

African associations in the Netherlands, numbers, type, interconnectedness and transnational ties

Anja van Heelsum

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DRAFT, comments welcome

e-mail: a.j.vanheelsum@uva.nl
<http://users.fmg.uva.nl/avanheelsum>



IMES

Instituut voor Migratie- en Etnische Studies

* Dr. A. van Heelsum is researcher at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands and has worked on associations of immigrants since 1997. More information: <http://users.fmg.uva.nl/avanheelsum>

Abstract

This paper deals with the associations of African immigrant groups in the Netherlands and is based on my study in 2005 among Angolans, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Congolese Nigerians and Sudanese in the Netherlands (Van Heelsum, 2005; Van Heelsum, & Hessels, 2005). Similar work on Ghanaians and Somali's will be used for comparison (Choenni, 2004; Hessels, 2000). The associational life in these communities differs considerably, both in terms of the number and type of associations as in terms of their interconnectedness through federations and ties to the home country.

The main questions of the paper are: what kind of associations do the above communities have, what can we learn from theories on associational development and finally can we draw some conclusions on the possibilities of NGO's to work with these African communities. It is shown that the associational life is very different among the groups in this study, though the size of the communities is similar and they are operating more or less within the same opportunity structure. The three main theories on organisational development are of help in showing why communities differ:

a) the theory of organisational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1989) forecasts an inverted u-curve development in the number of associations from the moment the first immigrants arrive until a community settles.

b) the civic community perspective (Putnam, 1993, 2000) looks into social capital of members of associations, and their interconnectedness and networks.

c) drawing from the transnational perspective (Portes a.o., 1999; Horst, 2006), we see differences in transnational contacts of the associations both towards the country of origin and towards other European countries and we will investigate to what extent circumstances in the country of origin provide an explanation of the differences between the African communities in Europe.

The results show that African associations in the Netherlands are in the first phase of organisational development. The Somali and Ethiopian communities have the highest associational density (number of associations per 1000 inhabitants). But the Sudanese community has the best potential with regards to interconnectedness and social capital. Looking at the transnational ties, there is not one single conclusion. On the one hand some countries are too affected by the war circumstances to give easy access to volunteer groups from abroad; on the other hand some communities have such strong international networks that they manage to work informally. In the last paragraph we will draw conclusions on the question what are the best options for successful cooperation between NGO's working in Africa and African associations in Europe.

1. African immigrants in the Netherlands: introduction

The largest African communities in the Netherlands from countries South of the Sahara were on January 1st, 2007 Somalis (21.670), Cape Verdians (20,181), Ghanaians (19,437), Angolans (9.459), Ethiopians/Eritreans (10.454/ 926), DR Congolese (7.793), Nigerians (8.393) and Sudanese (6.623).¹ In total we are talking about more than 100.000 people. The Dutch ministry of Justice has published a series on new ethnic groups, of which the first one was on Somalis (Hessels, 2000), the second one on Ghanaians (Choenni, 2002) the third on Cape Verdians (Choenni, 2004). In 2006 a similar publication appeared on several other African groups together, namely Angolans, Ethiopians/Eritreans, DR Congolese, Nigerians and Sudanese (Van Heelsum, & Hessels, 2005). This article is based on this common publication and the information on Somalis has been added.

We will first look at some general characteristics of these African groups. As among most new immigrant groups, the percentage of men is higher than the percentage of women. In 1996 the ratio was still extremely skewed, but in 2007 the percentage of women is increasing among all groups. As presented in table 1, none of the groups in this study has reached a fifty-fifty ratio. The ratio is most skewed among Angolans and Sudanese.

