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Diaspora Engagement and Investment: Governance and Policy in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Diasporas commonly play a significant role in advancing the progress of their homeland. Many countries have successfully integrated diaspora concerns into their national development strategies. This article explores how the Bangladeshi state governance and policies aim to shape the engagement and investment of the Bangladeshi diaspora. The complexity of the investment landscape, where remittances are traditionally channelled towards immediate consumption rather than transformative investments, necessitates a shift in perspective. Importantly, while maintaining cultural ties presents challenges, the need for strengthened collaboration becomes evident to leverage the diaspora's engagement as a catalyst for national development in Bangladesh. The study underscores the importance of language in strengthening the cultural ties with the homeland. The absence of Bangla cultural centres acts as an impediment to sustaining the bond with the second and third generations of Bangladeshi diaspora.

Forward:

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1. Introduction:

In the surge of globalisation, diaspora engagement and development are emerging as a new development mantra. Since diaspora communities are "social fields that link together the country of origin and the country of settlement" (Ma & Cartier, 2003), Therefore, this engagement encompasses various dimensions, extending beyond the economic realm to encompass social and political aspects as well. The psychological connection diaspora members have to their homelands makes them more likely to maintain ties to and involvement in their home countries (Safran, 1991). This develops their transnational bonds, linking their communities with diverse motivations. These motivations can manifest in forms such as philanthropy, altruism, or ethnic affinity. Today, the transnational flow of diaspora, information, knowledge, and ideas across political, economic, and socio-cultural domains is greater than ever. This presents a new opportunity for nation-states to incorporate diaspora communities into their state mechanisms for the purpose of national development (Newland and Turner, 2010).

Bangladesh is a developing country facing significant development challenges (Khan and Hossain, 1989). The country has set a goal to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve upper-middle-income country status by 2031, as outlined in its vision for 2041. However, the country is confronted with significant challenges such as a limited range of exports, low foreign direct investment (FDI) at less than 1.0 percent of GDP, and an overwhelming reliance on remittances (Mahmood, 2021). What compounds this challenge is the absence of a comprehensive mechanism to channel the substantial influx of remittances into productive development, as a major share of remittances is predominantly allocated to household consumption. The entire framework of migration governance revolves significantly around the inflow of remittances (IOM, 2021). This dynamic plays a pivotal role in shaping up institutional dynamics of labour migration within the national development framework. The 8th five-year plan, which targets reaching USD 30 billion in annual remittance inflows by 2030 (Population Reference Bureau, 2022), raises doubts about this ability being achieved with only the country's current dominance in labour migration. In this context, the diaspora is widely recognised as a significant developmental player (Brinkerhoff,

2011), and the Bangladeshi diaspora is no exception. However, Bangladesh has not been successful in effectively utilising the potential of involving its diaspora in the core of national development endeavours (Islam, 2011; Barkat, 2014; IOM, 2021)

As a migration expert, this has sparked my research interest, drawing from my experiences working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Bangladesh. I have delved into the exploration of how Bangladesh can effectively engage with its diaspora population, which is scattered across different countries. This exploration focuses on harnessing the productive use of remittances, encouraging investments, and facilitating the sharing of human and social capital. Throughout my work with the IOM, I have observed a promising prospect of utilising the relationship between remittances and investment in fostering growth (Giuliano & Ruiz-Arranz, 2009). Particularly when the financial sector in Bangladesh faces challenges in meeting the credit needs to intensify overall economic diversification (Hassan and Shakur, 2017). This realisation has made me aware that by strengthening transnational ties, substantial progress can be achieved through fostering investment, nurturing diasporic knowledge (Yong & Rahman, 2013), and involving the Bangladeshi diaspora in their respective community development. However, it is crucial to delve into the understanding of why the current institutional framework has been unable to effectively harness the immense development potential that exists. And “what factors are preventing the harnessing of the positive impacts of migration on the country of origin's development” (Boyle and Kitchin, 2013), encompassing both financial and non-financial aspects of the Bangladeshi diaspora.

Hence, recognising the significance of this context, this research is designed with the aim of examining the existing migration governance on cross-border economic interactions between the Bangladeshi diaspora and their homeland. Focusing especially on how the present policies and institutional arrangements cohere with diaspora engagement and the discernible variation in attaining such policy outcomes. This has further examined the influence of social resources such as culture and common ancestry, which can impact and lead to different paths of incorporation of the diaspora in the society of origin (Ahmed, 2020). For this, I posit that the transnationalism lens is imperative. By applying this as my conceptual frame, I examine how various factors (political, economic, and social) operate simultaneously

in both the home and host countries, influencing diaspora actions and decisions. Since both diaspora and transnationalism revolve around the nexus of homeland ties (Faist, 2010), it is crucial to study their interplay in migration research. This dual allegiance can foster development in the homeland through remittances, knowledge transfer, and investments. Throughout the research, my analysis has illuminated these dimensions, unearthing insights into the intricate dynamics of transnational practices that shape and reinforce diverse levels of engagement. Through these explorations, the study aims to answer:

The key research question:

“How the Bangladeshi State Governance and Policies Try to Shape the Engagement and Investment of Bangladeshi Diaspora”.

The research aims to identify the findings with the following sub-questions:

1. What are the prevailing opportunities and barriers encountered by the Bangladeshi diaspora in terms of financial and non-financial investment prospects?
2. What are the transnational factors and mechanisms through which cultural knowledge and investment practices are transmitted across generations within the Bangladeshi diaspora community?
3. How does the Bangladesh government's policy influence the diaspora to invest in Bangladesh?

The paper begins with a literature review in Section 2, which describes diaspora engagement and homeland development, emphasising the significant gap in the Bangladeshi context. The theoretical framework in Section 3 introduces how transnationalism serves as a prevalent and effective strategy to uphold and nurture connections between diasporas and their respective places of settlement. Section 4 outlines the qualitative methodology, highlighting the data collection techniques used to extract valuable insights related to diaspora and development dynamics.

The subsequent chapter in Section 5 presents the analysis of the study. It reveals that to fully harness the potential of the Bangladeshi diaspora, there needs to be a shift in policy focus from necessity to opportunity-based approaches. This entails

fostering cultural connections, strengthening transnational mechanisms, and enhancing their shared identity and collective voice. A notable finding underscores the pivotal role of language in connecting subsequent generations with their homeland. The paper concludes by summarising the research aims and presenting the key findings of the study, while also suggesting areas for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Interplay of Diaspora engagement and development:

Scholarly debate about what constitutes effective diaspora engagement continues to thrive. Craven (2021) argues that diaspora engagement strategies in the development field are contextually embedded in complex entanglements of power relations. This requires establishing a mutual responsibility shared between the diaspora and their homeland (Gamlen, 2018). The concept of mutual responsibility in the context of diaspora engagement is contingent upon various factors, including the diaspora's characteristics, historical dispersion, the current needs of the diaspora community, and how the country of origin defines its diaspora within the framework of national development (Sinatti and Horst, 2015). Such an act requires developing effective communication between diaspora groups and the origin of the state. Empirical evidence suggests that "structural variables, along with the specific policies implemented by the country of origin, as well as the responses from diaspora communities, constitute crucial aspects in the establishment of effective communication channels" (Tierney and Minor, 2004).

