



# THE ROLE OF DIASPORA AS INTERNATIONAL AGENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** To conceptually model the economic contribution of the Diaspora as a Public Private Partnership (PPP) to promote business, investment and industry, both in their host countries and countries of origin. As such, the model promotes Diaspora as International Agents for Development.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** A qualitative research methodology is used in order to understand the huge potential that Diaspora may have in benefiting the economic growth in their host countries, effecting economic and industrial development in their countries of origin as well as boosting their own personal investment portfolio through utilising the expertise they gained and links they developed. This could conceptually be built as a triangular model of PPP.

**Findings:** The Diaspora population is rising steadily: over 244 million people live outside their country of birth. Their host countries benefit from their skills and innovation. However, although the role played by Diaspora in the development, poverty reduction and reconstruction of their countries of origin is significant, this role is not fully recognised by their host countries or countries of origin. There is a powerful triangle of Diaspora, host countries and countries of origin that can potentially be used to promote business, investment and industry, both in the countries of origin and destination. This presents the Diaspora, in partnership with

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their countries of origin and residence, as a potential tool for achieving sustainable development and fighting poverty. It is therefore a step towards achieving the UN sustainable development goals for 2030.

**Originality/Value:** The role of Diaspora in “fire-fighting” economic crises in their countries of origin is well covered in the literature. However, very little has been highlighted about the benefits they bring to their host countries, both in economic terms and as a source of innovation. This paper aims to widen the scope to look at the Diaspora as International Agents for Sustainable Development, and model their contribution as PPPs between the Diaspora, host countries and countries of origin.

**Keywords:** Diaspora; host; homeland; origin; partnership; agent; sustainable development; industry; business; investment; model

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## INTRODUCTION

The present economic situation of Third World countries is in part the result of low levels of development, their backward industries, and outdated agricultural methods. According to UN Documents (1987), most of the global research and development effort is devoted to military purposes or the commercial objectives of large corporations. Little of this is of direct relevance to conditions in developing countries. This is still true today as it was then! Developing countries therefore have to work, individually and together, to build up their technological capabilities. Likewise, to get out of the poverty zone, under-developed countries need to adopt an integrated sustainable development plan, in which collaboration for industry, economic growth and capacity building represents the pivotal point (Dafa'Alla et al., 2016).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), poor and struggling countries will need national development strategies that respond to global macro-economic trends to ensure that they thrive in a global economy (OECD, 2010): this is where the role of Diaspora comes into play. For many countries, the Diaspora are a major source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), market development (including outsourcing of production), technology transfer, philanthropy, tourism, political contributions, and more intangible flows of knowledge, new attitudes, and cultural influence. This emphasises the potential role of Diaspora in development, hence poverty reduction, in their own countries of origin, provided their huge resources and impact can be utilised intelligently and effectively.

Whatever the role they may play, the Diaspora are indeed in the interesting position of making a natural link between their countries of origin and residence. Hence they are well suited to play an active and unique role as International Agents for Development in both countries. This paper highlights this role and contributes towards modelling it as a three-way Public Private Partnership (PPP) between the Diaspora, their host countries and countries of origin.

## DIASPORA FACTS AND FIGURES

The recent International Migration Report 2015, published in United Nations (2016), offers interesting statistics about migration. As such, unless otherwise explicitly stated, it is used as the main source for the figures quoted herein. According to the report, the number of international

migrants (i.e., persons living in a country other than where they were born) reached 244 million in 2015 for the world as a whole, with a median age of 39 years; a prime productive working age. This represents a 41% increase compared to 2000. In 2015, two thirds (67%) of all international migrants were living in just 20 countries. The largest number of international migrants (47 million) resided in the United States of America, equal to about a fifth (19%) of the world's total. With 12 million each, Germany and the Russian Federation host the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide, followed by Saudi Arabia that hosts 10 million foreigners (United Nations, 2016).

Interestingly, the majority of the Diaspora population (64%) originated from middle-income countries, and the majority of these settled in a high-income country. Between 2000 and 2015, the number of migrants originating from middle-income countries increased more rapidly than those from countries in any other income group. Indeed, 25% of them originated from countries in Europe and 43% in Asia. Some migrants came from the richest countries of the world as well. For example, **migrants from France live in more countries than migrants from any other nation.** The poorest countries represent a minority. Indeed, Africa contributes only 14% of migrants, despite the recently increased level of African's migration to Europe extensively covered in the media. This shows that the main driver for migration is not poverty. Note that, despite the lack of accurate statistics, a significant portion of these migrants are well-educated, skilled workers and professionals in their prime productive working age, seeking to fulfil personal or professional ambitions that they could not fulfil in their countries of birth due to developmental, social or political reasons.