Table 1 Seven African groups: number of women/men and first/ second generation on January 1st 2007

	Angolans	Congolese	Ethio./Eritr. ¹	Nigerians	Sudanese	Somalis
women	4,080 (43%)	3,749 (48%)	4,840/469 (47%)	3,809 (45%)	2,453 (37%)	8,794 (46%)
men	5,379 (57%)	4,044 (52%)	5,614/457 (53%)	4,584 (55%)	4,170 (63%)	10,124 (54%)
first generation	7,018 (74%)	4,873 (63%)	7,033 /716 (56%)	4,718 (56%)	4,885 (74%)	12,961 (74%)
second generation	2,441(26%)	2,920 (37%)	3,421 /210 (44%)	3,675 (44%)	1,738 (26%)	5,957 (26%)
total (100%)	9,459	7,793	10,454/926	8,393	6,623	18,918

* source: statline CBS

The third and fourth row of the table, show the numbers born in the home country (first generation) and the numbers born in the Netherlands (second generation). We find the highest percentage of children that are born in Holland among Nigerians (44%). Angolans and Sudanese have relatively few children, born in the Netherlands (26%). This is caused by their later arrival in the Netherlands, Sudanese families still have to reunite. The age distribution of the groups also differs. Among Angolans we find relatively many single youngsters. Specific for the situation of the Angolans is the high number of single minor asylum seekers. Boys fled because they feared to get recruited for the army and prefer to go to school. In 1998 62% of the asylum seekers was younger than 18, in 2000 70%, in 2003 62%. Of these youngsters little more than half is younger than 15; the others are 15–17 years old. Of the total Angolan population in the Netherlands, 62% is younger than twenty, while among Ethiopians/Eritreans only 38% is younger than 20 and among Congolese 48%. The mean age, at which Angolan girls give birth, is also younger than among the other African women in this research.

¹ Persons born on the Eritrean territory before Eritrea's independence, are registered as Ethiopians. It is estimated that about half of the Ethiopian population in the Netherlands is actually of Eritrean descent. This is why CBS data only show 794 Eritreans.

The immigration motives of the groups to move to the Netherlands differ. The groups of this study can be divided into the groups that mainly arrived as asylum seekers (Angolans, Congolese, Sudanese en Somalis) and the groups that had mixed motives for migration (Ethiopians en Nigerians). As table 2 shows, Nigerians show a wider variety of migration motives than the others.

Table 2 Immigration motives of six African groups in 2003

	Angolans	Congolese	Ethio+Eritr	Nigerians	Sudanese	Somalis
Labour	67 (6%)	7 (2%)	14 (4%)	87 (17%)	4 (1%)	5 (1%)
Asylum	1.014 (87%)	295 (75%)	127 (33%)	129 (25%)	274 (70%)	215 (63 %)
Family reunion	52 (4%)	55 (14%)	13 (3%)	45 (9%)	44 (11%)	88 (26 %)
Family member	4 (0%)	5 (1%)	2 (1%)	23 (5%)	-	1 (0 %)
Family formation	4 (0%)	18 (5%)	52 (14%)	171 (33%)	63 (16%)	35 (10 %)
Study	4 (0%)	-	89 (23%)	39 (8%)	4 (1%)	1 (0 %)
Other	16 (1%)	11 (3%)	51 (13%)	19 (4%)	2 (0%)	1 (0 %)
Total (100%)	1.165	392	384	514	389	344

Source: CBS, Statline 2005 + an addition through CBS info service

The most common motivation to migrate among Nigerians is family formation (33%), which means that Nigerians often marry with a partner who already has Dutch nationality. After the asylum motive labour is a relatively important ground to move to the Netherlands, more than among any of the other enumerated groups.

Among the Ethiopians the most important reason to migrate after asylum is studying. A quarter of the Ethiopians arrive in the Netherlands to study. This is most noticeable at the Agricultural University of Wageningen and at the Institute for Social Studies in Den Haag.

The third row of the table shows that Somali's have moved further into the phase of family reunification, and to a lesser extend also Congolese and Sudanese. This means that the percentage of single men will diminish in the future, while the percentage of complete families will increase. The migration motive is of great importance for someone's future in the Netherlands. Asylum seekers are forced to stay in camps for some years without being able to work and spread throughout the country, which has negative consequences for their labour career later.

