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Diaspora in Africa's Development Agenda: Tracing the Contours

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Abstract

It has been said that the rate of the velocity of the development of a people (state or continent) is directly proportional to the capability of its strategic human resource. Annually, large numbers of educated and professional Africans leave the continent in search of greener pastures abroad. Greater number of these immigrants never returns home even when the continent reels under the burden of lack of their invaluable expertise. Scholars are almost in agreement on the fact that if the huge human resource Africans Diaspora is appropriately leveraged on, it has the capacity to liberate Africa from her developmental challenges and priorities. This paper, apart from tracing the causes of African Professionals leaving Africa, and the inability of millions of people of African descent located in other communities around the world who are actively seeking for ways to re-engage with their ancestral homes in Africa to do so, it also traces how the invaluable talents, skills and expertise of these professionals and their firms can be identified and utilized towards helping Africa overcome her developmental challenges. This paper equally identifies strategic areas of intervention of the Diaspora in the development of Africa, such as governance and human capacity, private sector and women empowerment, engagement with

hometown Associations, Information Technology and Brain Gain in all its ramifications. This paper therefore concludes by suggesting how the Governments of African countries can develop deliberate policies and initiatives to engage the Diaspora in Africa's development agenda.

Key Words:

African Diaspora	Africans living outside Africa,
Wealth	Measure of resource value,
Diasporic	Related to diaspora,
Underdevelopment	Below living standard.
Hometown	Area of origin,
Greener pasture	Area of higher economic and social opportunities

Introduction

Beyond spending much money, junketing the whole of the western world by African leaders, begging for the rarely existent Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), engaging the African Diaspora in the development of their home countries is being advocated by scholars as indispensable to the rapid development of Africa (Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002). The wealth of the Diaspora is quite huge as can be estimated from their remittances, but measured in human resources, skills and professionalism; their wealth is even more enormous.

African Countries are faced with teething developmental problems which acted as the 'push' that sent these Africans away in the first place. Since the 'pull' that towed these Africans away from their home countries still exists in these western countries, how do you get these African Diasporas to contribute to the development of their home countries? A critical observer notices that the different leadership of African countries, whilst realizing the importance of the Diaspora, seems neither prepared enough to welcome them and their contributions back nor truly ready to engage them in any meaningful way. This paper advocates for ways to engage the African Diaspora by the leadership of African countries.

This paper shall therefore give an overview of the concept of diaspora with particular focus on African Diaspora, enquire into the nexus between migration, poverty and underdevelopment, measure the wealth of the African Diaspora, connect critical areas of Africa's developmental agenda with Diaspora engagement, and recommend the decisive roles of Government of African Countries in Diaspora engagement in Africa's development agenda.

The concept of diaspora

The works of Safran (1991), Clifford (1994) and Cohen (1997) are some of the most cited works when it comes to broad-spectrum theories of the Diaspora.

Diaspora as a concept in African and development studies refuses to yield to a single meaning. Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002) pointed out the fact that the African Diaspora has been seen largely in terms of the horrific experiences of Atlantic slavery, (Segal, 1998). These 'victim' Diasporas (Cohen, 1997) were clearly terrible events and their effects are still felt today. The truth is that some diasporic experiences are not forced in the sense of the transatlantic slave trade; hence, they are not as distressing.

According to Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002:5) , 'The roots of the word Diaspora lies in Ancient Greek where it is comprised of two elements - *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). Cohen, (1997), informs that Diaspora in Greeks signified productive colonisation, a positive movement for all concerned. In the subsequent millennia Diaspora gained more negative connotations following the enslavement and exile of the Jews from Babylon. Diaspora became linked to oppression, forced displacement and the ceaseless search for an authentic homeland. From here a number of other 'victim' diasporas followed; the most notable being the West Africans through slavery, Palestinians through Zionist expansionism and Armenians through persecution by The Ottomans. All these experiences involve forcible displacement by another group.'

The concept of Diaspora is a derivative of the concept of Migration. Migration involves physical movement from one place to another. It is either voluntary or involuntary, involving individuals or groups. Diaspora is a term used to denote those who have migrated to and settled in a place other than their ancestral homeland. Originally, Diaspora refers to the physical dispersal of Jews throughout the world; it also carries religious, philosophical, political, and eschatological connotations, inasmuch as the Jews perceive a special relationship between the land of Israel and themselves (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2004). There are many theories as to what causes migration or the settlement of a people or persons in a place other than their ancestral homes. Some of the identified causes include slave trade, war, natural disaster, human trafficking, ethnic cleansing etc. Cases like economic pursuit, employment and urbanization are additional factors which encourage voluntary migration.

