CONTRIBUTIONS AND BARRIERS TO KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

The experience of returning experts

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>Workplace equipment</td>
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<td>CIM</td>
<td>Centre for International Migration and Development</td>
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<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technology</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-government organisation</td>
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<td>RE</td>
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ABSTRACT

The increased circulation and mobility of people in recent times has created opportunities for migrants to gain new knowledge and ideas, which can in turn generate knowledge transfer and creation when they return to their country of origin. Recently, several programmes have begun to focus on diaspora knowledge transfer, such as the 'Migration for Development' programme by the Centre for International Migration and Development (CIM).

A key aspect of the programme is its component in support of returning experts (RE). This targets diaspora professionals in Germany who are interested in returning to their country of origin and helps identify employment opportunities and finance development-related occupations when they get there. Returning experts aim to contribute to knowledge transfer and creation, with the development of the country of origin itself as the ultimate goal.

This study examines the knowledge transfer that results from RE. In so doing it distinguishes between tacit and explicit knowledge transfer, analyses the perspective of both the knowledge sender and receiver, and considers barriers that may hinder the knowledge transfer and creation process. Through this unique approach, a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the impacts of the RE is achieved.

The study uses a mixed methods approach consisting of a desk review, the profiling of the current REs, an online survey, and interviews. The survey was emailed to a total of 1,345 REs who participated in the programme from 2009-2013, with a response rate of 43.7%. In-depth interviews were conducted in three selected countries: Georgia, Ghana and Mongolia. A total of 91 in-depth interviews were conducted, of which 32 were with REs, 29 with colleagues and 30 with supervisors. This method is useful in gaining multiple perspectives on the process of knowledge transfer within a single placement.

The key findings of the study show that knowledge transfer takes different forms in the majority of RE placements but often falls short of optimal levels. Moreover, the study concludes that tacit knowledge transfer occurs more commonly than the explicit variety. The results also confirm that – as is to be expected within diaspora and returnee programmes – culture and language are seldom barriers to knowledge transfer for REs. Other barriers to knowledge transfer, such as age and (lack of) experience, were reported more frequently. This in itself demonstrates the added value of diaspora and returnee programmes since language and cultural barriers are often the main barriers faced by foreign experts. Furthermore, the study highlights that the work environment and experience of colleagues and supervisors have a large impact on knowledge transfer. The capacity of organisations to absorb new knowledge transferred and created by the RE is crucial. Hence, the study also concludes that supervisors need to be aware of knowledge transfer objectives in order to effectively support the knowledge transfer process. Workplace equipment was also found to be essential for successful knowledge transfer of REs. The general lack of adequate resources in organisations as a whole within countries of origin still appears to be a major barrier to knowledge transfer.

The study makes several recommendations for the improvement of the support offered by CIM to REs. These include pre-departure training on knowledge transfer activities, integration of knowledge transfer into the objectives of the RE position, and awareness-raising among supervisors and employers to ensure their cooperation for knowledge transfer activities.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The increased circulation and mobility of people in recent times has created opportunities for migrants to acquire new knowledge and ideas, which can in turn lead to knowledge transfer and creation when they return to their country of origin. In recent decades, several programmes have emerged that focus on diaspora knowledge transfer, such as the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals Programme (TOKTEN) and the Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals Programme (TRQN). These short-term temporary return programmes aim to harness the skills of the diaspora for knowledge transfer through short-term assignments in the country of origin.

A key aspect of the CIM ‘Migration for Development’ programme is the Returning Experts (RE) component, which targets diaspora professionals in Germany who are interested in returning to their country of origin and helps identify employment opportunities and finance development-related occupations in the country of origin. The REs’ objective is to contribute to knowledge transfer and creation, with the development of the country of origin itself as the ultimate goal. In contrast to the above programmes, RE placements last two years and the programme makes no demands regarding permanent or temporary return. The RE initiative has been in operation since 1994 and over 10,000 participants have since returned to their countries of origin. Since the changes to the programme in 2009, over 1,300 people have participated. The RE initiative currently has approximately 250 people per year participating in over 40 countries.
Knowledge can be defined as literally ‘what people know’ (UNDP 2010). Argote & Ingram (2000) define knowledge transfer as ‘the process through which one unit (e.g., group, department, or division) is affected by the experience of another’ (p. 151). Knowledge transfer includes both tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to what is written down – knowledge that is recorded in memos, books, reports, documents and databases (Goh 2007). Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is much more abstract and complex, as it is often transferred more informally. This form of knowledge transfer includes mentoring, one-on-one training, learning by example, teamwork, and reflections on personal experiences. The challenge with evaluating knowledge transfer is that there is no established, verified method to measure the knowledge transfer processes (Kuschminder, 2012). However, several research projects have been conducted to try and fill this gap.

In assessing knowledge transfer, it is important to understand the perspective of the knowledge sender and receiver. The receiver – the party for whom the knowledge is intended – may demonstrate different levels of knowledge retention and use (Rich 1997). For instance, the knowledge may be received but not understood or applied (Rich 1997). It is thus important to understand what knowledge has been transferred, retained, and applied, from the receiver’s perspective.

A second component that must be considered is the barriers that may inhibit the knowledge transfer process. Barriers can exist at both individual and organisational levels. Individual barriers include a lack of experience or capacity, mutual mistrust, and negative attitudes or lack of motivation. Organisational barriers include an unsupportive working culture, competing interests, high levels of workplace bureaucracy, and a lack of the equipment and resources required for knowledge transfer (Mitton et al. 2007).

Therefore, for optimal levels of knowledge transfer there must be congruence between both the individual and the organisation. Diaspora and return migrants may experience varying levels of difficulty in knowledge transfer, depending on whether or not they face cultural barriers and/or mistrust from colleagues due to their migration experience. The very fact of being a member of the diaspora or a returnee may contribute to or detract from the knowledge transfer process.