2. Theories on organisational development

After this general description of the groups of this study, we will now turn to migrant associations. The five main reasons why immigrants establish associations are: a) to have a place to meet and to feel at home, b) to serve as an information and support service, c) to be able to organise events like cultural or religious celebrations more easily, d) to defend common interests, e) to arrange educational activities (Van Heelsum, 2004b). In the first phase after immigration the number of associations goes up sharply due to specific needs of this community, the demand for information and the need to meet and organise cultural and religious celebration is at that time a driving force. After a certain period the number of organisations usually stabilises, more women and children become part of a community and more diversity in the associations develops. Organisations arrange home work support for children and courses in the home language. After the community is well settled with at least two generations, the demand from immigrant communities for specific associations usually goes down. The members know how the language, have learned find the social institutions they need, and the information function

loses importance, while the second generation is often less interested in the cultural meetings. The religious function tends to remain salient, and religious associations tend to survive longer.

We will now treat three theoretical approaches from the literature on migrant associations, that we find useful to answer the questions on the organisational functioning of the associations in the African communities of our study: the organisational ecology theory, the civic community perspective and the transnational perspective. Readers who are interested in a more comprehensive overview of theoretical lines of approach on associational development are referred to the special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* of (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005) and to *'The immigrant organising process'* by (Vermeulen, 2005), where attention is paid to the interaction between the political opportunity structure in the receiving country and the process in the immigrant community itself. For Dutch readers Van Heelsum (2004a, 2004b) provides an overview of the associational development in the Netherlands.

2.1 The theory of organisational ecology

(Hannan & Freeman, 1989) state that the development of organisations (either business or volunteer) is mainly influenced by internal factors in a certain community of people that are interested to establish them, and less by factors in the surrounding society. A minimum number of people has to gather before the first organisation can develop ('density'), then the service has to be interesting and relevant for the public ('legitimacy') and the service is not yet offered everywhere ('competition'). These three characteristics determine the moment that new associations are established. For example a mosque is established when a minimum number of Muslims lives in a neighbourhood, they have to consider the mosque important enough to undertake effort to organise it (legitimacy), and there are no easy alternatives available (competition). An inverted u-curve development in the number of organisations becomes visible over time, because the legitimacy goes down when more organisations in the same field are established. This applies to business organisations but also to volunteer organisations. When too many mosques have been established, only the better ones survive.

Several types of associations have developed in the different African communities. With the ecological theory we will try to find an explanation on the kind of associations that have enough legitimacy in the different groups, and on the kind of associations that do not develop.

2.2 The civic community perspective

The civic community perspective is known for its attention for the social capital that members of associations provide, and to associational interconnectedness and networks. The debate on civic community has been stirred up by authors such as Fukuyama (1999) Putnam (2000) and Hooghe (2001) who have debated whether the diminishing interest in formal organisations throughout the Western world does or does not have serious consequences for the stability of society. Robert Putnam elaborated on the civic community perspective in *'Making Democracy Work'* (Putnam, 1993), he related the membership of associations with a higher level of political participation. In his study of the regional councils in Italy, Putnam has shown that civic culture explains a large part of the different political performances among the Italian regions. Putnam has measured the 'civicness' of regions by determining the density of the local cultural and recreational associations, by newspaper circulation, by the referendum turn-out and by the preference voting for regional candidates.

Fennema & Tillie (1999) have studied associationalism and political activity within the Dutch context. Based on their comparison of the Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean communities in Amsterdam, they confirm that the number of associations and the strength of networks between associations are the most likely contributor to trust in politics and turn out rates in elections. They have constructed several measures of the 'civicness' of communities. The first one is the simple organisational density (organisations per 1000 inhabitants), the second one includes a measure on the number of connections through common board members. Not only does the Turkish community have more associations per 1000 inhabitants than the other ethnic groups in the study, also the number of

connections through common board members is larger. A large number of associations is not always a sign of a well functioning civic society, but the representatives of the different political and religious streams within the Turkish community tend to meet each other in local and national advisory boards, in religious boards and in other umbrella organisations. The amount of umbrella organisations among Turks is considerably larger than among the other ethnic groups. This is why we see so many connections between the board members of Turkish associations. Because of the large number of connections, information can travel fast. When a Turkish representative gets certain information and talks about it in his meetings with other chairmen but also spread it among the members, transfer of information can be more efficient than would be possible in a community without many interlinkages.