There are some characteristics typical of the Diaspora. These include the maintenance of political ties with their ancestral homeland, thoughts of returning home, relationships with other communities in the diaspora, and lack of full integration into the socio-culture of the host country or community. In the opinion of William Safran (1991: 83-4), diaspora exists when a people "have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign, regions...(and)...they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return"

Cohen (1997: 26), distilling from Safran's model, developed the framework below for the classification of the diaspora:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
4. An idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least of the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Okpewho (1999) notes three phases or 'paradigms' of experience which link America and Africa and are part of a wider capitalist imperative. The first era was the labour imperative involving the slave trade; the second era was the territorial imperative involving colonialism, while the third era was the extractive imperative involving minerals and other raw materials. Each of these eras created new forces which propelled Africans, either forcibly or voluntarily, into diaspora. (Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002:9).

Typically, African Diaspora refers to those Africans who are settled outside the African soil, especially in the western hemisphere. The concept has acquired fairly new meaning in recent times – Africans who, in search of education, employment and better living, have left the shores of African to the places where the 'pull' is right for them and their families (Lee, 1996). From the spectacle of The African Union (AU), the Diaspora encompasses "people of African Origin living outside the continent, irrespective of citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and building of the African Union" (World Bank 2012). Byfield (2000: 2) concludes that "the creation of Diaspora is in

large measure contingent on a diasporic identity that links the constituent parts of the Diaspora to a homeland”.

Underdevelopment, poverty and migration nexus

There are many theories of migration and the Diaspora. These theories are hinged on the reason for moving out of one's homeland in the first place. Migration for work or labour related migration is more appropriate for discussions about the Diaspora. Individuals from developing countries migrate to more developed countries or where the 'pasture is greener' as a means of survival and more convenience for themselves and their families. The monies they send back home in form of remittances are used by their families to build houses, go to school and have better living in general terms (Jennissen, 2007).

According to Lee (1966), there are 'push' and 'pull' factors in migration. The push factors are those harsh factors that make one uncomfortable in his or her environment or cause one to live in limitations in comparison to one's potential capabilities. The pull factors are those favourable conditions that attract one to another area of greater opportunities. Lee enumerated the push factors to include, unemployment, limited opportunities, primitive conditions, desertification, famine or drought, slavery or forced labor, poor medical care, loss of wealth, natural disasters, death threats, lack of political or religious freedom, pollution, poor housing, war, etc. The Pull factors, according to Lee, are Job opportunities, better living conditions, political and/or religious freedom, enjoyment (social liberties), Education, better medical care, friendly climates (or environmental safety), security, family ties, Industry (urbanization), etc.

Researches show that when individuals and groups pushed from the areas of discomfort and pulled into other areas of perceived opportunities, they end up contributing to the further development of their host environment to the detriment of their home environment. This situation surveys have revealed is most prevalent among Africans that underdevelopment among other factors pushed into the western world. African Diaspora ends up contributing their intellectual and manpower resources to the further development of the developed. The resultant effect is a continental brain-drain that has placed Africa on continued and further development peril. Many scholars therefore are of the opinion that if the African Diaspora were to return to Africa, that Africa will become a developed continent in few years. The educational sector, health care, power sector, administrative and political sectors; and virtually every sector in Africa is reeling under the burden of brain drain and human capital inadequacy. Not repeating Walter Rodney's thesis on how the west underdeveloped Africa; from transatlantic slave trade to migration due to economic purposes, the human resources and capacity needed to develop Africa is domiciled in the western hemisphere. The west argues that the brain drain that is frequently

alluded to is the same brain that came to the west empty and was appropriately developed by the west.

The dilemma here is the fact that poverty and underdevelopment are responsible for the voluntary migration of Africans away from Africa, yet, the human capital that left Africa in search of better developmental opportunities, seems to be the requisite solution for Africa's development. The major worry among scholars and researchers on solutions to African development is that the pull factors are still in the west while the push factors have remained in Africa. The clarion call therefore is for the Government of African countries to design and implement deliberate policies and strategies for engaging the African Diaspora in developmental programmes. This needful engagement should of necessity, be a follow-up to a measurement of the wealth of the African Diaspora.

Measuring the wealth of the African diaspora

The wealth of the African Diaspora cannot be measured in money or remittances alone. More than money, the skills, experiences and contacts or reach-out of the African Diaspora has been estimated to worth billions of dollars annually. According to Obiagali Ezekwesili, the World Bank's vice president for Africa, the remittances from the diaspora, estimated at some \$32-40 billion annually, exceeds the official development assistance to the region. For her, "beyond wealth, Africans in the diaspora have the skills and knowledge that would need to be mobilized to promote the continent's advancement. It is therefore important to look strategically at the diaspora's role in African development." (Fleshman, 2010).