All of these elements were considered in the design and implementation of this evaluation. The methodology was therefore specifically designed to cover explicit and tacit knowledge transfer and barriers to knowledge transfer, and to capture the experiences of knowledge senders and receivers. This unique approach has made a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the impacts of the RE initiative possible.
The study used a mixed methods approach consisting of a desk review, profiling of the current REs, an online survey, and interviews. A desk review was first conducted on knowledge transfer to further understand the process and its specific context upon return. Using CIM’s registration database of all REs, the participants were profiled in order to examine various key indicators. This profiling allowed for an understanding of the primary countries of return by project year, if the job was found through placement support or self-search, and the gender of the RE.

After the profiling was completed, an online survey was created to assess the knowledge transfer activities and experiences of the REs. The survey was emailed to a total of 1,345 REs who participated in the RE component from 2009-2013. A total of 588 usable responses were received (a response rate of 43.7%) and included in this evaluation report.

In addition to the online survey, three countries were selected for interviews based on the following criteria: a mix of both self-search and placement participants, being located in different geographical regions, and having sufficient REs in the capital city available for interview. The three countries that were selected were Georgia, Ghana, and Mongolia. In each country, interviews were conducted with REs, their employer/supervisor, and one colleague. This approach was useful in gaining multiple perspectives on the process of knowledge transfer within a single placement.

### 3.1 Overview of Interview Respondents

A total of 91 in-depth interviews were conducted, of which 32 were with REs, 29 with colleagues and 30 with supervisors. There was a strong gender component to the countries, with 75% of REs in Georgia and 60% in Mongolia being female, compared to 10% of the REs in Ghana. On average, the Georgian REs were the youngest with an average age of 31 years compared to 36 in Ghana and Mongolia. REs to Ghana were more likely to have a PhD, with 40% holding the degree, compared to 30% in Mongolia and 17% in Georgia. 60% of the Mongolian experts worked in their field of expertise during their stay in Germany, compared to 25% of Georgian experts, and 30% of Ghanaian experts. Mongolian REs stayed much longer in Germany with an average of 10 years compared to an average duration of 6 years for Georgian REs and 5 years for Ghanaian REs. All of the REs interviewed (with one exception) had migrated to Germany to pursue their studies.
4. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The online questionnaire yielded 612 responses, of which 588 were complete and thus included in the analysis. Of the REs who answered the survey, 64% were still in their RE position. The average age of respondents was 36.7 and their ages ranged from 24 to 66. The majority (two thirds) of respondents were between 31 and 40 years old. 67% of the respondents were male. Twenty-eight individuals, or 5% of the sample, had German citizenship but had returned to their country of origin as an RE nonetheless.

Of the survey respondents, 91% had chosen 'education' as their main motivation for having migrated to Germany and 96% stated that they had studied while in Germany. 68% had migrated to Germany alone but almost 30% had migrated with their spouse and almost 20% with children. The number of years spent in Germany ranged from 1 to 32 with an average of 5.4.

A minority (32%) of the REs had worked in their area of expertise while in Germany. Of these individuals, 50% had worked in an academic institution and 25% in a private company – the remainder had primarily worked in the public or non-profit sectors or had been self-employed. The years of professional experience acquired in Germany ranged from 1 to 21 with an average of 3.8 years.

The most frequent reason given for the return was 'to share skills and contribute to development' (59% gave this as their first reason) followed by 'to be close to family and friends' (19% gave this as their primary reason and 34% as their secondary reason). The reasons for return differed across countries, with respondents from Moldova, Ukraine and China being more likely to cite employment opportunities as their main reason for return while no or very few respondents gave this reason in Mongolia, Nepal and Ethiopia. 49 respondents (8% of the full sample) gave 'visa expired' as their primary or secondary reason for return. Although many of the REs were students on time-limited visas, this was not reported as the reason.

46% of respondents had found their RE position through placement support offered by the programme and most (41%) of the self-search REs had found their position through professional contacts. CIM offers several other services to REs and just over 50% reported that they had received 'additional support' services, such as networking trips, internship support, or capacity building activities. Interestingly, 37% reported that they had received workplace equipment support (APA).

Most respondents had been in their RE position for at least eighteen months and respondents who were still in their RE position were more likely to have held it for longer than two years compared to those who had already left their RE position. One third of the respondents had returned to the same organisation for which they had been working prior to their migration. In such cases, the REs now occupied a more senior position within the organisation than prior to their migration. 50% of those who returned to their previous organisation were at academic institutions. The most common

Are you currently in your RE position? Received placement support to find RE position?

Figure 1: Currently in RE position and placement support

Of those who had completed a degree in Germany, 51% had completed a Master's degree, 34% a PhD, and 5% a Bachelor's (respondents could only select the highest qualification they had obtained although some had completed multiple degrees in Germany). The most common study disciplines were mathematics and natural sciences (21%), followed by engineering (20%) and agricultural and environmental sciences (15%).

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Type of organisation for REs to work in upon return was academic institutions, followed by government institutions and not-for-profit organisations (Figure 2). The two most common areas of work that an organisation engaged in were 'education' and 'environment, energy, water, or waste management'.

Among those respondents who had left their RE position the most common reason given for leaving was the fact of having another job opportunity (38%). However a sizeable number (18%) had left because their contract had ended and had not been extended. 54% of those who had left their RE position were still working for the same employer and 77% of these respondents had been promoted. Of the former REs who had finished their RE position and left their place of employment, two thirds were still living in the country to which they had returned for their RE placement. Of those who had moved to a different country, 60% (16 individuals) were now in Germany and 75% (20 individuals) were now in the EU (or Switzerland). Of all former REs, the majority (86%) were working or studying and the remainder were unemployed, mostly actively seeking employment.

The respondents in general had a high level of membership of organisations within their return country, with 54% being members of academic associations and 52% in professional associations. Memberships in these associations correlated highly with one another and also with being a member of student or alumni associations, suggesting that individuals tend to either be involved in several associations at once or none at all.