On the other hand, the high-income countries, including the G7 countries, have been the main recipients, and hence beneficiaries of the added value that Diaspora contributions bring to their economy. Between 2000 and 2015, positive net migration contributed to 42% of the population growth in Northern America and 32% in Oceania. Indeed, the size of the population in Europe would have fallen between 2000 and 2015 in the absence of positive net migration. Overall, 76 million international migrants were residing in Europe, compared to 75 million in Asia. Northern America hosted the third largest number of international migrants (54 million), followed by Africa (21 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (9 million), and Oceania (8 million) (United Nations, 2016). It is also interesting to note that **84% of the United Arab Emirates' population is foreign born.** This is the highest share of migrants compared to all countries in the world. The next three highest – Qatar (74%), Kuwait (60%) and Bahrain (55%) – are also in the Gulf region; most come from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, by hosting 10 million migrants (31% of the population), Saudi Arabia has the largest group of Diaspora population in the Gulf region. These figures reflect the huge reliance of the Gulf region on foreign migration.

## CONTRIBUTION OF DIASPORA TO GLOBAL ECONOMY

The migration experience benefits the migrants in many ways. They gain new skills, benefit financially and are exposed to new cultures. During this process, they also contribute a great deal to their host countries, as well as to their countries of origin. Over the past few decades, Diaspora groups have increasingly become significant players in the international political, social and economic arenas, thanks to new communication technologies improving abilities to mobilise,

and multiculturalism policies in receiving countries that revitalised ethnic pride and assertiveness (Vertovec, 2005). A few examples of politically active Diaspora communities are the Jewish-, Greek-, Cuban- and Armenian-American associations that represent some of the strongest lobbies in Washington, DC. Prime illustrations of Diasporic political payoff occurred in 1990 when Croatians abroad donated US\$4 million towards the election campaign of Franjo Tudjman and were subsequently rewarded with representation in parliament, and in 2003 when Diasporic Iraqi groups and individuals played crucial roles in encouraging American military intervention in Iraq (Vertovec, 2005). Perhaps rich countries, feeling the pinch of economic slowdown and increasing burden of aid and military intervention, were driven to explore and exploit the potential influence of Diaspora on their soil to play politically active roles in their countries of origin or *homelands*, as sometimes referred to in the literature. With regard to their national Diaspora, countries of origin certainly want remittances and may appreciate lobbying, but they may resent too much political involvement. There is a good volume of evidence in the literature regarding the role of Diaspora in political changes, nation and capacity building, peace-making, technology transfer and economic development, both in their host countries and countries of origin, as discussed in (Vertovec, 2005), for example. However, in this paper, we are confining our discussion only to the economic and development role of the Diaspora.

Irrespective of the motive, it seems that the governments of migrant-sending (*homeland* or *origin*) and receiving (*host*) countries, international agencies, and academics are now paying considerable attention to the relationship between Diaspora groups and development. Although economic motivations of migration have long been recognised, the economic development effects of migration on host countries and countries of origin are only recently coming into focus. In this context, the contribution of the international Diaspora to the world economy is estimated by the North American Integration Development Centre of California University to be around US\$7.1 trillion, equivalent to the sixth largest economy in the world (Hinojosa-Ojeda, 2017). Indeed, the rise in the number of international migrants reflects the increasing importance of international migration, which has become an integral part of world economies and societies. However, this contribution is largely dispersed among the 20 countries that host two thirds of Diaspora, and hence does not reflect in any specific economic or political agenda of the Diaspora population as such. In fact, to date, there is no pressure group or organisation that represents the international Diaspora's interests, or that has the legitimacy to speak on their behalf. Nevertheless, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development. It further recognises that international migration is a multi-dimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination (United Nations, 2016).