Thinking of the African communities of our study, some groups have more associations and some groups have more interconnections than others. It is necessary to find out how many associations have been established, what this means and to what extent they are connected to each other.

2.3 The transnational perspective

The transnational perspective (Horst, 2006; Portes, 1999) is not a theory on organisations, but a way of looking into more dimensions of migration. Not only the country of origin and the country where the immigrant arrives are important, but also the many interactions between them and the interactions with third countries. Just studying organisations of immigrants in the country where they currently live may give limited insight into these associations. Drawing from the transnational perspective, our attention is drawn to developmental aid by associations in the Netherlands towards the country of origin and to cooperation between associations in the Netherlands with third countries.

Firstly the circumstances in the country of origin are part of the explanation for the differences between African associations in Europe. We will describe below to what extent the circumstances in African countries differ and how this influences the possibilities for associations in the Netherlands to set up development projects and to cooperate.

Secondly this perspective points our attention to the fact that an immigrant is likely to function in a network of countrymen that have moved to several other countries. For instance a Turkish immigrant in the Netherlands will probably not only have a network of contacts in the Netherlands, but it is very likely that he has close friends and family members in for instance Germany. If communities have a strong system of umbrella associations, this also passes borders. In the Turkish case, the main religious and political streams that we see in the Netherlands are also visible in Turkey and other European countries like Germany. European umbrella organisations function in some cases from Turkey and in some cases from Germany.

This kind of transnational associational ties can develop simply because of personal networks. But they can also develop because political opposition is organised abroad or because of a powerful umbrella organisation.

3. Numbers and type of African associations in the Netherlands

We will now turn to our data on African associations in the Netherlands. We will start with the number and type of associations among the groups of this study, and then relate the outcomes as much as possible to the theories that we have treated.

Numbers of associations

Through gathering several existing databases on African organisations, combined with data of the chamber of commerce, we have gathered all possible names and addresses of organisations of Angolans, Congolese, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Nigerians, Sudanese and Somalis. Since all databases on organisations have turned out to be very sensitive to changes, the data should be interpreted as a random indication. In table 3 we have summarized the numbers and in table 4 the type of associations.

Table 3 Number of organisations and organisational density of African groups in 2004

	number of organisations	organisation per 1000 inhabitants
Angolans	12	1
Congolese	37	4
Ethiopians/Eritreans	74	7
Nigerians	22	3
Sudanese	43	6
Somalis	161	7

* though it is clear which associations are Ethiopian and which are Eritrean, the two groups are taken together because otherwise the density cannot be calculated

As the first column of table 3 shows, there is a big difference in the number of associations that communities of comparable size have set up. This is on itself a striking conclusion, and these differences probably influence all other aspects of the functioning of groups.

Somali's, Ethiopians and Eritreans in the Netherlands dispose of much higher net number of associations than Angolans or Nigerians. Of course the organisational density is a better figure to compare communities of different size. The second column shows that the organisational density is relatively high among Somali's, Ethiopians/Eritreans and Sudanese, while it is lower among Congolese and Nigerians and the very lowest among Angolans. To compare this, the Turks in the research of Fennema & Tillie, had an organisational density of 4.