The majority of REs reported some level of continued contact with family and friends and with professional contacts in Germany following their return. For most, however, this occurred less than once a month. In the case of diaspora organisations, a majority (57%) still had contact with diaspora organisations in Germany but in general this was very infrequent.

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Figure 2: Areas in which REs work

- Academic Institution
- Government Institution
- Not-for-profit organisation
- Privately owned company
- International NGO / diplomacy
- Other
- Self-employed

Figure 3: Perception of RE service and future plans

- Yes 94%
- No 6%

- Country of origin 78%
- Germany 11%
- Other 11%
Perceptions of the value of the RE service were in general very positive, with 94% stating that the programme had helped with their reintegration (Figure 3). One of the most fundamental aspects of reintegration is re-entering the labour market. Having a job, and in particular a good job, enables a returnee to not only have an income and livelihood to support their family, but to be able to feel pride and success in their accomplishments upon return. These are critical aspects of successful reintegration.

A minority of REs (31%) stated that they would not have returned without the RE service, suggesting that the programme is not perceived as a primary factor in the decision to return. The programme itself does not set out to induce people to return – its principal objective being to contribute to knowledge transfer and development. The critical role of the programme in facilitating return and reintegration therefore arguably contributes to the wider objective of knowledge transfer for development. The majority of respondents expressed the intention to remain in their country of origin and only a small number (11%) expressed the intention to return to Germany. This significant figure further illustrates the success of the reintegration process.
This section will examine the results of the questionnaire and interviews in three stages. We first identify and explore forms of knowledge transfer. Second, we discuss specific factors that contribute to an individual having a high level of knowledge transfer. Third, we examine barriers to the knowledge transfer process.

5.1 Forms of Knowledge Transfer

In this section we first use the questionnaire data to identify the most common and infrequent forms of knowledge transfer and then give examples of each area of knowledge transfer. In all cases a large majority of questionnaire respondents said that they had at least sometimes engaged in the knowledge transfer or capacity building activity described. Sharing new ideas, tools and working methods, assisting colleagues in problem solving, and encouraging teamwork were done ‘often’ or ‘very often’ by 80% of the sample. The activities which were most likely to be ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ carried out were providing formal training, writing memos or guidance notes and organising or contributing to a workshop, although each of these activities was carried out at least ‘sometimes’ by over 80% of the sample (Figure 4). This highlights that tacit forms of knowledge transfer occurred more commonly than explicit forms of knowledge transfer.

Having assessed the frequency of knowledge transfer activities, this section will now provide more in-depth examples of the forms of knowledge transfer prevalent among the REs. We first examine explicit forms of knowledge transfer, followed by a discussion of tacit forms.

5.1.1 Explicit knowledge transfer

Formal training
The majority of interviewees stated that they provided formal training in the form of lectures, seminars, presentations and practical training for staff members, clients or other organisations. The setting in which the training took place as well as the intensity of such training varied widely. For example, some organisations held regular team meetings and organised peer learning sessions in which staff members presented their knowledge in order to share it with their colleagues. As part of these, the REs gave presentations in their field of expertise or on other topics of which they had knowledge. In academic institutions and other research institutes it was also common for research results to be shared, presented and discussed at team meetings. In other cases, especially for REs working at academic institutions, giving formal training was part of the job description and therefore formed a part of regular duties.

The intensity of formal training and consequently the extent of knowledge transfer depended largely on the nature of such training. In cases where most knowledge transfer was reported and observed (both from the RE, and from colleagues and supervisors) it took the form of practical on-the-job training or presentations on new strategies closely related to the work of the organisation. For example, one RE working in an IT company gave frequent practical training on software development and the use of software applications. It was reported by the supervisor that the other staff members – often recent university graduates – were able to fulfil their task more efficiently and in a shorter time frame after the training. In another example, an architect trained the engineers in the company on how to incorporate better thermal insulation in their constructions. The colleague reported now being not only aware of this issue, but also including this kind of technology when planning a new building.

In addition to the nature and frequency of formal training, the content of such training can be divided into three different categories. First, many training sessions were conducted in order to develop new skills among participants. Beside general management skills such as human resources, accounting, teambuilding, leadership and project management, the training also dealt with improving the writing and participants’ research skills. For example, colleagues were trained in writing reports, monitoring and evaluation, and conducting surveys, but also in writing formal letters and documents. In some cases German and English language courses were also given to staff members with the goal of improving their communications skills in foreign languages.
Besides the improvement of skills, further training aimed at providing theoretical knowledge in the field of expertise of the RE and dealt with topics such as brown coal mining, neuropsychology, comparative law and cyber security. Such training was not only given to colleagues but in some cases also delivered to students or clients of the organisation. In other cases colleagues were trained in the practical usage of equipment and new technologies. This was often the case when workplace equipment (APA) was received in the form of new lab equipment, medical devices or IT systems and colleagues had to be taught how to use the new technologies. Where REs held positions in technical or scientific working fields, providing practical knowledge of new technologies and
methodologies, efficient usage of pesticides, thermal insulation, or usage of satellites was very common. However, this kind of knowledge transfer is also the most tangible and therefore may be easier to identify by the interviewees. In many cases it was reported that REs helped staff members use computer programs and assisted in the solving of IT problems.

Sharing materials, books and information with colleagues
In two cases German and English literature was translated into Mongolian in order to share the latest research on a topic with colleagues unable to read in those languages. In one case an RE translated his Master’s thesis so that colleagues could learn more about the approaches and methodologies applied in Germany. His colleague stated that this was very useful, since it had broadened her knowledge and made information available which would have been difficult to obtain if only Mongolian information had been available. In both cases, colleagues frequently asked for short translations and explanations where information was in a foreign language.

5.1.2 Tacit knowledge transfer
This section will examine the forms of tacit knowledge transferred by REs, as identified in the interviews.