### *Contribution of Diaspora to Host Countries*

The Economist (2011) commented that migrant networks are a rare bright spark in the world economy: rich countries should welcome them. It added that Diaspora bring benefit to the host countries via the networks they establish as well as the ideas and money they spread. They have the skill and expertise to apply, the ideas to drive innovation and research, and some of them bring in direct and indirect investment to feed the economy in their host countries. To clarify

this further, note that while migrants make up an eighth of America's population, they founded a quarter of the country's technology and engineering firms. Also, by linking the West with emerging markets, Diaspora help rich countries to plug into fast-growing economies. Indeed, the US State Department has both acknowledged and recognised their huge contribution to the American economy and society. For example, in 2011 and 2012, the US State Department hosted two 'Secretary's Global Diaspora Forums' in Washington, which attracted hundreds of delegates representing over 70 countries. This was a very public and international recognition and realisation of looking at Diaspora groups in different ways. The key messages of these Forums revolved around a number of themes (Diaspora Matters, 2011; Diaspora Alliance, 2012):

- leveraging the diversity of the United States as an asset;
- Diaspora engagement is key for exploring new markets;
- Diaspora drive innovation in Silicon Valley and beyond;
- Diaspora groups can play active roles in building bridges between the US and their countries of origin;
- Diaspora groups have unique expertise, insights and personal commitment to development in their countries of origin,
- Diaspora groups have local knowledge and contacts that diplomats sometimes don't have;
- Diaspora groups offer an opportunity to reorient ties with developing and emerging economies.

Likewise, European migrants who have arrived in the UK since 2000 have contributed more than £20bn to UK public finances between 2001 and 2011. Moreover, they have endowed the country with productive human capital that would have cost the UK £6.8bn in spending on education (Dustmann and Frattini, 2014). As a result, migration to the UK since 2000 has been of substantial net fiscal benefit, with migrants contributing more than they have received in benefits and transfers. This is true for migrants from Central and Eastern Europe as well as the rest of the EU. Indeed, Diaspora investment in education does not only keep UK universities financially viable, but also benefits from them as a source of innovation and keeping the research wheel revolving. In fact, the benefit to the UK goes beyond the research area to directly feed into the UK economy in many different and interesting ways, as discussed in Dustmann and Frattini (2014).

In this context, if one takes the example of the Sudanese Diaspora in the Gulf region, these Diaspora were born in the Sudan, largely educated and skilled in the UK and USA, and now work in the Gulf region. One can think of them as a natural extension of the Sudanese Diaspora in the UK and USA respectively. Some of them made substantial financial gains in the Gulf. If they cannot invest their wealth in Sudan for political reasons, and have no direct legal avenue to invest in the Gulf countries, they would naturally be inclined to invest in the countries where they were skilled. Hence, for the host countries, investment in Diaspora education is a means of gaining from their future investment, irrespective of whether they stay in the country for the long term or not.

In fact, the benefits that Diaspora bring to local economies are not limited to the USA and the UK, but shared between all rich countries that host a significant Diaspora population; many of them consider the Diaspora as a "national asset" (Diaspora Matters, 2011). The above examples suffice to highlight the contribution of the Diaspora to the economy of their host countries and, consequently, the global impact of their contribution.

### *Contribution of Diaspora to Countries of Origin*

As shown above, rich countries are likely to benefit from looser migration policy, and fears that poor countries will suffer as a result of a “brain drain” are over exaggerated. The prospect of working abroad spurs more people to acquire valuable skills, and not all subsequently migrate. Skilled migrants send money home, and they often return to set up new businesses. One study found that unless they lose more than 20% of their university graduates, the brain drain makes poor countries richer (The Economist, 2011).

Diaspora remittances and financial contributions are well mobilised through various instruments, including, but not limited to, bonds, securitised remittances, and special banking arrangements. The World Bank and other development partners have revealed that remittances by African Diaspora, for example, surged by 3.4% to US\$35.2 billion in 2015. However, this amount does not directly translate into development due to many challenges, such as the very high costs involved in money transfer, the technical complexity and alternative innovative platforms, going beyond funds for the day-to-day needs of families. A larger, more consolidated option channelled towards productive investments fostering an entrepreneurial rather than a dependency culture is needed (Madichie, 2016).