The 'diaspora engagement' is widely used in several different ways (Gamlen, 2018). Hence, the state's attempts to shape diaspora engagement are due to its tremendous development implications. This entails a myriad of dedicated activities that involve an intricate interplay of economic, political, social, and cultural dynamics due to the diverse nature of the diaspora and its fluid characteristics. Moreover, fuelled by an altruistic motivation towards their nation of origin, "diasporic communities often exhibit a strong eagerness to contribute to the economic and social progress of their homeland" (Kessy and Shayo, 2022). In the context of diaspora development, this perspective develops a link for our understanding of both the 'diaspora' as an influential agent and the intricate structure of the 'origin country' (Faist, 2010). By interconnecting this aspect, this gives a nuanced insight into the interplay between diasporic influences and the developmental dynamics of the origin country. The transnational bond plays a pivotal role in fostering this wide array of exchange between diaspora and their homeland, further initiating the multifaceted nature of diaspora-driven development initiatives. So, this transnational relationship between diaspora

engagement and development is central to my research on understanding the Bangladeshi state's approach to its diaspora. Specifically, given the substantial contribution of the Bangladeshi diaspora to the country's development through remittances, cultural exchanges, and investments, it becomes critical to analyse how state policies either facilitate or inhibit this potential.

2.2 Transnationalism ties to collective remittances:

The communicative process of transnationalism encompasses various dimensions, including diasporic engagement; the transmission of remittances emerges as a significant point of the diaspora's ties to their home country (Elo & Minto-Coy, 2019). These financial transfers primarily serve the purpose of supporting friends and family, reflecting the diaspora's sense of moral responsibility to contribute to the development of their homeland due to their emotional ties and attachments (Vaalder, 2013). However, the individual impact of remittances on economic development has been a subject of scholarly debate. Scholars emphasise a notable differentiation between periodic remittances from economic migrants and remittances from the diaspora. Periodic remittances generally address immediate needs, while diaspora remittances are characterised by a demand-oriented and investment-focused approach (Ullah, 2013).

So, diaspora transnationalism extends beyond the act of remittance, touching upon the investment decisions of diasporans, often intricately linked to their homeland or specific home regions (Elo and Riddle, 2016). This linkage is facilitated by their specialised knowledge of local markets and the advantages derived from their social networks (Gillespie et al., 1999). Through the social networks motivated by homeland altruism or philanthropy, diaspora communities undergo a substantial influence that intensifies their commitment to development initiatives benefiting their places of origin (Gillespie et al., 1999). This trend has led to the phenomenon of collective remittances, where resources are channelled towards projects such as constructing schools, health centres, refurbishing town halls, and more (Lacroix, 2018). Such initiatives play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between organised groups of diaspora and state structures, creating what Evans (1996) terms "state society synergies". Exploring these 'state society synergies' is vital in unravelling the opportunities and challenges faced by the Bangladeshi diaspora in their financial and non-financial investment

pursuits. This has the potential to increase bridging social capital in communities (Varda, 2011).

2.3 Diasporan knowledge, culture, and its generational effect:

Economics is not the whole story. Culture plays a defining force in shaping the identity of migrants (Kanchan and Chansauria, 2020), so diaspora engagement in the development role is contingent upon the strength of cultural ties (Ullah, 2013). When we analyse migration through a transnational lens, it becomes evident that people's experiences before migration significantly shape their actions in the countries where they settle and what they remit back to their homelands (Levitt, 1998). Scholars suggest that diasporan dynamics within transnational social spaces are shaped by both internal and external factors, leading to the emergence of various forms of capital, including economic, human (education, skills), and social (resources from social and symbolic ties) (Faist, 2010; Riddle, 2008; Markley, 2011). The act of remitting this knowledge and these practices exerts a strong influence on the reinforcement of transnational bonds. As a result, the future achievement of retaining this knowledge relies on the efficacy of the country of origin's policy, which must adeptly integrate the knowledge into its developmental goals to ensure success (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

Similarly, strengthening the cultural heritage and transnational ties fosters a sense of unity among the diaspora (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). This is evident in the Indian Diaspora and how they develop their unified global identity as the Indian Diaspora (Kanchan and Chansauria, 2020). Likewise to the Chinese diaspora, Confucius Institutes have been established in numerous countries to promote Chinese language and culture among the diaspora and local populations (Paradise, 2009). This shared cultural similarity with the homeland gives rise to diaspora community-level norms and values promoting the social desirability of homeland economic involvement (Nielsen & Riddle, 2007).

Some scholars emphasise the time-sensitive nature of institutional reform in effectively engaging the diaspora in their home country (Chimienti et al., 2019), particularly for the second-generation diasporas, which are harder to engage and assimilate as they have less of an emotional tie to their home country (Ullah, 2013). First-generation immigrants are more inclined to engage significantly in their homelands when the cultural distance is small (Waite and Cook, 2011). Therefore, it is important to use cultural diplomacy for diasporic communities to maintain interaction between states (Collins and Bekenova, 2017). This further impact on migrants' desire to remain in contact with their home country and reproduce their culture in the host country affects businesses, markets, and capital flows alike, generating unanticipated multiplier effects (Guarnizo, 2003). These insights form a cornerstone for this research, as it delves deeply into Bangladeshi diaspora engagement across generations, bridging both cultural and economic narratives, all while underscoring their significant role in driving national development.

2.4 Diaspora Policy: Catalysts for Engagement:

The diaspora policy framework is shaped by a constellation of transnational factors that promote efficient communication and engagement within the diaspora (Dickerman, 1976). Since they hold significant development potential, they affect remittances, investments, businesses, trade, skills, and experiences, resulting in profound impacts on social and cultural roles in the country of origin. So, the success and outcomes of diaspora engagement initiatives are significantly influenced by the home country's perception of its diaspora population and the policies it implements to foster interaction with them (Ding, 2015). This provides a crucial aspect for a comprehensive engagement of the diaspora. The first step for any government is to devise a strategy that identifies its own goals for facilitating stronger diaspora involvement in development (Agunias and Newland, 2012). Any weak institutional frameworks pose challenges for diaspora investors, as they perceive financial risks, a lack of support, and political fragmentation as investment barriers. All diaspora policies are predicated on the assumption that, beyond state and citizenship limits, a shared national life obligates the state to be accountable not just to its own people but also to co-national communities and persons residing abroad (Kessy & Shayo, 2022). Thus,

diaspora policies are dialectical processes shaped by numerous parties' disparate objectives and strategic interests. They are diversified and dynamic (Gazso', 2017).

In light of the different approaches to diaspora engagement discussed above, Bangladesh is at a crossroads (Yong and Rahman, 2013). The diaspora possesses significant potential for both financial and non-financial contributions (Barkat, 2014). However, realising this potential is contingent upon the Bangladeshi government's capacity to formulate and execute effective policies and strengthen its institutional framework. In the next section, I delve into Bangladeshi literature to further examine the opportunities and challenges associated with mobilising the diaspora, as well as how existing structures impact the diaspora's relationship with their homeland.

2.5 Bangladeshi Diaspora profile, engagement, remittance, and development:

The Bangladeshi diaspora, spread across different destination countries, includes a mix of unskilled migrant labourers, skilled workers, skilled professionals, and second- or third-generation Bangladeshi descendants (Siddiqui, 2004). However, numerous studies conducted in Bangladesh indicate there is a lack of precise data regarding the types, numbers, and destinations of the Bangladeshi diaspora residing across various countries globally (Siddiqui, 2004; Monem, 2018; IOM, 2021). This further manifests in the ambiguous demarcation between diaspora members and short-term migrants, casting shadows on accurate data about diaspora as well as the size and location (Siddiqui, 2004). The absence of a clear demarcation between diaspora members and migrants presents challenges in distinguishing the segregation of remittances (Salomone, 2006).