Mentoring/coaching, Informal Teaching
Many REs trained new colleagues and interns on the job or supervised students or junior researchers, helped them with problems and gave frequent advice. Besides this regular supervision, some colleagues reported that the RE helped them to work more independently and gave them confidence to behave more proactively. For example, one colleague stated that the RE always encouraged her to present her research results and to think critically and independently when doing research. Others emphasised the high social skills of the REs, which also facilitated their own work. REs gave informal advice with regard to efficient working, honesty and time management and showed colleagues how to work reliably, independently and in an organised manner. While in many cases mentoring or coaching was undertaken voluntarily by the RE, in other cases it was done as part of the assigned work tasks. For example, one RE was trained in crisis intervention by a consultant of a Dutch NGO and then began coaching other organisations in the country, with the help of other colleagues.

Besides improving the skills of colleagues, some experts stated that they gave career advice as well as guidance about going abroad or even inspired colleagues or students to study overseas. For example, one RE had frequently given advice to junior colleagues (national service personnel) about how they might pursue further education abroad, through introducing the junior colleagues to websites, discussing requirements and providing help with CVs and motivation letters. Before he went to Germany, this RE had ‘wanted to be like’ senior colleagues at his previous workplace who had studied abroad and said that junior colleagues at his new workplace now saw him in the same way.

Problem solving
In the majority of cases the colleagues felt that the RE was supportive and always willing to help with any problems that occurred. In explicit terms, this involved assistance with computer and IT problems, writing formal letters, and conducting research. Besides these practical skills, some colleagues also reported that due to their high social competence the RE provided new perspectives which also assisted in problem solving.

Learning by example/professionalism
In almost all cases colleagues and supervisors stated that the RE was very organised, disciplined, punctual, goal-orientated and a reliable team member – characteristics that were perceived as having been learned in Germany. Many REs stated that they maintained regular office hours and endeavoured to be on time for all meetings. In many cases this was seen as a positive attribute, as colleagues followed the example and improved their attitudes towards work.

In other cases, colleagues stated that they changed their teaching style because they were inspired by the effective methodology, German standards, and practical approach.
adopted by the RE. Some colleagues stated that they also learned social skills from the RE, who provided new perspectives and different approaches. For example, in a project involving foreign companies and in which cooperation problems arose, one RE took the initiative and mediated between the two partners since he was the only one who could speak both German and English. According to the colleague, the RE’s intercultural skills were especially helpful in solving the problem and this lesson was absorbed by the colleague.

Challenging the status quo
Challenging the status quo seems to be something that depends mainly on the RE’s working environment, organisational culture and individual aspirations, as well as the position of the placement.

The extent to which the status quo was challenged and initiatives for change were initiated varied significantly. In the majority of cases, the RE had at least some ideas for change, such as promoting teamwork, optimising the work process or making the structure of the organisation more efficient. In several instances smaller-scale initiatives arose. For example, two REs working at a university introduced a rule system for students regarding their tardiness. Another RE recommended that the employer implement a system of rewards for staff because she felt that the current system included only negative sanctions. While her recommendation was not included formally in the statutes, she felt that it had been put into practice – at least to some extent. In another example, an expert working for an NGO sought out new funding opportunities and presented these ideas to the board of the organisation. While one idea was accepted by the board, the other concerning the structure of the association was not.

Sharing new ideas, tools and methods in informal discussions
A key need perceived by many REs concerned the improvement of their colleagues’ IT skills. As staff members frequently sought advice on computer problems, the REs shared tools and methods to resolve these matters. In the case of one RE, the entire staff consulted him on Internet issues. The supervisor said that the RE was ‘one step ahead’ because he would email work rather than submit it in hard copy. The supervisor was initially ‘a bit confused’ but then expanded his own set of responsibilities to include ensuring that the Internet was always working. In another example an RE became responsible for the IT management of the organisation since colleagues frequently asked him to solve problems. Feeling rather overwhelmed by this additional task, he decided to give IT workshops in order to build his colleagues’ capacity. Other REs tried to introduce several IT innovations and taught people how to use PowerPoint or other computer programmes. One RE overhauled a website and began to frequently publish the indicators of a monitoring system. Another expert educated colleagues on treasury responsibilities. Through informal discussions, he initiated awareness of treasury issues and capacity building where was previously these had been lacking. Another way of sharing ideas was to encourage colleagues to use a work plan and share information so that work was more organised and delivered on time.

However, those experts who tried to introduce a new working style through informal discussions also stated that there were certain barriers and that colleagues often began to neglect their duties after a while. For example, one RE stated that he had come up with many ideas on how to improve the functioning of the organisation. Although he was very motivated to change things and contribute, senior management often delayed implementation. Furthermore, it was often found that colleagues were not actually ready to change their working habits or the wider organisational culture, despite showing initial interest.

Encouraging teamwork
The main way teamwork was encouraged was through initiating weekly team meetings, colloquiums and peer learning sessions in order to discuss and share ideas, raise awareness about team members’ projects and plan the team’s work. In addition, some REs involved colleagues in their work by asking them for feedback on documents and publications and encouraging the joint preparation of publications. Similarly, one expert tried to imitate a system of document review using online file-sharing so that people
could see the status of a document. Even though he delivered a training session for colleagues and received positive responses, the system did not take root in the office. Another expert changed the working process in order to promote teamwork among colleagues. She grouped indicators of the monitoring system and assigned staff members to each group so that people who had previously worked individually on the indicators now had to cooperate in teams. Another expert made efforts to restructure the institute and to promote cooperation between different departments, yet encountered strong resistance to change. In general, lack of receptiveness to innovation and change, as well as the refusal of colleagues to cooperate seem to be the main challenges for promoting teamwork. Moreover, many REs reported that their organisation already used teamwork and therefore saw no need to promote it further.