In table 4 we present an overview of the types of associations that we could distinguish in our database. The categorisation is based on the names of the associations and our personal information and most of the time not in all cases on interviews. The manner of categorising associations is also used in our overview of migrant associations in the Netherlands (Van Heelsum 2004a)

Table 4 Types of associations among seven African groups in the Netherlands

	general *	political	develop mental	religious	socio- cultural	student/ youth	women	other **	Total
Angolans	6	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	12
Congolese	8	1	6	17	2	0	1	2	37
Ethiopians	8	3	4	5	0	1	0	10	31
Eritreans	14	4	5	7	2	4	3	4	43
Nigerians	6	3	3	2	1	0	1	6	22
Sudanese	15	4	5	0	5	3	1	10	43
Somalis	54	2	55	2	21	4	9	14	161

* a 'general' associations has usually several functions: information, cultural meetings, education

** category 'other' includes sport, ethnic subgroups, media, etc.

Though we have to be careful not to draw far-reaching conclusions, some things become clear from these tables: 1) Somali's have most associations, particularly of the general and developmental type; 2) all ethnic groups have political and developmental organisations that work in the country of origin, 3) religious associations occur mainly among Congolese, Eritreans and Ethiopians (churches) and nearly not among the Muslim groups 4) the Angolan and Nigerian community seem less bound to establish associations.

We will now describe the organisational characteristics of the different communities with some additional information.

The large number of Somali associations is often attributed to the clan structure of the Somali community. Every clan has its associations, especially in cities where many Somali's live, though this is usually not communicated to for instance subsidy providers. This shows in the large number of general Somali organisations but also in the large number of developmental aid organisations, which usually support an area or a village in Somalia. This kind of organisations gather money to build a school or a well for instance, usually in a village. Somali's outside their country found developmental organisations necessary. Family and stay-behinds in Somalia sometimes didn't have any source of income and in the worst period of the war, there were not even banks or telephone companies. So helping the ones that had stayed behind in this totally destroyed country was considered urgent.

Surprisingly this was less the case among Congolese. Though the infrastructure of DR Congo is also in a very bad state, the Congolese in Holland didn't think that they could easily achieve something by starting developmental projects. It has been noted by other authors that a general fatigue characterised the Congolese community in the Netherlands. Problems with Dutch language are much more serious than among the other groups in this study, which might be a factor to stop them from arranging something complicated as international aid. Among Congolese the most common form of organisation is religious. The Congolese have established their own Kimbanguist churches and a Roman Catholic church, but also many Pentecostal churches.

Of the few Angolan associations that exist, developmental aid seems important. Though most young Angolans think first of going back with a diploma and not of starting a development project, the number of attempts is in the last years increasing.

Also among Ethiopians and Eritreans the religious category is the largest. The Ethiopians have their specific Ethiopian Coptic churches, a Roman Catholic and a growing number of Pentecostal churches. A specific characteristic of Eritrean organisation is, that many are related to the Eritrean government. Before its independence Eritrea had a liberation movement (EPLF) and an opposition movement (ELF) which both had strong organisational networks in Europe. This structure still exists after the Eritrean independence, but now the first group is allied to the embassy.

The Sudanese organisations are more divers: there are several political and aid organisations. Note that religious organisations are not common among Sudanese, but there is a powerful umbrella organisation.

The Nigerians have also formed associations of nearly all types, including Pentecostal religious ones. We didn't find Nigerian Muslim associations.

Organisational ecology theory

Combining our knowledge on the African associations in the Netherlands with the organisational ecology theory, it becomes clear that the recent date of arrival of most African groups determines the phase in which the organisational development finds itself. Most of the communities are in the first phase of organisational development and a growth is taking place. In all national groups we find a sufficient numbers of potential members to form organisations. Within the Angolan community the number of associations is so low, that the first phase of finding members and getting legitimacy within the Angolan community is not passed. The number of Somali associations has grown more rapidly. Due to the clan based structure of Somali community more associations have legitimacy within the different clan groups. Only among Somali's the number of associations is so high that they are competing and some of them are disappearing, but is also caused by the removal rate of Somali's.

However, every group has very different preferences, which can be explained by both legitimacy and competition. It is clear that for all groups developmental work has legitimacy, though more for Somalis' and Nigerians.

Secondly it seems that the Muslim groups have nearly not developed religious associations (Somali's, Sudanese), while groups with specific Christian churches have established many of them. Because many Muslim associations and mosques of Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese already exist in the Netherlands, the Somali's and Sudanese seem to have no high urgency to establish their own mosques.