Bangladesh stands as one of the highest recipients of global remittances; a substantial portion is channelled towards household consumption rather than productive development (Ullah, 2013; Siddiqui, 2004; Monem, 2018). This demonstrates a significant gap: the whole migration governance cannot incentivize and facilitate diaspora members, especially those with higher skills and resources, to invest in productive ventures, thereby contributing to long-term economic growth and sustainable development (Siddiqui, 2004; Ullah, 2013).

The challenge of Bangladeshi diaspora engagement extends beyond remittances; the persistent challenges include issues like political fragmentation, the absence of a collective identity, and difficulties in aligning policies with diaspora needs (Shams, 2016; IOM, 2021). Bangladesh consists mostly of homogeneous people with the same ethnic identity, except for a few differences in different geographical locations. However, domestic political divisions within the diaspora community influence their interactions in host countries and impact the formation of a shared cultural identity (Shams, 2016).

These poorly performing, uneven democracies lead to distancing the differences among the diaspora sub-groups, thereby hindering the cultivation of unity within the diaspora for meaningful engagement. So, comprehending the interplay of structural forces and cultural practices is crucial for grasping the intricate nature of diasporic identity, agency, and discourses that may echo exclusivist nationalist appeals (Drzewiecka and Halualani, 2002). This poses a significant gap in the current migration literature in Bangladesh.

2.6 Knowledge network, Generational dynamics, and Policy impact:

The Bangladeshi diaspora's eagerness to uphold ties with their homeland is evident through their contributions in knowledge transfer, investments, and technology mobilisation (Barkat, 2014). However, the absence of coordination and integration among diaspora initiatives hinders the creation of synergies, resulting in the dispersion and underutilization of resources (IOM, 2021). Since the first generation has enduring connections, the absence of engagement efforts could profoundly impact the second generation. Such an impact could potentially lead to greater assimilation rather than integration into host societies (Siddiqui, 2004).

Different literature reviews suggest that the second and 1.5 generations are more likely to invest their resources and participate in civic activities in their settlement country, attempting to integrate and pursue upward mobility (Hammond, 2013). In the Bangladeshi context, both first- and second-generation expatriate Bangladeshis (EBs) exhibit varying degrees of connections with their country of origin. The country offers dual citizenship to those who do not want to lose their foreign passport (Rashid, 2020). The research also indicates that the profound emotional attachment of the first

generation in Bangladesh may not automatically pass on to the second generation (Ullah, 2013). To institutionalise the diaspora linkage effectively, the state, civil society, and the private sector in Bangladesh must implement innovative measures and collaborative efforts (Monem, 2018).

Bangladesh currently does not have a well-defined and effective diaspora policy. Thus, there is evidence of several gaps and limitations in the institutional and regulatory framework (IOM, 2021; Monem, 2018; Siddiqui, 2004). Particularly noteworthy are the discernible discrepancies between the legal framework and the actual execution of these measures. Additionally, existing institutional mechanisms do not adequately involve the diaspora in the planning and execution phases of development initiatives. This disparity further accentuates substantial divergences between the demand of diaspora members and supply-side responses from relevant authorities (IOM, 2021).

Therefore, this leads to a lack of understanding and capacity to effectively optimise and strengthen formal transnational ties while harnessing the potential of the diaspora. This situation serves as a reminder to conceptualise an understanding of what the diaspora can do for policymakers rather than what policymakers can do for diaspora investors (Gamlen, 2018). These dynamics concerning the Bangladeshi diaspora define the foundation for my analysis. Examining their distinct profiles, remittance behaviours, culture, and generational tendencies reveals both barriers and opportunities for effective engagement with their homeland. The evident gaps between state policies and their implementation further emphasise the need to investigate the significant effect on the Bangladeshi diaspora. I have discussed the details in my analysis section.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Defining and Understanding Diaspora

This is apparent that there is no universally agreed definition for the term diaspora. Grossman (2019) highlights that the concept of diaspora remains inherently debatable. As a result, academic discourse persists in discussions about the fundamental elements that define the boundaries and characteristics of a diasporic entity. Faist (2010) regarded diaspora as a specific form of transnational community, with the former concept insisting on identity formation and mobilisation and the latter on ties and practice. So, the concept of diaspora has undergone a process of transformation from simply a dispersion of people to the formation of identity; this includes the cultural, historical, and political heterogeneities of immigrants in their postulations (Bhandari, 2021). Today, the term 'diaspora' refers to virtually any population that is considered 'de-territorialized' or 'transnational'. These people maintain connections that go beyond just one country and include social, economic, and political ties (Wetengere & Shule, 2014). This viewpoint constructs my conceptual view, portraying Bangladeshi diasporas as social formations of Bangladeshi migrants in different countries. The social construction of these migrants is shaped by a shared culture and history, intricately linking them with the transnational social field.

3.2 Shared Interests -Diaspora and Transnationalism:

Scholars continue to thrive, making transnationalism a more robust and effective analytical concept when compared with "diaspora". The term 'transnationalism has been used to describe the daily practices of migrants involved in diverse activities (Baubock and Faist, 2010). Therefore, this can be said that both diaspora and transnationalism encompass, highlighting their shared interests in homeland ties and the integration of individuals living abroad. These activities involve a diverse range of actions, such as reciprocal interactions and support within kinship networks and political engagement in both the country of emigration and immigration (Lacorix, 2018). This further assists in analysing how political and economic factors intersect, potentially impacting diaspora engagement with their homeland.

Transnationalism extends its broader scope beyond traditional diasporic groups and includes various social formations such as business networks, social movements, and cross-border communities (Faist, 2010). While diaspora approaches tend to emphasise collective identity and shared imagination despite geographical separation (Kissau & Hunger, 2017). This prioritises the study of cross-border mobility and its impact on identity and culture (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Nevertheless, it is the broader scope and emphasis on mobility within the transnationalism framework that provide a nuanced understanding of diaspora dynamics and their intricate connection with the homeland. Viewing the diaspora as a transnational community, this approach recognises all forms of social and symbolic connections among migrants across borders (Faist, 2010). Such interplay is instrumental in my analysis of the Bangladeshi diaspora, particularly their engagement levels regarding investment, knowledge transfer, and the formation of a shared identity.

3.3 The liminality of Transnationalism and Diaspora Development:

Hometown transnationalism serves as a prevalent and effective strategy utilised by diaspora communities to uphold and nurture their connections with their respective places of settlement (Lacroix, 2018). This has produced significant policy attention from numerous developing countries due to the diaspora's contributions to the development of projects aimed at benefiting their places of origin. Scholars often attribute this phenomenon to the primary aspect of a specific sense of belonging. Lacroix (2018) describes the collective remittance practice as a cornerstone of this connection, which is exemplified through initiatives such as constructing schools, health centres, refurbishing town halls, and more. These collective remittances play a crucial role in symbolising allegiance to their community and serve as a channel through which diaspora communities transfer facilities, resources, and practices from their country of settlement back to their place of origin.

The process of diasporisation is closely intertwined with the construction of memories. Scholars argue that the interplay between the collaborative efforts of fostering hometown progress and the act of memory-building significantly shapes the transnational engagement with the migrants' country of origin. The reason for this is that engaging in homeland activities is believed to enhance the level of social recognition within both diaspora and homeland communities (Aharaoni 1966). Social

recognition is intertwined with the diaspora's sense of identity and plays a crucial role in socialising diaspora into their respective cultures. This construction of cultural and social identities within the diaspora is influenced by the circulation of money, goods, information, and lifestyles. These socio-cultural identities, connections, and their consequential further impact on development influence conceptualising the Diaspora-Development Nexus (Peck, 2022).