5.2 Factors Contributing to Knowledge Transfer

In this study we identify an individual as ‘high-transfer’ if they answered ‘very often’ in four or more categories of knowledge transfer. We then compared high-transfer individuals with the rest of the sample based on various criteria. In terms of age, length of time in Germany, having worked in Germany, education level, sector of work and type of organisation, and having returned to their previous organisation, there were no significant differences. In addition, there was no significant difference in terms of being a high-transfer RE between individuals who received placement support or those who found their positions through self-search. This suggests that receiving placement support does not decrease the level of knowledge transfer and is thus an important element of the service in helping people to find employment.

Individuals were more likely to be high-transfer if they had been in their position for under 12 months and particularly if they had been there for under 6 months. This implies that in the beginning of the RE position there is either a higher need for knowledge transfer or a higher motivation on the part of the RE to contribute to knowledge transfer. This was corroborated by some of the interviews, in which it was clear that after a certain length of time an RE’s initial enthusiasm for the job diminished due to repeatedly encountering barriers such as resource constraints, bureaucracy, and apathy among other staff members.

Individuals who had frequent contact (once a month or more often) or daily contact with former colleagues and professional contacts or with a diaspora organisation in Germany were more likely to be classified as ‘high-transfer’. This reflects theories of knowledge circulation, in that having regular contact with outside groups provides access to new knowledge that can then be applied within the closed context.

The primary reason for return also had a significant association with the frequency of knowledge transfer activities. Of the individuals identified as high-transfer REs, 68% had returned primarily because they wanted to share their knowledge and contribute to development, while this was true of only 52% of non-high-transfer respondents and 59% of the sample as a whole. ‘High-transfer’ individuals were considerably less likely to have returned primarily in order to be closer to family and friends. This stands to reason, in that individuals who are more motivated to contribute to knowledge transfer are more likely to do so.

High-transfer individuals were also much more likely to be a member of an academic or professional network. For example, 65% of high knowledge transfer individuals were in a professional network, compared with 47% of those who were not high-transfer, and 68% of high-transfer individuals were in an academic network as opposed to 48% of those who were not high-transfer.

We then turned to considering the individuals who reported a ‘low’ incidence of knowledge transfer, as defined by their having answered ‘never’ or ‘seldom’ to most of the knowledge transfer activities. There were few significant results using this method of analysis. However, respondents who were in the lowest 10% of the sample in terms of overall knowledge transfer were less likely to have returned to the same place.
of employment where they had worked prior to migration. In other words, returning to the same organisation as prior to migration appeared to ensure that at least some substantial knowledge transfer would take place. The missing element here however is the type of organisation in which the respondent works: those who returned to the same organisation as prior to their migration were much more likely to be working in an academic institution, where the types of knowledge transfer identified here are likely to be part of the RE’s day-to-day work.

Furthermore, certain organisation types have a higher average level of knowledge transfer than others. Among respondents in academic institutions, 32% were classified as high-transfer while only 31% of those in government organisations and only 19% of those in private organisations achieved high knowledge transfer. This is a consequence of the fact that jobs in academia tend by their nature to include more direct knowledge transfer, often in the form of teaching, one-to-one supervision of students and peers, and producing written material to transfer knowledge. In order to eliminate this bias it makes sense to focus on the different types of organisations separately.

Breaking the sample down by the type of organisation in which the REs worked, it is clear that some types of transfer are more prevalent in certain types of workplaces. Formal training was provided often or very often by 70% of REs employed in academic institutions whereas for those working in government or non-profits/NGOs this figure was only 50%. REs in non-profits and government were over twice as likely never or seldom to give formal training. Those in academic organisations were also the most likely to challenge the status quo on at least some occasions, put colleagues in touch with others in their network, organise or contribute to a workshop, write memos or guidance notes and clarify roles.

Case 1: Example of a high-transfer RE and the reasons for his success

One RE migrated to Germany in order to pursue his studies. He lived in Germany for seven years and also completed an internship at the German Bundestag beside his studies. The RE initially worked for a government ministry upon his return but had to leave the position due to political changes. In his current RE position he is employed as an economic advisor at an NGO advocating for freedom of information and government transparency. The RE reported that in his previous position he was constantly challenging the status quo and tried to improve the working process, for example through introducing a weekly work plan for staff members. However, he encountered constant barriers, both from staff and supervisors and the organisation was reluctant to change due to its hierarchical and bureaucratic structure.

In his new position he feels that there is a more innovative and flexible working environment, which encourages him to share ideas and take the initiative. The team has weekly strategic meetings where everybody can share ideas and where work tasks are discussed. The supervisor and colleague both stated that the RE frequently shares his experiences on the job and serves as a model of punctuality, organisation and reliability. He takes the initiative and advises colleagues in their projects on economic issues – his field of expertise. When the Supervisor was asked if the RE ever conducted formal training, he said that he had never thought about this possibility, but he felt that it was a good idea and something to consider for the future. Besides these primarily tacit knowledge transfer activities, the RE also promotes capacity building in the organisation. He has initiated a project aimed at monitoring state-owned enterprises, for which he not only wrote the proposal but also raised funds and promoted cooperation with several ministries, including the one where he worked before migrating.
In terms of REs in government institutions however, those who were classified as high-transfer reported encountering twice as many barriers on average (although the difference was not statistically significant). REs working in government or non-profits were more likely to report a lack of colleague capacity if they were classified as high-transfer, compared with those who did not achieve high knowledge transfer. No such effect was observed in academic institutions.