For the Ethiopian/Eritreans, Congolese and Nigerian communities found the Coptic, Kimbanguist and Pentecostal churches so relevant, that they established their own. The Pentecostal churches are a special case, since they are more easily established than most other religious associations. There were many Pentecostal churches of Ghanaians in Amsterdam, probably the language has been relevant for Congolese – who like the service in French – and Ethiopians/Eritreans – who like the service in Amharina or Tigrina. This shows that the competition argument of the ecology theory can be used for Muslim, Coptic and Kimbanguist religious associations.

Social capital theory

The social capital theory has already pointed us in the direction of calculating the number of associations per 1000 immigrants. We have seen that the Somali, Ethiopian/Eritrean and Sudanese community have higher organisational densities.

A second lesson from the social capital theory is that we should also look into the networks between organisations. In our database of organisations we find a number of umbrella organisations. The strongest one is the Sudan Forum. In 2004 30 associations have united in the so-called 'Sudan Civil Society Forum in the Netherlands' abbreviated SCSF or Sudan Forum. This Sudan Forum has been established because Dutch NGO's for developmental aid (particularly NOVIB) needed a contact point to cooperate with the Sudanese community. An important part of the Dutch developmental aid is currently a system of cooperation between developmental NGO's and migrant associations. The Sudan Forum has developed into something much bigger than a contact point for developmental aid: it has organised congresses on the political situation in Sudan, it supports the social events of the local member organisations, it keeps contacts with Dutch and Sudanese politicians and there is effective daily exchange of information through a web forum. That Sudan Forum has an important role in exchange of information and uniting efforts of the many local Sudanese organisations. It functions as a tie to spread information fast and it can operate in defending interests of Sudanese in the Netherlands. Information is also exchanged outside the Netherlands, because of the contacts of the members abroad.

The Somali organisations are characterised by vibrant activity and there are several umbrella organisations. The largest one is Federation of the Somali Associations in the Netherlands (FSAN), which is also the official representative in the advisory organ to the national government Vluchtelingen Organisaties Nederland (VON) ². This federation has 41 member associations, both men's and women's associations, local and national associations, from all regions of Somalia, and the member associations are spread throughout the Netherlands. FSAN is a strong federation. On the one hand common concerns among Somali's are reformulated into local activities, but on the other hand the national policy influences the activities (for instance the national government defined female circumcision as a priority and FSAN and its member developed local information gatherings on this issue. Even though our database of Somali association's changes faster than the database of other groups, due to new formation/discontinuance or because of address change, we can speak of a strong network.

Among the Nigerians we also find platforms, but our impression is that they are not as strong as the Sudan Forum of the FSAN. There are at least two platforms, from different sections of the Nigerian population. It is less clear how strong these Nigerian networks are and to what extent they cover all sections of the Nigerian population in the Netherlands, there seem to be political cleavages. Among Sudanese, Somali's and Nigerians the networks are more developed than among the other African communities of our study. It is easy to get contact with platforms and member organisations, while the network of Angolans is relatively the least developed one. Probably the age of the young Angolan population is one of the causes.

² <http://www.fsan.nl/>

Transnational approach

From the transnational perspective there are three lines of reasoning that are relevant for associations: firstly the associations of all communities have ties in their country of origin but the circumstances in the countries of origin differ and influence the functioning of associations in the Netherlands. Secondly many of the former colonisers of African countries are important links in the international network of African associations. Thirdly a different connection pattern has been established outside the Netherlands because of different preferences for settlement.

We will first elaborate further on the first factor, the circumstances in the countries of origin of the African groups in this study, which are very different. The most obvious difference is between countries at peace and countries at war. Congo, Sudan and Somalia are the most instable and the situation is either war, or so instable that areas can any time plunge back in to war. The possibility to interact with countries at war is limited and many services are disrupted. The infrastructure is broken, refugee movement makes it difficult to find people and the telephone doesn't function everywhere. Building up stable work relations is even more difficult. The most difficult to work with seems Congo, not only because of it's instability and lack of infrastructure but also because of lack of law and order. Though Somalia has for years been near to chaos, without government, tax system or police, the Somali associations outside Somalia have shown an enormous perseverance to set up small scale development projects. That no government took responsibility for the basic needs in villages and towns seems to have stimulated them to do something it themselves. Worst affected is the Mogadishu area, and less affected Somaliland.