The relationship between diasporas and development is necessarily complex. Different scholars emphasise the diverse nature of diasporas, challenging basic categorizations and highlighting the need for a more sophisticated understanding of their political dynamics. Faist (2010) argues that diasporas, as transnational communities, are groups with collective identities; however, diasporic networks and transfers are not uniform; they are more characteristic of specific subgroups within the community (Tambiah, 2017). Thus, it is contended that transnational practices "may be constant, periodic, or just occasional; likewise, they may occur consistently between multiple social domains—politics, economics, or culture—or may be limited to just one" (Waldinger 2010). As a result, the scholars argue that transnationalism is not a widespread condition, and the role of local political dynamics has been overlooked in previous scholarship.

3.4 Transnationalism and Institutionalisation:

The structural forces and transnational cultural practices provide a dynamic relationship to articulate diasporic identity, agency, and discourses. This may further echo in constructing a nationalist appeal for the diaspora (Drzewiecka and Halualani, 2002). Diasporic communities build connections and interactions between the government of their homeland (including government agencies and officials) and the community in their homeland, as well as the cross-border networks of fellow diaspora members. This transnational communication enables them to shape and adapt their identities in a shifting political and economic landscape (Bhabha, 1990). In response, authorities in countries of origin and residence, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) then attempt to channel migrants' transfers of financial, social, and human capital towards planned development (Faist, 2008; Piper, 2009; Raghuram, 2009). Consequently, this drives the formalisation of their affiliations,

leading to the creation of government entities addressing the interplay between the state and its diaspora (Agunias, 2009).

Diaspora institutions dedicated to emigrants and their descendants have been extensively highlighted by policymakers (Agunias and Newland, 2012). These organisations expand their influence beyond cross-border boundaries, projecting their infrastructural power internationally. They also shape how migrants perceive themselves and transform the spatial dynamics of states in ways that go beyond traditional geopolitical ideas centred on nation-states (Agnew, 2005). Though diaspora institutions vary widely in form and function (Gamlen, 2014). By delving into these mechanisms, this research uncovers the factors enabling or hindering diaspora-led development by examining the interaction between Bangladeshi diaspora individuals and organisations, including state-led institutions. It also explores how younger generations inherit and adapt cultural and investment-related knowledge, perpetuating diasporic linkages.

3.5 Governance and Diaspora involvement:

Development constitutes a consensus-driven matter where individuals are keen to participate (Lacorix, 2018). This participation is not linear but rather dynamic and intricate, involving the social, economic, and political realms. Therefore, Agunias and Newland (2012) argue that no road map can be a "one-size-fits-all" model for governments working to engage their diasporas more effectively. The study examines how governments can enhance diaspora involvement in development; this should begin with goal clarification and outlining internal tools like administration and finance for achieving these aims. Such an aim should be embedded within the strategic planning of diaspora institutions, not as something to be swept to the side (Mannan, 2018).

Similarly, diaspora cannot have significant effects when the basic elements of good governance are not integrated into development planning (Kessy and Shayo, 2022). The government framework in many developing countries often displays a distinct horizontal structure (Phillips, 2004). This leads to a noticeable incongruity between bureaucracy and society, with significant implications for the socioeconomic progress of these countries (Haque, 1997). Providing further impact by weakening the

institutional framework, such as through poor enforcement of laws, protection, regulations, property rights, and informal institutions, is challenging (Williams and Efendic, 2019). Another challenge of the bureaucratic framework of developing countries is incoordination: various origin-state agencies target or interact with emigrants and their descendants in different direct and indirect ways (Gamlen, 2014). Governments are increasingly discussing the importance of diaspora organisations, but have been accused of talking more about them than listening to or working substantively with them (IOM, 2021).

3.6 Multifaceted Process of Diaspora Engagement:

The conceptual underpinning of transnationalism offers invaluable insights into the comprehension of diaspora engagement. The long-term emigrants from Bangladesh fit in nicely with this concept (Siddiqui, 2004, and Monem, 2018). Apparently, their main commitment lies with their host countries, for various reasons. However, as a transnational community, they also maintain ties with Bangladesh to fulfil their social and cultural requirements (Siddiqui, 2004). Though not necessary, all transnational communities can develop full-fledged diasporic linkages with their homelands (Safran, 2004).

Therefore, diaspora engagement represents a multifaceted process involved with a myriad of contextual factors. The inherent fluidity and dynamic composition characterising diasporic entities provide a challenging complexity. Their heritage or ethnicity entails ongoing dialogical negotiation between the positions of feeling simultaneously assimilated, separated, and marginalised (Bhatia, 2002). Therefore, the engagement strategies of the first generation of diaspora members are not consistently replicated by their successive generations (Morawska, 2018). Hence, the pursuit of formulating a single policy or formal diaspora institution alone is not capable of sustaining their engagement (Dickinson, 2017). So, a whole-of-government approach, ensuring policy coherence across all sectors and levels of government, combined with a whole-of-society engagement, is crucial to ensuring the active inclusion of the diaspora in national development (IOM, 2021).

4. Methodology:

4.1 Research Approach:

To answer the key research question and sub-questions in my investigation, I apply a qualitative analysis by examining the actions of players or agents (Dana and Dumez, 2015), which enables me to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual factors influencing those actions (Williams and Vorley, 2015). Through the lens of my research methodology, I have identified unique challenges encountered by the Bangladeshi diaspora in connection with their homeland, as well as the influence of transnational cultural norms on their socio-economic investment choices. The core findings of my research come from my qualitative primary research consisting of 9 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a diverse set of participants, as presented in the table below:

Sl.	Respondent Pseudonym	Respondent Designation	Type of Respondent Organisation
1	Migration Expert	Executive Director	Diaspora Organisation
2	Retired Govt. Official	Confidential	Confidential
3	Govt. Officials	Confidential	Confidential
4	Homeland Investment Expert	President	Diaspora Organisation
5	Civil and Political Rights Activist	Executive	Diaspora Organisation
6	Parliament Member	Lawmaker	Bangladesh Parliament
7	Cultural Activist	Individual	Individual
8	Migration Expert	Confidential	UN body
9	Academician	Teacher	University

To facilitate communication with my sample participants, I utilised my established personal connections from my previous work experience at the IOM Bangladesh before joining the University of Sussex. This advantageous position allowed me access to a diverse range of Bangladeshi institutions and networks, including diaspora organisations in different locations. I acknowledge that my position might impact the data collection process. Therefore, I developed a set of open-ended questions with the intention of fostering an environment that encourages participants to articulate their viewpoints freely and authentically. Through this conscientious

approach, I aim to not only enhance the richness and depth of the collected data but also to ensure that my own perspective remains a transparent part of the overall research landscape (Rossi and Lenzini, 2020).

Before conducting interviews, I take the initiative to communicate with participants to ensure smooth coordination and agreement on a suitable interview schedule. Although the recruitment process presented challenges due to participant availability, it is important to highlight that, despite not achieving the initially envisioned sample size, I have carefully selected a diverse and valuable pool of participants. This diverse group of individuals brings depth and insight to this study.