Another notable finding from the survey analysis is that the REs’ likelihood of having a high level of knowledge transfer across different types of organisations was linked to their education level. As Figure 5 shows, in private, government and non-profit organisations there was very little difference in the likelihood of achieving high knowledge transfer based on the RE’s education level (the degree which they obtained in Germany). Notably in the case of government institutions, there was hardly any difference between Bachelor’s and PhD holders in terms of the high-transfer percentage. In academic institutions however, PhD holders were by far the most likely to be classified as high-transfer and none of the Bachelor’s degree holders achieved high knowledge transfer. This highlights the importance of post-graduate education in achieving high knowledge transfer in an academic setting. It is assumed that this is the case because the level of education of employees in academic institutions is generally higher than a Bachelor’s degree.
5.3 Barriers to Knowledge Transfer

Barriers impede the ability of the RE to contribute to knowledge transfer in the organisation. It is important to highlight and address such barriers, as they are often beyond the control of the individual RE.

Figure 6 illustrates the frequency of each form of knowledge transfer barrier reported by the questionnaire respondents. It is interesting to note that the lowest type of barrier identified is the language barrier, with less than half of the REs reporting experiencing a language barrier. Cultural barriers are slightly higher with over half of REs reporting experiencing a cultural barrier. Other forms of barriers to knowledge transfer were reported more frequently than language and cultural barriers. This in itself suggests the added value of diaspora and returnee programmes as language and cultural barriers are often the highest forms of barriers faced by foreign experts.

The most frequently reported barriers to knowledge transfer were the lack of experience and capacity of colleagues and the lack of equipment required to perform tasks. Both of these barriers illustrate the need for capacity building within organisations, which is precisely what this programme aims to address.

Case 2: Example of a high-transfer RE and the reasons for their success

One RE lived in Germany for 21 years. He had studied, had a family and worked for an IT company at a senior level. Even though his life was well established in Germany, he never felt completely at home. Sensing an atmosphere of change in his home country, with many emerging opportunities, he was motivated to take the step and return. By returning he felt he could make a difference, have an impact on his country and contribute to development. He started to work for an IT company, where he was initially responsible for the implementation of a national IT-certification programme (digital signature) as part of the e-government plan. The RE soon took over other tasks in the organisation, such as the training of colleagues. His supervisor emphasised the importance of knowledge transfer as practical knowledge was particularly lacking in this field in the country. He said that through this training, his colleagues were able to complete their tasks in less time and with higher quality. The colleague interviewed mentioned that at the beginning the collaboration caused him some challenges as the RE had introduced new programmes, technologies and methods that were difficult for the colleague to use. In recognition of these challenges, the RE was able to explain the usage and function of the new programmes to their colleague. In addition, to further improve the work of the company, the RE introduced new management software to coordinate the working process. Work was now being planned with the team members at weekly meetings. Both the colleague and supervisor mentioned that due to this software and the weekly meetings, the working process in the organisation had been optimised; products could be developed more efficiently and with higher quality. Partial results could now be presented to the clients throughout the working process, thus increasing customer satisfaction.
The experience of negative attitudes towards change correlated very strongly with mistrust from colleagues and also with an unsupportive working culture. The experience of workplace bureaucracy correlated strongly with corruption and nepotism in the workplace. The experience of language barriers correlated highly with cultural barriers. Finding a lack of experience and capacity among colleagues correlated fairly strongly with negative attitudes towards change, mistrust from colleagues and an unsupportive working culture. In the following subsections, examples are given from the qualitative data of the barriers experienced by REs when trying to engage in knowledge transfer.

Education was significant, especially if the qualification had been completed in Germany. Those who had completed a Master’s or PhD in Germany were more likely than others to report frequently experiencing of lack of equipment. Forty-eight per cent of those who completed a Master’s in Germany ‘often’ or ‘very often’ experienced a lack of equipment compared with 61% of those who completed a PhD in Germany. More strikingly, 20% of those who did not complete either degree in Germany ‘never’ experienced a lack of equipment barrier as against a mere 3% of those who had completed a PhD in Germany.

These results suggest that individuals with the potential for high knowledge transfer are more likely to perceive lack of equipment as a barrier. It may be the case that these individuals return to jobs which are highly specialised and that they require advanced technology to make full use of their skills. It is understandable that those who completed a PhD in Germany, and thus worked in a German workplace, have higher requirements and expectations in terms of office resources. By contrast, those without this experience may...
take the less developed working conditions in their country of origin for granted without challenging this as much. Despite lack of equipment being perceived as a barrier, those who cited it were in general high-transfer individuals. Undoubtedly, the APA support from CIM also helps overcome this barrier (we will return to this below).

Having looked at the survey data to identify some causes of barriers we now turn to the interviews for some illustrative examples of barriers to knowledge transfer.

**Too junior to influence colleagues or challenge the status quo**

For the majority of REs, the returning expert position marked the start of their professional careers. Consequently, these REs often felt that they did not have much influence over the work of senior or same-level colleagues, or over institutional factors such as resource management, which would improve their work. These REs were also less likely to significantly challenge the status quo of the organisation, provide formal training or perform mentoring or coaching with colleagues. The main transfer of knowledge (besides the on-going transfer of knowledge to colleagues in the course of normal work) took place through the mentoring of younger and more junior colleagues, interns or students. Certain colleagues, especially those much older than the RE, felt that due to the latters’ lack of experience there was little to learn from them. Some older colleagues were even quite indignant when asked whether they had learned anything from the RE, they thought this was unrealistic since they themselves were more experienced, had more expertise and occupied a higher position in the office hierarchy. Yet this was not true in all cases. Some older colleagues recognised that the RE influenced their work mainly in improving their IT skills or in providing examples for new approaches and working styles.

**Composition of the team**

The composition of the team also influenced the extent to which knowledge transfer activities could take place as well as the impact of those activities on other staff members. In some cases there was not a lot for the RE to challenge in the status quo since all other (or many) colleagues also had international experience and held themselves to similar standards of productivity, efficiency and punctuality. These were often high-capacity organisations in the first place, so the RE did not necessarily introduce a new working attitude, skill set, or level of expertise. It was also common in these types of organisations that knowledge was frequently shared between the team members and that creative and autonomous work was promoted or even expected. In two other cases, the RE was the organisation’s only employee and consequently no knowledge transfer could take place. Two REs were working in organisations where only REs were employed, which also made it difficult to detect their impact on colleagues or the organisation.

