in St Kitts and Nevis are honoured for their varied contributions to the development of the Federation in a variety of sectors and areas. By including a Diaspora Category in the National Honours Programme; the Government intends to celebrate and recognise the invaluable contribution of the Diaspora population to national development.

B. Diaspora Day

Government will designate a day to be regarded as Diaspora Day. The structure and activities for Diaspora Day will be developed with input from the diaspora community to ensure their fullest participation.

C. Central Online Hub

Efforts will be undertaken to facilitate the development of a Central online Hub to connect the Diaspora Associations with Government. The online platform will promote dialogue and action on economic development in St Kitts and Nevis. The numbers, distribution, skills, prosperity, and level of integration of the Diaspora will thus inform a raft of opportunities for Diaspora partnerships.

D. Database of Diaspora Associations and Businesses

Government will actively support the creation of a comprehensive database of professional, skilled Diaspora and Business Associations to facilitate partnerships between local professionals and those abroad. The exercise of mapping Diaspora competence, skills, availability, resources and national priorities, offers an opportunity to generate greater knowledge on opportunities and partnerships both at home and abroad

E. Establishing a Diaspora Network

Government will encourage representation of the Diaspora Network in the design and implementation of the Federation's development strategies. The Network, once established, is expected to contribute to activities that support economic growth as well as to promote St Kitts and Nevis' reputation globally. It is expected to become a valuable resource for Government and members of the network will be invited to

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provide advice to Government on a variety of issues ranging from international trade and tourism to the environment and health care. The Network may be invited to lobby on behalf of the Government.

F. Cohesion within the Diaspora Network

Government will facilitate the development of initiatives that promote a sense of social cohesion and national identity among the various Diaspora groups. The Network will allow for the activities of the Diaspora groups to be streamlined and harmonized and for best practices to be shared among the respective groups. The Network will also encourage greater and more effective participation, linkages among the groups and, greater synergies.

VIII. Conclusion

Discussions on and with Diasporas are not new. In fact, this issue continues to be addressed by scholars, international organizations and government policymakers. However, the growing global diaspora communities and the contributions they bring to development, call for strengthened dialogue and closer relationships between diaspora communities and their countries of origin or heritage, and thereby ensuring that they are incorporated into national development.

The engagement of Diasporas requires an enabling environment. Diaspora members spontaneously develop networks and transfer resources and knowledge back and forth. Therefore, to develop their full potential, policies related to integration, social protection, citizenship, voting rights, and rights of return and the possibility to build partnerships between countries of origin and destination, are essential in facilitating this engagement.

This Diaspora Policy is geared towards integrating the Diaspora into the Federation's overall development plan to ensure sustainable development and greater economic resilience. The Policy highlights the relevance of diaspora engagement, the potential for their participation in national development, as well as the policy and programmatic options to maximize this potential. It also envisages the steps to be undertaken by government to take full account of its Diaspora and its role in nation building.

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The Diaspora Policy also highlights the prominence and legitimacy the Government attaches to the Kittitian-Nevisian Diaspora and outlines the future “whole of government” approach being adopted. It promotes increased partnership between and amongst government, the private sector and civil society, but ultimately; it is hoped that this Policy will reassure the Diaspora community of the new levels of commitment with which the Government intends to engage, listen and to collaborate and to incorporate them, their ideas, skills, expertise, experience and resources in the national development agenda.