Overall, the study utilises purposive sampling to enable a more targeted investigation into the areas of engagement, experiences, insights, and contributions of the Bangladeshi diaspora. Through the utilisation of in-depth interviews, I have facilitated a targeted exploration of critical policy barriers and institutional gaps in Bangladesh regarding diaspora engagement. This research project has received ethical review approval by the University of Sussex's Social Sciences and Arts Research Ethics Committee (ER/LK400/1).

4.2 Analytical Approach:

A semi-structured questionnaire is formulated for data collection. The questionnaire is designed in a manner that accommodates the diverse participants mentioned above, aligning with the specific focus of the research. Before commencing each interview, I have ensured to share a set of indicative questions with the participants. This step helps them obtain a comprehensive understanding of the focus of the interview and allows them to prepare effectively. In analysing the qualitative data, I meticulously review and categorise interview transcripts. This method facilitates identifying key themes, patterns, and individual characteristics. Such analysis yields insights into cultural diffusion, the diaspora's involvement in socio-economic development, and perspectives from policymakers. Employing this systematic approach, the thematic analysis offers a rigorous exploration of the data. This nuanced approach further facilitates the extraction of valuable insights concerning the interplay between diaspora and developmental dynamics.

To enhance the robustness of the findings, I have employed a technique that involves comparing and contrasting data from diverse research participants. Considering the research emphasis placed on examining the influence of policy and social processes on diaspora engagement in Bangladesh, my analysis has investigated the complex interplay between the state (Bangladesh government) and the emerging diaspora.

4.3 Limitations of the Research:

Since most of my sample is dispersed across different geographic locations, I conducted interviews on the Zoom platform of the University of Sussex. As a result, maintaining a suitable interview schedule presented challenges due to varying time zones and the availability of the research participants. Addressing these logistical complexities has consumed a substantial portion of the time within the scope of my research methodology. Eight of my participants took part in the interview, while one participant preferred to provide a written response to the interview questions. Since my research scope is limited to a certain sample, this may not grasp the full underlying intricacies of Bangladeshi diaspora engagement. Therefore, the findings of this study may not provide a complete understanding of all the underlying issues on the national scale.

5. Analysis:

This section is informed by a qualitative research approach centred on key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with Bangladeshi government officials, diaspora organisations, and policy practitioners, complemented by a review of national policy documents, institutional reports, and relevant academic literature. The analysis is situated within the Bangladeshi context, where diaspora engagement is recognised as vital for sustainable development, yet remains constrained by limited institutional mechanisms, weak investment mobilisation, and fragmented policy approaches. By triangulating participant perspectives with documentary evidence, the discussion highlights how governance structures, policy instruments, and bureaucratic practices influence both the opportunities and barriers to diaspora engagement. This approach ensures that the voices of diaspora actors and stakeholders are central to understanding the challenges and potential of building stronger transnational linkages.

5.1 Assessing Investment Landscape: Shifting Remittances to Investments

Migration governance in Bangladesh has historically revolved around sustaining remittance inflows as the primary development strategy. Remittances, amounting to over USD 21 billion annually, have been central to the country's macroeconomic stability and the achievement of various development targets (IOM, 2021). However, state policy continues to privilege the quantity of migrant outflows rather than the quality of diaspora engagement. Consequently, remittances are overwhelmingly directed toward household consumption, with approximately 43% of total inflows spent on food nationally (Onneshan, 2011, p. 5). This pattern underscores the reliance of rural households on remittances for food security and subsistence needs, leaving limited surplus for community development or long-term investment.

Civil society actors and diaspora organisations have persistently advocated for policies that channel remittances toward collective and productive development. Yet, as one diaspora organisation described, *“it is disappointing to note that the government does not have any formal channels in place to support our community with the utilisation of our remittances.”* This absence of institutional mechanisms represents a missed opportunity to leverage remittances beyond household-level expenditure. While remittances transmitted through official banking channels enhance

liquidity and enable increased credit disbursement in the private sector (Omankhanlen, 2012), they do not translate into structured, collective investment vehicles. A retired government official underscored this gap, stating: *“Despite the significant role of remittances in the country’s financial landscape, there has been a lack of proactive initiatives taken by any banks to establish a collective fund utilising these remittance inflows. Even Bangladesh Bank has yet to provide guidance in this realm.”*

Comparative insights highlight the importance of institutional innovation in shaping outcomes. In Mexico, for example, a small levy on each remittance transaction generates a dedicated development fund, which is subsequently channelled into community projects and business ventures (UNCTAD, 2012). In this context, an insightful observation from the same diaspora organisation in Bangladesh suggests that *“the country could cultivate a substantial investment fund by adopting a comparable approach, leveraging its noteworthy remittance inflow of USD 21 billion per transaction”*. Yet, rather than pursuing such innovations, Bangladesh remains caught in what de Haas (2010) terms a *remittance-dependence trap*, privileging labour export and remittance inflows over policies that systematically convert private transfers into productive development assets.

The case of Probashi Kallayan Bank (PKB) further illustrates this policy disjuncture. Established to provide financial services to overseas Bangladeshis, PKB currently focuses narrowly on offering low-interest migration loans and has limited capacity in remittance mobilisation. Despite its presence across districts, PKB does not facilitate remittance reception or investment opportunities. Both diaspora organisations and government officials interviewed for this study suggested that transforming PKB into a limited company with diaspora-exclusive shareholding options could embed a sense of ownership while simultaneously expanding remittance-based investments. This aligns with Bobeva’s (2005) observation that states failing to institutionalise credible remittance-investment frameworks risk undermining both financial flows and diaspora trust.

5.1.1 Rethinking Investment Avenues:

Bangladesh Bank has implemented strategies aimed at attracting investments from both overseas wage earners and members of the diaspora. A notable initiative in

this endeavour is the establishment of the Wage Earners' Development Bond. Additionally, the Government of Bangladesh introduced the US dollar investment bond and US dollar premium bond in 2003, envisioning these instruments as vehicles to facilitate the investment of foreign currency by non-resident Bangladeshis (Barkat, 2014). The retired government official points out that these bonds have not managed to achieve a significant level of popularity among the non-resident Bangladeshi community. The diaspora organisation in the USA highlights that despite significant remittances from migrant workers to Bangladesh, these bonds haven't gained popularity, especially among those in the USA and Europe. The Embassy hardly had the initiative to make these popular among migrant workers or professionals. Notably, among professionals, this bond has failed to create any business value, as they are already settled in countries such as the USA, Canada, and Europe. As a result, they do not feel compelled to invest their money in these bonds since there are lots of alternative investment packages. The retired government official opines that the government should leverage the media to provide accurate information to the diaspora, both in host and origin countries.

The diaspora organisation, both in the USA and Germany, emphasises that the existing investment packages predominantly cater to necessity-based investments rather than opportunities. The retired government official emphatically highlighted that those financial institutions, including Bangladesh Bank, have failed to develop new investment packages and initiatives specifically tailored to the needs of different diaspora groups. This could potentially encourage higher levels of investment. In this context, six research participants have advocated for the establishment of Economic Processing Zones (EPZs) dedicated to the diaspora, which could serve as a catalyst for investment and potentially lead to substantial remittances. The USA participant shared with deep feeling that there are many EPZ governments established; having one specifically dedicated to the diaspora would stir a deep sense of pride among Bangladeshi expatriates. The organisation in Bangladesh mentions that although the 8th five-year plan sets a target of \$30 billion in annual remittances by 2030, diaspora led initiatives could sustain and even accelerate this momentum, ensuring that remittance growth translates into broader developmental gains. In this regard, a demand-driven approach that aligns investment opportunities with diaspora preferences and capacities would be essential for maximising impact (Williams, 2018).