**Lack of motivation to go the extra mile**

Some of the REs saw their position as a stepping stone only and consequently were not very invested in going the extra mile for the organisation. In some cases the job was not one that the RE had really wanted to do but a post that, confronted with limited possibilities, they had taken up upon their return as a way of gaining general work experience. From the interviews it was not possible to say whether having found the RE position through placement or self-search made a difference to their motivation. A lack of motivation could also be observed among some REs at the end of their tenure, given the few prospects for staying in the organisation. Some REs stated that they were frustrated and felt insecure regarding their future, because when the top-up ended the organisation would not have enough resources to pay them an adequate salary. Another reason for a lack of motivation was the perceived resistance of the organisation to promoting staff learning and development. It appears that the degree to which an RE invests in building the capacity of the organisation and challenging the status quo depends greatly on their possibility to stay in the organisation and developing their career there.

**Clash of different attitudes to work**

In general there are several ways in which the organisational and professional cultures can hamper the impact of knowledge transfer. For instance, one RE expressed frustration at the amount of socialising being done in his workplace, perceiving this as an inefficient use of time. He was also
annoyed by the fact that people would make verbal requests for work to be done but not write down the details. When he tried to be more precise by sending email requests for work he never received a reply until he went to the correspondent in person and made a verbal request as well. He perceived this as a bad system, of which he openly disapproved. He chose to distance himself from these social norms within the workplace, which meant that his relationships with colleagues were not as good as they could have been. Another RE also felt alienated from the culture of socialising at work and perceived the reward structure of the workplace as nepotistic. ‘In the African context,’ he said, ‘you can forget about justice’, by which he meant that social climbing is valued more than hard work or genuine results and that this was, in his opinion, unfair. This compounded the RE’s lack of commitment to the organisation itself, although he did acknowledge that he was respected in the workplace for the results he had achieved. In one case, the workplace environment did not inspire the RE to share his own knowledge and experience, he said, ‘I didn’t want people to know I had all that experience - I wanted to lie low’. Concerned about offending people by trying to correct them, the RE usually avoided doing so.

One Ghanaian RE also cited apathy among other staff members as a barrier to real engagement with progressive ideas. Other staff members were stretched very thin since they had to take on second and third jobs in order to make ends meet, leaving them with little energy or enthusiasm for change. One Georgian RE acknowledged that he had arrived with many ideas and initiatives to change and develop the organisation and to optimise its function. As a board member he became more and more demotivated since, due to the hierarchy and bureaucracy, decision-making took a long time and in the end no major changes were achieved. In almost all cases in the Ghanaian context the respondents mentioned lack of punctuality among colleagues and subordinates as a barrier to carrying out their work. In the Mongolian case, some REs also perceived a lack of trust and felt that they could not really rely on colleagues since the latter seldom complied with agreements. Moreover, when initiatives were taken to organise the work process through weekly schedules and plans, colleagues neglected these after a while and went back to the old ways of working.

**Low IT proficiency among colleagues**

In some cases, computer proficiency in the workplace was generally at a much lower standard than that of the RE and there was sometimes a problem of a lack of Internet access among colleagues, clients and other stakeholders. In many cases, particularly among younger REs, the RE had often explained how to perform various computer functions to colleagues but had not always been successful in transferring the knowledge.

**Lack of equipment and financial constraints**

Lack of workplace equipment was mentioned as a barrier in almost all the interviews in Ghana. In many cases, the RE had not been provided with the equipment necessary to carry out their role, which usually included a computer or laptop but sometimes extended to much larger items such as scientific equipment. Where a lack of equipment had been identified the RE had often applied for equipment using APA support. In the Ghanaian cases, the equipment often made a profound difference to the organisation’s capacity. In several cases, REs returning to universities used their APA allowance to purchase a projector and screen and in all cases these resources were shared among other staff. In one case a new lecture hall had been built but had no projector, so the RE’s projector was installed there. Another RE acknowledged that the laptop received from CIM was the only one in his department so he made it freely available for colleagues to use. The laptop was used so frequently that it broke within two years and had to be replaced. In the other countries, the lack of equipment was not thought to be as significant as in Ghana, yet for some organisations, in particular NGOs, APA support in the form of a laptop was crucial in order to equip a workplace. In all cases, however, it was often remarked that the equipment had taken a very long time to arrive and that the application and ordering process had been time-consuming for the RE.

Besides the lack of equipment, in some cases financial constraints made it difficult for the REs to fulfil their tasks.
For example, one RE had been tasked to design a manual for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as part of a team (which had been done) and to train public sector employees in its use (which had not been done). Money was needed to hold workshops and, more crucially, to print and distribute the M&E manual, but the RE said that releasing money from the central budget was a lengthy bureaucratic process which he was unable to influence. The lack of implementation was a big problem and a source of frustration for the RE. Financial constraints were also perceived regarding the sustainability of the RE position. In many cases the RE stated that after the end of the top-up they might not be able to stay in their position since the organisation did not have the financial resources to pay an adequate salary for the work. When the top-up ended, however, in some specific cases the organisation would search for new REs, resulting in high turnover and the loss of the capacity built up over the two years.

This trend seems to be the biggest challenge regarding the sustainability of the RE initiative. While the top-up seems to be the most important support for all REs, virtually none of the organisations was able to cover the difference in the salary after the top-up ended. An organisation was usually only able to slightly increase the RE’s salary once the top-up ended, leaving them with less income overall or leading them to rely on other income sources. In the interviews many REs expressed considerable frustration about this situation.

In order to improve efficiency, the salary top-up could be better adapted to the average national income. Moreover, as recommended by an RE in the survey, the top-up could be gradually reduced during the two years of support, so that the RE could more easily adapt to the lower income after top-up ends.