In Sudan there are differences between regions. The attempts of Dutch Sudanese associations to work on development in Sudan seem to focus on south Sudan, from where most of the Sudanese in Holland originate. Towards Darfur there have been several political initiatives, like peace conferences, demonstrations, etcetara.

Angola is currently not at war anymore, but the infrastructure is such a bad state outside the capital (including landmines problems) that it is still difficult for Dutch associations to set up anything outside Luanda. Because many Angolans are teenagers and not sure about their staying permit, these are not a very stable starting point for development projects. Older Angolans with a stable residence permit frequently talk about going back or moving up and down to build up Angola.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are constantly in a state of near war. It is currently not very difficult to cooperate with Ethiopian civic society but more difficult to cooperate with Eritrean civic society. In Eritrea associations are inspected and the threat that something might be considered a danger to the regime causes fear to act.

Nigeria is the only country that is not in a state of war, though this doesn't mean that it is always stable or easy to work with. There is constant stream of incidents particularly in the oil-area, these concern lawlessness, corruption, killings. The relative stability makes it possible for Dutch Nigerians to work in Nigeria, though they are obstructed by payments requested on all levels for instance customs but also village chiefs.

The secondly transnational factor that influences associations is the link between the former colonisers of African countries and the international network of Africans. In the case of Angola this was Portugal, and for Angolans in Europe Portugal remains important. There seem to be limited associational contacts though between Dutch Angolan associations and Portuguese Angolan associations, the contacts seems to be on personal level.

DR Congo was colonised by Belgium and because of this, many Congolese in the Netherlands have friends in Belgium, travel up and down to Belgium and know French much better than Dutch. In Belgium there are a considerable number of Congolese associations, for instance cultural associations in Liege and Brussels. We don't see strong connections between Dutch and Belgian Congolese associations.

In the case of Eritrea Italy was the coloniser, and a lot of close contacts exist between on individual level between Eritrea and Italy, and between Eritreans in other European countries. This is also true for associations. The main meeting of the two political groupings (the former EPLF and the opposition) are yearly taking place in Italy and Eritrean members of these groupings from all over Europe gather there. Ethiopia was never colonised, it was only occupied during the Second World War by Mussolini, so connections with any of the European countries are less developed.

Somalia is a special case, since parts were occupied by England, France and Italy. Most Somali's are from the former British part, which might be a factor in their preference for the UK.

Nigeria and Sudan are both former colonies of the United Kingdom, but there is a difference between them. Nigerians in Europe seem more oriented towards the UK than Sudanese are. There has been much more settlement of Nigerians in the UK than of Sudanese, and the communities differ a lot. The Nigerian community in the UK is older and depends more on economic and student relations. Relatively new are the Sudanese refugee communities caused by the war in South Sudan and recently in Darfur. Sudanese associations work together with their counterparts in the UK.

A thirdly factor that influences the transnational connections of associations outside the Netherlands, is the different preference pattern for settlement of immigrants. From UNHCR data (2006) on refugee flows, the following patterns come forward.

Angolans have a tendency to prefer Portugal, though they cannot attain an asylum status there. Until recently they also liked the Netherlands, but after Angola was declared a safe country and many Angolans were sent back, this interest diminished.

Refugees from DR Congo prefer France and Belgium, after that the UK and Canada, and to a lesser extend the Netherlands. Their networks are French speaking and stronger in France and Belgium.

Ethiopians prefer to settle in the UK and the USA, and after that Canada, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Associations in the Netherlands invite scholars from the UK and US to give lectures in their conferences, but not a lot of cooperation takes place between the associations.

Eritrean refugees currently prefer to settle the UK, Switzerland, Sweden, Malta, Norway, and to a lesser extend the Netherlands.