5.1.2 Diaspora Contribution and Constraint:

Good economic governance can do more to attract and turn migrants' savings into investment (Bobeva, 2005). As global competition for investment intensifies, labour-sending countries are increasingly compelled to design and implement policies that not only appeal to foreign investors but also strengthen the transnational bonds between diaspora communities and their homeland (Ratha, 2007; Lacorix, 2018). Hometown Associations (HTAs) demonstrate how collective remittances can be leveraged to develop infrastructure and social benefits, leading to positive community impacts through diverse projects (Bonciani, 2018).

In the Bangladeshi context, diaspora organisations have emerged as critical non-state actors in fostering community development. Their interventions span a diverse range of social sectors, including the establishment of schools, mosques, hospitals, and cattle farms, thereby addressing both immediate welfare needs and long-term community resilience (BASUG, 2023). Importantly, these contributions are most frequently channelled through informal mechanisms rather than formal institutional pathways. This reliance on informality highlights both the agility of diaspora actors and the structural constraints of Bangladesh's governance, where formal processes are hindered by bureaucracy. For any foreign fund to be invested in community development, or for social work to take place in Bangladesh, approval from the NGO Affairs Bureau is required. However, this process is widely perceived as extremely challenging and highly bureaucratic. Diaspora organisations in Bangladesh and Germany have consistently raised strong concerns over the prolonged and tedious hurdles they face when seeking approval for projects funded by foreign sources. One participant from Germany explained that, *in practice, funds are often designated simply as remittances for community development, for example, supporting communities in the lower Sylhet region during devastating floods, since the informal process allows timely responses. They further argued that if diaspora organisations were not required to channel funds through the NGO Affairs Bureau, there could be a substantial increase in remittances allocated to social and community development.* In my long experience working in the field of development in Bangladesh, I also had similar experiences. As a result, diaspora organisations that

seek to establish connections with their homeland and actively contribute to community development often find it difficult to navigate formal mechanisms.

With their transnational ties, diaspora members engage across borders, acquiring and disseminating valuable skills and innovative ideas. Despite the limited presence of professionals within Bangladeshi communities, there exists a highly knowledgeable and skilled diaspora cohort (Manna, 2018; Barkat, 2014). This group holds significant potential to contribute to national advancement. However, the socio-political and investment climate in Bangladesh often dilutes these ambitions (Siddiqui, 2004). In interviews, four diaspora members criticised the garment and textile sectors, where management positions are largely occupied by Indian and Sri Lankan professionals. Over the past decade, although the government initiated numerous mega-projects, the input of diaspora professionals remained minimal; instead, reliance often fell on Chinese or Indian expertise. Consequently, initial enthusiasm among diaspora returnees frequently fades. One academician from the USA noted that those with strong family linkages and political connections are more likely to navigate such challenges and occasionally succeed. A Bangladeshi diaspora organisation added, “Individuals who have successfully established innovative entrepreneurship ventures in Bangladesh are predominantly from the second generation of migrants. Interestingly, their first generation, even before migration, already had notable professional, knowledge, and financial success.”

The boundary between the Bangladeshi diaspora and their country of origin is predominantly favourable in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture. However, it is revealed that hostility and frustration among diaspora members and migrant workers are largely divided on issues such as communication, investment protection, engaging opportunities, and security. The colonial bureaucratic government structure and subsequent mindset hinder and extend the barrier. Two diaspora organisations have complained that even when they invite embassy officials to participate in programmes regarding investment connections or other cultural events, their participation is merely for show or appearances. They often just take photographs to later publish in the local media. There is no follow-up action after the event. Even some diasporas burst out with their frustration that embassy people in the event preferred to talk with white-skinned participants rather than with us.

Such performative institutional engagement deepens resentment and disillusionment. Emotion, a sense of duty, social networks, and the strength of diaspora organisations are important determinants of diaspora investment (Riddle, Hrivnak & Nielsen, 2010). Moreover, studies show that governance weaknesses including government corruption, red tape, policy unpredictability, and weak security and property-rights protection are major deterrents to diaspora engagement and investment (Manna, 2018; Barkat, 2014). In the diaspora–development nexus, responsibility does not rest solely with the diaspora; it also depends on home-country institutions, particularly policies, legal frameworks, and institutional trust.

5.2 Forging Cultural Bonds:

5.2.1 Cultural and Its Empowering Dynamics

The diaspora's inclination becomes evident through diverse economic, social, and cultural interactions (Alexander, 2017). Empirical evidence from Latin America suggests that the spread of diaspora engagement practices and institutions is a consequence of both formal and informal collaboration between governments in the region (Délano, 2014). Foreign embassies also have the potential to significantly contribute to shaping diaspora inclinations and nurturing relationships. Specifically, diaspora diplomacy plays a central role in reshaping relations between diaspora and foreign or domestic communities (Dickinson, 2020). Feedback from research participants and diaspora organisations consistently highlighted the absence of cultural centres within Bangladeshi embassies across various countries. This gap creates significant barriers for the Bangladeshi diaspora, impeding their ability to maintain a strong connection with their cultural roots. Participants in the USA and Germany emphasised that this absence particularly affects the younger generation, as they lack formal spaces to learn Bangla and connect with their cultural identity. They explained that families often attempt to bridge this gap informally through Zoom sessions and home-based language teaching, yet these efforts remain limited and unable to substitute for institutional support. This represents a missed opportunity to foster deeper cultural ties and reinforce the sense of identity among second-generation Bangladeshis.

Culture can play an important role in empowering the diaspora in the host country (Field, Kapadia & Singh, 2011). However, in the context of globalisation, this empowerment doesn't automatically emerge; it necessitates the origin state's involvement with its diaspora community (Bekzhanova, Koblandin, and Sergazin, 2022). This phenomenon can be observed through the lens of the Jewish diaspora experience, drawing parallels to situations before and after the establishment of Israel, as well as in the cases of Indian and Chinese diasporas. Such interactions foster a symbiotic relationship between the diaspora and the origin state, yielding economic, social, and diaspora-related development objectives (Chirvas, 2022). Unfortunately, diaspora organisations have noted that the Bangladeshi diaspora in the global north is substantial, although precise figures are absent from Bangladeshi government statistics. Rough estimates place the number at around 2.4 million. Furthermore, the political dynamics and bureaucratic landscape of the Bangladeshi government have not facilitated the development of a robust platform for cultural identity and knowledge sharing among the Bangladeshi diasporas. The cultural activist in the USA expresses a strong urge that, without a positive shift, there's a genuine concern that we could lose the engagement of our second and third generations.