Case 3: Example of barriers hampering potentially high knowledge transfer

In one particular case, lack of resources and institutional legal clout substantially undermined the impact that the RE could have had. The RE’s work involved visiting the scenes of alleged pollution incidents, determining whether an offence had taken place, and attempting to stop the polluters. In the department there was a dire shortage of specialised equipment for recording, for example, the volume of noise pollution, the pollution level of drinking water, and proof of illegal mining. The RE was a trained physicist but when holding polluters to account he was not able to analyse any of the evidence, nor did the department have much hard evidence upon which to build a court case against polluters. The RE had ordered equipment from CIM to capture evidence – a camera, decibel meter and so on – but it had not yet arrived at the time of the interview. He described being demotivated about staying in the organisation although he was positive that the equipment from CIM, when it arrived, would make a substantial and positive difference. The RE’s level of IT proficiency was much higher than that of his colleagues but the office was not equipped even with desktop computers. He was therefore frustrated at not being able to make the most of his own skills or perform the same standard of work to which he had been accustomed in Germany. Despite these demotivating factors the RE believed in the importance of his job in furthering development goals and was willing to tolerate the shortcomings in his workplace because he recognised that resource constraints were legitimate and to be expected in a developing country. He had also successfully transferred knowledge in several areas, having reorganised the office communication system, given IT training in formal and informal capacities, and put a colleague in touch with someone from his professional network.
The results of the study demonstrate several key findings regarding the functioning of the RE service.

Key findings include:

- **REs are primarily students.** The vast majority of respondents in the study were students. The RE service is intended to target students and workers in Germany. If the intention is to target those who have also gained work experience in Germany, CIM might consider changing the way in which it targets potential REs.

- **Knowledge transfer occurs in different forms in the majority of placements but often not at optimal levels.** The survey and interview data illustrate that several different forms of knowledge transfer are prevalent in most placements. This knowledge transfer often occurs on a small scale and in subtle ways.

- **Tacit knowledge transfer is more common than explicit knowledge transfer.** It is clear that knowledge transfer occurs more often through informal training, learning by example, and sharing new ideas. Formal training most commonly occurred in academic settings. Explicit knowledge transfer such as writing memos or guidance notes is relatively infrequent.

- **Culture and language do not frequently represent knowledge transfer barriers.** The evaluation confirms that, as is expected within diaspora and returnee programmes, culture and language barriers to knowledge transfer are a minor issue for REs.

- **Age and experience can be important barriers to knowledge transfer.** In cases where the REs were younger than colleagues and in their first job outside of school, it was difficult to act as a knowledge transfer agent to older and more established colleagues.

- **Supervisors are frequently unaware of the RE service.** The researchers found that supervisors often only learned about the service when the researchers conducted the interviews with the employers. It is uncertain as to whether this is desirable, in that the REs are not given special attention, or whether it detracts from the ability of the RE to contribute to knowledge transfer, as the supervisor is often unaware that this is one of the objectives of their position.

- **The work environment and experience of colleagues and supervisors has a large impact on knowledge transfer.** In placements where the colleagues and supervisors had also studied abroad, the knowledge transfer occurring from the RE was lower.

- **The APA equipment allowance is often essential to the success of the RE position.** The APA equipment allowance made a substantial difference in several cases but it was found that the general deficiency of adequate resources in the organisation as a whole was still a barrier to knowledge transfer. It was also found that the importance of APA equipment allowance varied by country and the nature of the work placement. For instance, the APA equipment allowance was deemed more necessary in Ghana than in Georgia and Mongolia, and in all countries was considered more necessary in scientific and technical positions requiring specific equipment, than in other work environments.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION
Recommendations for improving the functioning of the RE:

- **Knowledge transfer should be integrated into the objectives of the RE position and the agreement with CIM.** There is currently no requirement that the RE’s position itself contain knowledge transfer within its specific objectives. If it were to be made a requirement that knowledge transfer be intrinsic to the RE position and that knowledge transfer activities be specified from the outset, then this would guarantee that some level of knowledge transfer take place within each RE position. This evaluation process has highlighted the difficulty of following up with REs. In light of this, it is better to try to guarantee knowledge transfer in the first place.

- **The objective of the service should be communicated more strongly to the supervisors.** Making the supervisor aware of the service could result in more knowledge transfer activities. It is acknowledged that it is currently the prerogative of the RE to tell their supervisor and colleagues as much or as little information about the RE services as they see fit. However if they were encouraged to gain the supervisor’s cooperation with regard to carrying out their knowledge transfer activities, this might make it easier for tangible results to be achieved.

- **Pre-departure training on knowledge transfer activities should be offered.** Given that the vast majority of REs are recent graduates, particular skills and experiences that are necessary for knowledge transfer might be lacking. Providing workshops prior to departure on key skills for knowledge transfer, such as conducting training or seminars, communication skills, or how to be a mentor, might be useful ways to promote knowledge transfer activities.

- **Recognise the extra challenges and the higher potential for positive change in medium capacity organisations.** If organisations can be characterised as having a high, medium or low-capacity, it becomes clear that each RE has a certain level of potential for impacting these organisations. High-capacity organisations tended to have high levels of internationally trained staff, and in these organisations it was difficult for the RE to bring further added value. On the other hand, in low-capacity organisations there tended to be a lack of ability to retain the RE after the top-up ended and less capacity for the staff to absorb knowledge transfer for the RE. REs are therefore optimally used in medium capacity organisations, where local staff have enough capacity to retain knowledge from the RE, but have not themselves had the opportunity to go abroad. In such situations, the RE can introduce knowledge that is entirely innovative.

- **Continue and streamline the APA equipment support.** The APA equipment support was recognised as an essential component of the programme. It is important to continue and streamline this element and to ensure that the equipment is efficiently received by the RE. In cases where the equipment is specialised (such as a specific research tool) it should be required that the RE trains colleagues on how to use the tool.


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