Meanwhile, a recent joint report from the World Bank and the African Development Bank argues that African governments should do more to realise the economic benefits of migration. “With about 30 million Africans living outside their home countries, migration is a vital lifeline for the continent”, the report says, adding that migrants’ remittances have helped to reduce poverty in Africa and have led to increased investments in health, education and housing (Cummins and Provost, 2011). Sinatti and Horst (2015) noted that an increased focus on the role of Diaspora as new agents in the development arena was noticeable in the first decade of the millennium, when enthusiasm about migrants’ potential for complementing mainstream development efforts rose among key development actors. This came at a time of increased debate on aid effectiveness and growing interest in “new development actors”. This interest was further strengthened by emerging Diaspora investment trends and awareness. The publication of the 2003 Global Financial Report of the World Bank stated that remittances far outweigh official development aid (Raghuram, 2009). However, these efforts have mainly revolved around the pivotal point of aid, poverty reduction and directed towards the countries of origin. This confines the role of Diaspora to “fire-fighting” economic crises in their countries of origin, while ignoring the benefits that the host countries also gain from Diaspora investments. This makes the main objective of the role of Diaspora politically, rather than economically, driven.

International migration is now widely seen to have the potential to contribute to technology transfer and development in the migrants’ countries of origin, and many government and development agencies are seeking ways to maximise its benefits. There are different models for how countries of origin have elected to benefit from their respective Diaspora. For example, 26% of the Jordanian GDP (Gross Domestic Product) comes directly from Diaspora remittances. China, India and Taiwan, however, focus less on remittances in favour of pursuing three very different business-oriented models in seeking Diaspora contributions to development. China has long worked to attract direct investment and open trade opportunities through overseas Chinese communities. India has recently launched a Diaspora policy that is multi-pronged, pursuing direct investment, portfolio investment, technology transfer, market opening and out-sourcing opportunities. Taiwan, on the other hand, has pursued a “brain trust” model, focused on attracting hu-

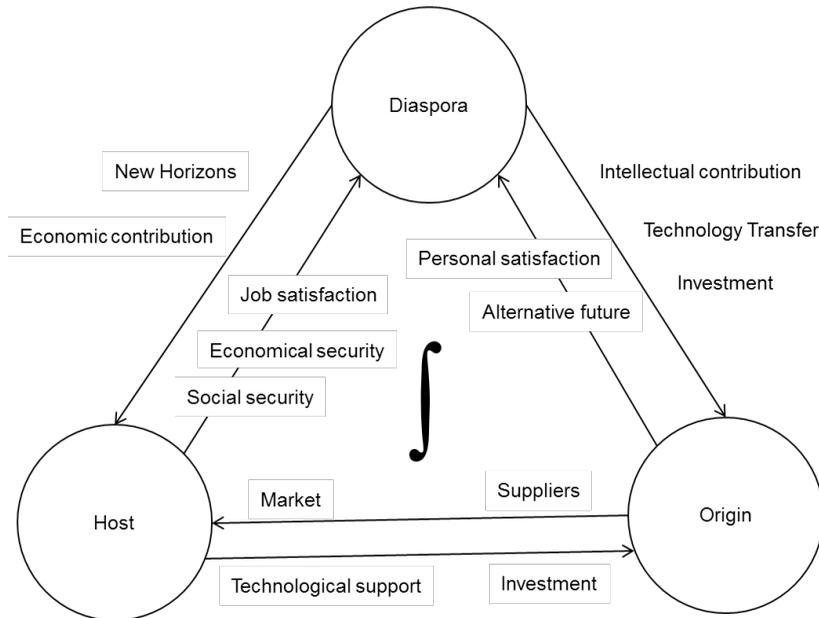
man capital from the Diaspora (Newland and Patrick, 2004). While the Chinese and Indian models are attractive from business and investment perspectives, the Taiwanese model is of special interest to facilitating technology transfer and building up technological capabilities as part of the national industrial and economic development strategies in the developing and underdeveloped countries of origin of the Diaspora.

## MODELLING THE CONTRIBUTION OF DIASPORA AS PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

As discussed above, there is a recent growing understanding and recognition of the contribution of Diaspora to the economies of their host countries. The Annual Global Diaspora Forum hosted by the US State Department is one example of such growing interest. However, the examples quoted above also show that the role of Diaspora is uni-directional. This role utilises Diaspora to influence economic, political or social events in their countries of origin, but not in host countries. Literature is full of examples emphasising this role: see DeWind and Holdaway (2005) for a collation of such examples.