Cultural identity is often interlinked with the political identity of the diaspora, where there exists a plurality of political beliefs (Adamson, 2012). Scholars argue that smaller and demographically homogeneous immigrant communities form less diverse and limited organisations, while larger and more demographically heterogeneous groups form more complex networks of organisations (Vrga 1971, Moya 2005). This is not reflected well in the Bangladesh context. Bangladesh as a country is largely homogeneous in terms of ethnicity and language; however, enduring historical political conflicts are deeply rooted in Bangladeshi society (Shams, 2016). Similarly, much like the internal political divisions, the diaspora organisations also exhibit a deep division when it comes to showcasing their cultural identity through the organisation of various cultural events or observance days. This further induces the formation of many associations abroad, and many of these associations are divided along national political lines (Monem, 2018). The organisation in USA shared his own experiences that it was originally established in the mid-1980s to promote Bangla culture and identity, yet over time it fragmented into four separate groups, largely as a result of political divisions. The organisation has observed that these splits reflect attempts by

individuals to showcase influence and gain recognition in both Bangladeshi society and the USA. Diaspora members in Germany have emphasised that when divisions within the diaspora are particularly intense, manifesting not only along political lines but also through regional and district-based affiliations, these fragmentations pose profound challenges to the construction of a unified collective identity. Such internal cleavages resonate with what Vertovec (2007) describes as the “diversification of diversities” within transnational communities, where competing loyalties and micro-identities weaken organisational cohesion. At the same time, participants suggest that the negotiation of political and regional differences can, under certain conditions, foster new forms of collective agency by compelling diaspora groups to renegotiate boundaries and seek common ground. This aligns with the argument presented by the lawmaker participant, who emphasises that cultural empowerment alone is insufficient unless it is complemented by a more unified and liberal political approach. When supported by coherent policy frameworks, such an approach provides the institutional scaffolding necessary to strengthen diaspora engagement.

5.2.2 Impact of Transnational Practices: Factors Influencing Diaspora Diversity

Immigrant community associational diversity and complexity are related to the size and demographic heterogeneity of the immigration group (Nielsen and Riddle, 2007). Bangladeshi diaspora organisations exhibit a variety of patterns influenced by a range of factors contingent upon the nature and identities of the migrants. The diaspora organisation in Germany pointed out that among Bangladeshis, there are many cultural organisations rather than more development organisations. The reason is that most of them are involved in lower-skilled jobs, their spatial diffusion reminds them to go back to their memories; and they like to listen to the same songs after their work. The diversity of the diaspora community is obvious. This diversity further shapes and strengthens various scales of transnational factors, building various opportunity structures and cultural and organisational resources, as well as the diaspora's inclination or motivation to maintain their solidarity (Brinkerhoff, 2013).

Diaspora cultures are formed by immigrant waves and their offspring. Cultural similarity between many first-generation immigrant communities and their homelands may, at least partially, explain why high proportions of first-generation immigrants have

maintained connections (Waldinger and Lim, 2010). This is evident in terms of investment and social remittances in their homelands. When the cultural distance between the diaspora and their homeland is large, the motivation to invest may be much lower among the diaspora as a group. This is because they may experience feelings of alienation based on their past experiences and have less knowledge of the second generation about market and operational realities in the homeland. The profound anguish felt by the first generation of the diaspora is evident in their emotional inquiries about its cause, and the USA diaspora organisation responses that younger generations often withdraw from Bangladesh because they saw their parents struggle with ancestral property disputes, professional barriers, and widespread issues of political tolerance, transparency, and bureaucracy.

So, the ethnic advantages of diaspora are not solely about preserving cultural and emotional ties. This example illustrates a negative link between the connection of the diaspora with their homeland's culture and the perception of individual-level ethnic advantages. Second-generation diaspora perspectives on homeland, identity, and belonging are extraordinarily complex (Ferdous, 2023). Members of the second generation are more likely to feel longing for their parents' homeland, especially if they grew up in a strong, homogenous social environment. Therefore, the diaspora organisation in Germany explains their observation that parents who deliberately teach their children Bangla often succeed in fostering stronger community connections. They emphasised that language functions as a crucial bridge, enabling second- and third-generation Bangladeshis to maintain meaningful ties to their heritage and to the wider diaspora community.

5.3 Policy Puzzle – Challenge and Potential of Bangladeshi Diaspora Engagement

5.3.1 Decoding NRB's Shades within Bangladesh's policy spectrum:

In Bangladesh, the concept of "diaspora" lacks a clear and specific definition. Notwithstanding this definitional gap, the 2016 Bangladesh Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy underscores a strategic direction to harness the potential of the Bangladeshi diaspora and migrant workers. Similarly, the 8th Five-Year Plan from July 2020 to June 2025 recognises the importance of the diaspora and

emphasises tapping into the untapped potential of the diaspora population (Bangladesh Bank, 2020). It is noteworthy, however, that despite these forward-looking policy frameworks, neither explicitly defines the term "diaspora," leaving room for varying interpretations and discussions surrounding its precise meaning in the Bangladeshi context.

The official term “Non-Residence of Bangladesh” (NRB) is employed to encompass both temporary and permanent migrants of Bangladeshi origin who are residing or working abroad (Monem, 2018). However, this terminology fails to establish a clear distinction between the concept of diaspora and migrant workers. This becomes evident in the actions of the Wage Earner Welfare Board, which operates under the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), and has initiated a project to enlist individuals from the diaspora in 29 different countries. The government official expresses that this enlistment process includes four categories: Low Skill, Skill, Semi-Skill, and Professional. The prerequisite is possessing a Bangladeshi passport and relevant documentation. This approach primarily captures Bangladeshi short-term, temporary, and long-term migrants, thus leaving a significant gap in accumulating the correct statistics of the diaspora (IOM, 2021). The research participant, the retired government official, expressed that the use of the term “Non-Residence of Bangladesh” (NRB) exacerbates a lack of clarity. Consequently, it becomes challenging to gather accurate data regarding the size and locations of the Bangladeshi diaspora across various countries.

This is further underscored by Agunias and Kathleen (2012), who emphasise the knowing diaspora as crucial for successfully involving them in development endeavours. In line with this opinion, the retired government official states that such clarity can serve as a guiding force in establishing the identity of the Bangladeshi diaspora. He further notes that clear policy guidelines also simplify the process of developing accurate profiles to identify diaspora communities across different countries.

5.3.2 Beyond Policy: Pathway to Engagement

Diaspora members have strong emotional ties to their home countries; research indicates this is not inherently conducive to mutually beneficial outcomes (Ionescu,

2006). For this to occur, the institutional arrangement must adequately support the integration of diaspora members into national development efforts. However, the existing mechanisms in Bangladesh fail to sufficiently engage them in the planning and execution of development initiatives (IOM, 2021). The senior retired government officials mentioned a lack of initiative from the concerned nodal Ministry – the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE), and hardly outlined any specific objective other than to include diaspora issues in the relevant policy. This argument further corroborates with Agunias and Newland (2012), who emphasise that facilitating more vital diaspora involvement in development is the first step required to identify its own goals; this is further aligned with the capacity residing with the targeted diaspora. The same research participant also emphasised that the Ministry's institutional framework for involving the diaspora needs to outline strategic planning, including allocating distinct responsibilities among ministries and launching renewed initiatives. However, the Ministry has a few projects apart from a labour migration focused on building training centres, which frequently lack globally recognised accreditation, casting doubts on their effectiveness. This was further corroborated by the parliamentary member, who highlights that although there are some dynamic officers within the Ministry, it lacks the substantial resources necessary to implement diaspora-related initiatives effectively, despite having formal rules of business in place.

The lawmaker further urges that a shift in policy focus should come from the highest level of the government. In most cases, the change in direction should be initiated by the chief executive of this country (be it the Prime Minister or the President). Among all offices, the Prime Minister's Office is the most efficient, with a success rate of 80 to 90 percent. From that perspective, solid political commitment could play a pivotal role in determining the policy initiatives of the government related to diaspora engagement (Monem, 2018). However, the academician from the USA and the diaspora organisation from Germany caution that merely relying on policy won't suffice. While successive governments have produced rhetoric and policy commitments that focus on migrants, these have rarely translated into effective implementation. Participants highlight that the core challenge lies not in policy formulation but in execution, particularly in addressing issues of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Without tackling these governance concerns,

diaspora stakeholders remain sceptical about the credibility and effectiveness of state-led initiatives.