Nigerians are currently moving in bigger numbers to Ireland, UK, but also to Canada, Spain and we find less of them in the Netherlands. Some of those who had moved to the Netherlands move on to the UK. The UK seems to be the centre of activity, also for associations also information services.

Somali's have always preferred the UK, but both their numbers and the influx are still considerable in the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway. From the last three countries migration takes place to the UK. Both personal as associational ties exist between these four countries.

Sudanese refugees' first preference in Europe is the UK, after that France and the Netherlands. There seem to be both personal and associational ties between the Netherlands and the UK. Connections with the SPLA sections in Sudan, the Netherlands and the UK are the most obvious. Exchange of intellectuals for congresses is also taking place.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have combined the data on African associations, gathered in our study of 2005, with theoretical knowledge on associations in general. In paragraph 3 we showed what kind of associations the different communities have. It is shown that the associational life is very different among the groups in this study, though the size of the communities is similar and they are operating more or less within the same opportunity structure. Ethiopians, Eritreans, Sudanese and Somali's have considerably more associations than the other groups, while Angolans have nearly no associations. Associations with 'general' purpose (information provision, cultural meetings) and developmental associations exist among all, but religious associations seem to occur more among Christians and less among Muslims. Somali's are more active in establishing associations in for developmental aid.

In paragraph 4 we added new dimensions by applying theoretical knowledge. The organisational ecology theory has given us a framework for the phase in which the associations in our study are: Angolans are in the earliest phase while the Ethiopian community has developed for the longest period. All communities are in a development phase and have not entered the phase of consolidation, since all are relatively short in the Netherlands. Somali and Angolan communities had started to build up, but due to the migration of their members out of the Netherlands, the number of associations is already diminishing.

The social capital theory has pointed our attention to the organisational structure of the communities. This section showed that some communities have more federations and networks. Of the groups of this study the Sudanese community is better connected than the others and the Angolan community is the least connected.

Information added from the transnational ties perspective shows that strong transnational ties are influenced by the political situation in the country of origin, the former colonising power and the preferences of current refugees for certain countries. In general we can conclude that the French, Portuguese and English speaking worlds are not connected. For most of the group in this study, the UK is an important point of reference. Another conclusion is that communities that have strong networks in the Netherlands, also have stronger networks outside the Netherlands, like Sudanese and Somali's. Ethiopians, Eritreans and Sudanese exchange intellectuals for meetings and conferences and political figures are going around Europe. The Somali community is very actively engaged in international contacts between Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands towards the UK, though not through federations but through small (clan based) associational contacts.

6. Possibilities for cooperation with NGO's

We will now end with a short summary of the consequences of the knowledge that we have gathered from the organisational theories and the research in African communities for NGO's. Indications are formulated of the possibility to cooperate with a certain community. It has to be stressed that active and efficient individuals and associations can be found in all communities, who want to work on developmental aid. Individuals and associations in the less organised communities, for instance the Angolan community, simply need more support to get organised and established.

As we have seen above the Sudanese and Somali communities have a high level of organisational cooperation. Among Sudanese we find also many high-educated people. Within the Somali community: developmental aid has high 'legitimacy', it is an active community, with many transnational links and very flexible, sometimes maybe too flexible. When judged from the perspectives of the theories that we have used, it will be easier to cooperate with this kind of strong networks.

The other groups all have something that complicates cooperation. In the Ethiopian and Eritrean cases it is necessary to avoid the political dividing lines in the community. Both Congolese and Eritreans have difficulties to access the country of origin, because of political turmoil and unsafety.

Among Nigerians developmental aid has low 'legitimacy', and therefore it will be more difficult to find associations and individuals interested in setting up projects. The economic possibilities to trade with Nigeria or to set up businesses in Nigeria are of more interest for Nigerians in Europe than developmental aid. Within the Angolan community we found limited organisational activity, and the community mainly exists of teen-age youngsters, which makes it more difficult to find a starting point for cooperation with NGO's.

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