Paradoxically, while the Diaspora are important actors in economic development, they are still mainly considered shortcuts to leveraging financing (especially remittances), channelling funds for sustained development albeit in a sub-optimal manner. This attitude underplays alternative platforms of innovative contributions of the Diaspora. A parochial focus of such financial contributions poses risks of failure and ultimately jeopardises the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Madichie, 2016). Madichie went on to advocate that Diaspora should be considered, not just as sources of finance for development, but also as development partners. He added, while the Diaspora may have the capacity and patriotic mind-set to contribute to national development, concerted efforts must be made by all stakeholders to develop policy objectives that could facilitate Diaspora mobilisation: we agree with him. However, this paradigm was recommended in the same traditional uni-directional context of using the Diaspora to help the development path in their countries of origin. Confining the contribution of the Diaspora in this uni-directional role ignores the legitimate interests and ambitions of the Diaspora themselves, and risks exploiting them for the political and economic aims of the countries of origin and/or host countries. This is clearly not a satisfactory situation from their perspective and surely does not exploit the full potential of the Diaspora. With a population of 244 million, an economic value of US\$7.1 trillion and ability to donate, for example, US\$4 million towards the one cause of supporting a general election campaign in Croatia alone as quoted above, the real weight of the Diaspora should really reflect their true potential as International Agents for Development.

What we are advocating is a new perspective that satisfies the ambitions of the Diaspora, requirements of host countries and needs of countries of origin. This aim can be achieved by considering a three-way Public Private Partnership model (PPP) of equals between the Diaspora, the host countries and the countries of origin, as depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1. The figure demonstrates how such a partnership model works in practice. The symbol in the middle of the triangle is meant to represent the “integration” between the roles of the three partners in the model. Also, note that the examples of the contribution of each partner towards the others shown in the figure are not exhaustive. The three partners should work collaboratively in an in-



**Figure 1** Three-Way PPP Model for the Diaspora as International Agents for Development

*Source:* Devised by author

egrated manner to resolve inhibitors and build enablers to economic growth, both in host countries and countries of origin, and allow the Diaspora to fulfil their dreams of investment while contributing to nation and capacity building in their countries of origin as well as residence. It is a PPP Model for formulating industrial and economic strategies, building capacity, driving development and making investment. As such, although general, the model is of particular relevance to developing and under-developed countries, where these issues are of high priority.

This model sees and recognises the Diaspora as International Agents for Development and can be readily replicated in economic, social and political arenas in complementary or isolated terms. It can also be used in a “softer” mode as a vehicle for knowledge and technology transfer between the partners. This can be delivered in a form of advice or expert support to formulate economic and industrial strategies, for example. The model is not meant to replace the current role of Diaspora, but to complement and enlarge it in a meaningful and more comprehensive and effective manner. However, for it to work as designed, it has to be a partnership between equals where transparency and democratic means of taking decisions is the order of the day. This may require political reform and cultural change in some Third World countries before they can take full advantage of the model. It also requires clarification and agreement on the objectives and targets right at the start of any practical project based on this model. These prerequisites are essential to avoid exploitation of the Diaspora and prevent the partnership from reverting back to the traditional uni-directional context it is aiming to avoid. It also needs official recognition of the role of Diaspora both in the host countries and, more importantly, countries of origin. This is important in order to alleviate fears of Diaspora of risking being associated with the corrupt and undemocratic regimes in many countries of origin. Recognising their role in these countries and legislating for it in the statues of the country will serve to take the partnership outside the political arena and make it less vulnerable to abuse by corrupt officials. This will also give host

countries the political leverage or cover to sell their partnership and investment in Third World countries to their own public. This process can be enhanced by the Diaspora being organised in institutions that can articulate their views on these legislations and ensure that they are a fair reflection of their needs and interests. These institutions/organisations/associations can be formed in a way and play a role similar to the trade unions in mature democracies or the Royal Colleges in the UK. These organisations should also set the standard and monitor behaviour of the Diaspora, as well as represent them and defend their rights.