Almost all diaspora organisations voice a similar complaint: concerns about the protection of the diaspora persist when they visit their home country, particularly among second and third-generation members who perceive insecurity, compounded by property-related issues and their existing investment. The diaspora organisation from Germany highlighted recent news in which seven investors of Bangladeshi origin from the UK were falsely arrested on allegations, suggesting that their local business partners might have played a role in the incident (Dhaka Tribune, 2022). This report emphasises the importance of security and trust for diaspora members. It highlights the need to establish trust between the diaspora and their home country's institutions, as a lack of security and trust can hinder positive engagement and potentially result in decreased investments. The lawmaker in my research participant underscores that for the protection of diaspora investment, there is a requirement for credible law firm and chartered accountant support to safeguard business partnerships and assets within Bangladesh. He further argues that building long-term trust depends on establishing an independent mechanism for alternative dispute resolution, separate from government influence. Such an institution, he highlights, would be essential for guaranteeing security and protecting diaspora property, particularly for second- and third-generation members.

5.3.3 Citizenship and Voting: Striking a Balance

The Citizenship of Bangladesh initially is deemed based on *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* – a person who was birth and their parent(s) are Bangladeshi (IOM, 2021). A unique feature of Bangladeshi citizenship is that it allows for dual citizenship under specific conditions, requiring individuals to maintain ties to their country of origin alongside their new citizenship. While many countries restrict dual nationality, participants in Germany highlight the challenges this creates for the diaspora. They acknowledge Bangladesh's effort to extend dual citizenship as highly beneficial but argue that its impact is limited without reciprocal arrangements. They suggest that proactive diplomatic advocacy by Bangladesh to encourage host countries to recognise dual citizenship would significantly strengthen the ability of diaspora members to sustain transnational connections.

The diaspora organisation in Bangladesh mentions that the acquisition of Bangladeshi citizenship holds significance for preserving cultural heritage and identity and facilitating travel, residence, work, and business opportunities within the country. Moreover, this citizenship connection can extend to future generations, fostering a continued link with Bangladesh. However, three participants criticise the lengthy bureaucratic process, which often takes over a year to complete. They state that unless any concerns arise with their property issues, they hardly obtain dual citizenship; given this bureaucratic process, the second and third generations rarely feel inclined to pursue citizenship.

While Bangladesh provides postal voting provisions, recent reforms by the Election Commission stipulate that individuals must be physically present during the voter registration period (IOM, 2021). A diaspora member in Germany highlights the contradiction, noting that although Bangladesh formally recognises dual citizenship, it simultaneously requires physical presence in the country to cast a vote. He further observes that despite “Digital Bangladesh” being a flagship political agenda, almost 10 million Bangladeshis living abroad are still excluded from digital voting opportunities.

From a diaspora investment perspective, four research participants emphasise that the impact of citizenship and voting rights would be more encouraging. They emphasise that more attention should be placed on the substantial shortcomings within Bangladesh's legal and institutional frameworks and lack of commitment as well as consistency, which fail to adequately address the needs and concerns of the diaspora population. Strengthening diaspora engagement, therefore, requires reducing bureaucratic barriers and expanding access to political participation. As Ostergaard-Nielsen (2006) argues, meaningful political rights can enhance trust and deepen transnational ties, which in turn encourage greater economic and social contributions from diaspora communities.

6. Conclusion:

This research has revealed that the level of transnational engagement exhibited by the Bangladeshi diaspora is significantly influenced by multiple factors. This includes cultural identity, political fragmentation, previous experiences, social networks, values, and perceptions of business opportunities. However, while trying to optimise the engagement in both financial and non-financial contributions of the diaspora, they face challenges in upholding their cultural roots. My research highlights the importance of prioritising collaboration and improvement to fully harness the transnational engagement and investment potential of the Bangladeshi diaspora in national development. This underscores a perspective trajectory: how can domestic governments effectively shape the political narrative by leveraging the diaspora as a powerful strategy (Njikang, 2020). This has provided the answer to my research questions about how the Bangladeshi state's governance and policies play a crucial role in shaping this trajectory.

To address this question, this paper delves into a meticulous analysis of the path dependency within the prevailing institutional framework, coupled with insights obtained from observations and experiences within the diaspora. This approach facilitates an examination that views policy as an objective reality (Durnova, Fischer, and Zittoun, 2016: 36). By doing so, it allows me to investigate how existing policies primarily focused on remittance recipients shape the boundaries and what implications this has. Additionally, it explores the necessity of breaking these boundaries and creating more opportunities for diaspora remittances to contribute to national development. However, it is important to note that this approach has limitations, such as the absence of official data and the distinction between diaspora remittances and those resulting from labour migration. My analysis, both the interpretation of my research participant's view and the literature review able to capture the situation that suggests a comprehensive approach for engaging diaspora within the broader institutional framework, driven by a balance both market economy principles and social development objectives.

The findings examine how a diaspora-driven approach facilitates the flow of transnational capital for community development and strengthens diaspora ties. This

aligns with the theoretical framework that emphasises collective remittances through Hometown Associations (HTAs), which play a crucial role in financing impactful community projects for diaspora development (Bonciani, 2018). Moreover, the research reveals the intricate challenges posed by the established formal institutional framework within Bangladesh, particularly concerning investment and community development. This raises the question of why the current institutional structure is insufficient in accommodating and utilising collective remittances for community-led development, which would align harmoniously with the aspirations of both the diaspora and the home country (Brinkerhoff, 2011). My findings thoroughly examine the underlying reasons behind the institutional limitations that hinder the integration of this form of development within the diaspora community. This research also offers insight into the 'why' behind these challenges, providing a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to these limitations.

The research demonstrates a contrasting pattern in the involvement of skilled Bangladeshi diaspora professionals in knowledge transfer and growth. This is particularly evident in the challenges that impede their active engagement. One significant finding is the limited availability of management and professional positions. This constraint significantly curtails the prospects of upward mobility for diaspora professionals within hierarchical structures. This revelation addresses why such limitations exist and how they impact the trajectory of skilled diaspora professionals.

My findings delve into the multifaceted dynamics that result from the convergence of cultural heritage, diaspora unity, and aspirations for investment. This constitutes the 'what' – the central aspects that govern the trajectory of diaspora involvement. The findings identified that fostering cultural bonds and strengthening transnational mechanisms should be a priority for Bangladesh to tap into the diaspora's full potential. Therefore, the unity of diaspora organisations is an important aspect. However, this unity faces an obstacle due to domestic political divisions, thus weakening their collective voice and eroding transnational bonds. Despite these challenges, diaspora and migrant associations are recognised as influential 'agents of change' for their contributions to development in their countries of origin (Kleist, 2009).

Language emerges as a crucial bridge between generations and the larger Bangladeshi community, underscoring its role in maintaining ties and fostering a sense

of belonging. However, the absence of robust cultural centres within Bangladesh embassies in different countries hinders the Bangladeshi diaspora's ability to maintain strong cultural ties, particularly among the second and third generations. This poses a missed opportunity for fostering deeper cultural ties, reinforcing the sense of identity, and further engaging in the national development of the Bangladeshi diaspora. This could potentially present a new perspective for future research endeavours, delving further into comprehending the impediments posed by the lack of a Bangla language centre or cultural promotional initiatives. These barriers may be limiting the exploration of generational influences within the Bangladeshi Diaspora.

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