As partners in this model, the Diaspora can contribute as individuals, small groups, or even organisations. The presence of the host country in the partnership may also be seen as safeguarding the Diaspora's rights from being abused by their countries of origin's governments. At the same time, the presence of the countries of origin's governments in the partnership may provide the official monitoring that only governments can provide in order to guard public interest from being exploited by foreign investors; this is highlighted in Dafa'Alla (2016). Note that the involvement of governments can be either directly by committing public funds to nominated projects, or indirectly by creating the right environment for investment and following that up by encouraging their private sector to commit funds and actively engage in the projects. However, the direct involvement of at least one of the two governments is essential for the PPP to work. Irrespective of the format of the government participation, giving the partnership a legal framework will guard against lack of democratisation and rampant corruption, ensure protection, and make investment in countries of origin more appealing and attractive while protecting against exploitation by any party. Furthermore, forming and legalising such a three-way PPP can also encourage and incentivise other countries and sources of investment to come to the country and ask for similar treatment - *a win-win situation for all*.

Hence, the model presents the Diaspora, in partnership with their host countries and countries of origin, as a potential tool for achieving sustainable development and fighting poverty. This is a step towards achieving the UN sustainable development goals for 2030.

## CONCLUSIONS

The roles played by Diaspora in the development, poverty reduction, nation building and reconstruction of their countries of origin are significant. These roles had been extensively covered in the literature, but not yet fully and suitably recognised by their host countries or their countries of origin.

However, these roles are uni-directional in the sense that they reflect the contribution of Diaspora towards their countries of origin. They do not recognise or reflect the benefits that host countries gain from hosting Diaspora in terms of the skill and innovation they bring and contribution to the local economy in the country of destination.

More importantly, although these roles give the Diaspora some satisfaction through improving the conditions in their countries of origin, they do not fulfil the legitimate ambitions of the Diaspora of improving their own lives and investing their wealth for their own benefit and the benefit of their families. As such, they fall short of using the full potential of Diaspora and risk their exploitation for the political and economic aims of the countries of origin and residence alike.

To get out of this trap, and in an attempt to give the Diaspora an alternative route for contribution and investment, we advocate a three-way Public Private Partnership Model between the Diaspora, host countries and countries of origin. The model presents the Diaspora as Interna-

tional Agents for Development in a Public Private Partnership between equals with the governments of their host countries and countries of origin. This partnership works collaboratively in an integrated manner to resolve inhibitors and build enablers to economic growth, both in host countries and countries of origin.

The model sees and recognises the Diaspora as International Agents for Development. It can be readily replicated in economic, social and political arenas in complementary or isolated terms. It can also be used as a vehicle for knowledge and technology transfer.

However, for the model to work as designed, it should have clear objectives and targets, needs to be a partnership between equals, operate in a transparent democratic environment, and the role of Diaspora needs to be recognised and legalised in both the countries of origin and host countries.

Although the model is universally applicable, it is of special interest to developing and under-developed countries as it aims to tackle developmental issues, such as making investment while building capacity, driving development, transferring technology and helping to formulate industrial and economic strategies.

The model presents the Diaspora, in partnership with their host countries and countries of origin, as a potential tool for achieving sustainable development and fighting poverty. This is a step towards achieving the UN sustainable development goals for 2030.

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## BIOGRAPHY

**Dr Adil A. Dafa'Alla (PhD; C.Eng.; Eurlng)** graduated in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Khartoum, Sudan in 1981. He did postgraduate studies at UMIST, England, where he was awarded his PhD in 1988. Dr Dafa'Alla joined Airbus UK Ltd in 1996. He has vast academic and industrial experience. As part of his quest for continuous development, he has become a Chartered Engineer (C.Eng.) followed by Eurlng testimony to his high standard of professional experience and conduct. His research interests cover aspects of CFD, aircraft safety as well as airport capacity planning issues. Coming from a Sudanese background, he also has a special interest in topics related to education, industry and sustainable development in Africa. His research activities are reported in a number of international journals and conferences in addition to many technical reports. He is an active member of WASD, and has been Associate Editor of its flagship journal, WRSTSD, since its inception in 2003.

**Elmouiz Siddeg Hussein (BSc (Hons), MSc)** is a Mechanical Engineering graduate of the University of Khartoum, Sudan (1999). He then gained work experience as a Mechanical Engineer at a private workshop in Khartoum North, Sudan. During this period, he also worked as a part-time Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Engineering, University of Khartoum. He subsequently moved to the University of Portsmouth, UK, to do his MSc in Advanced Manufacturing Technology (2003-2004). In 2006, he joined Airbus UK as a Manufacturing Engineer. Currently, he develops and integrates industrial systems for the A350XWB Wing, develops and optimises business processes, and manages industrial risk.