Chima (2011) is of the view that Remittances (the money and goods sent to friends and relatives of the African Diaspora back home) have contributed significantly in poverty reduction and improved living conditions in the African continent. These monies have been invested in the areas of real estate, education, healthcare and even feeding. The African Diaspora have also catalyzed trade, provided capital, transferred knowledge and technology

Surveys that studied the rate of return to Africa after studies in the United States and Canada in the 1980s and 1990s showed that 44% of African PhD students in the U.S. and Canada in (1986-96) decided to stay back in the host countries after completion of their studies. This can be observed in the number of African professors and medical doctors in United States academic institutions and hospitals. Ethiopia has about the same number of doctors in Chicago hospitals as they have in the whole of Ethiopia. Meyer, J-B., et al. (2001)

It has been observed that the prevalence of 'no-return' has risen significantly in the last decade to the extent that more than one third of Africa's educated and highly qualified professionals are in the Diaspora. (*Financial Times*, 16 July 2004,

cited in IOM World Migration Report 2005). For example, Nigeria has more than half of its academic personnel working abroad. In Ghana and Zimbabwe, three-quarters of all doctors leave within a few years of completing medical school; and more Ethiopian doctors are practicing in Chicago than in Ethiopia. Also, at least 12,207 South African health workers, including an estimated 21% of doctors produced in the country, were practicing abroad in 2006. Statistical surveys by scholars show that 45% of American and European lower and middle class Human capital resources are Africans. Every sector of western society, has records of individuals of African descent operating at the excellent award winning echelon The wealth of the African Diaspora is therefore quite enormous when remittances is used as the indices, but takes a quantum turn when measured, using skills, expertise, contact, network and professionalism as the indices.

Diaspora in Africa's development agenda

There seems to be a general realization that the contributions of the Diaspora cannot be neglected anymore, if the efforts of governments and development partners are to be maximized (Zack-Williams, 1995). In Fleshman, (2010) Obiageli Ezekwesili, the World Bank's Vice President for the Africa Region advises that "Africa has a huge capacity gap that can be bridged by tapping the expertise of the African Diaspora" For her, "The African Diaspora is predisposed and interested in engaging with the continent and development partners would be ill-advised to ignore the opportunity to work with them."

Mohan (2002) proposes a three-fold classification for examining the positive linkages between diaspora and development. "First; *developments in the diaspora* where people within diasporic communities use their localised diasporic connections within the 'host' country to secure economic and social well-being and, as a by-product, contribute to the development of their locality. Second; *developments through the diaspora* in which diasporic communities utilise their diffused global connections beyond the locality to facilitate economic and social well-being. Third, *development by the diaspora* in which diasporic flows and connections back 'home' facilitate the development - and, sometimes, creation - of these 'homelands'. These categories, and the relationships between them, are fluid and blurred, reflecting the inherent tensions between deterritorialisation and fixity that characterise Diasporas. For example, a Congolese trader in Paris, living with diasporic contacts, selling T-shirts sourced from a family member in Hong Kong, and sending part of the profits back to his/her extended family straddles all three categories" (2002:12); the concentration on remittances alone should change.

Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002:14) argue that evidence suggests that the decision to migrate is located at the household level whereby family members see migration as a form of portfolio diversification which spreads risks between various

income-generating activities. As a decision based within the family, it places strong obligations on the migrants to succeed and to send money and capital goods back to those left behind. In their classic research, MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000: 126) discuss *lusolo* which is a Congolese belief that "success in commerce is a gift that is inherited in the family and that the wealth it brings belongs to the family and should be shared among them" No doubt, the strong pressure for redistribution links the diaspora to development. Arthur reports of one migrant whose failure to send remittances resulted in virtual ostracization with his father exclaiming "When you die make sure you are buried in America" (2000: 134 cited in Mohan and Zack-Williams 2002:14).

There are identifiable strategic areas of intervention of the Diaspora in the development of Africa such as governance and human capacity, private sector and women empowerment, engagement with hometown Associations, Information Technology and Brain Gain. For instance, the Diaspora can dictate in a very strategic manner, the tempo of political happening in their countries since they can pressure for change from outside without facing the human rights abuse and dangers that those inside the country face. They are closer to centres of global decision making in the world and can lobby governments and groups for enhanced aid budget and decisions for Africa. They can also bring more informed voice to policy makers both at home and abroad (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser, 1999).

AFFORD (2000) in Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002:16) identify a range of developmental organisation engaged in a variety of activities. These are hometown associations, ethnic associations, alumni associations, religious associations, professional associations, development NGOs, investment groups, political groups, national development groups, welfare/refugee groups, supplementary schools, and virtual organisations. Their types of activities include community-to-community transfers, identity building/awareness raising, lobbying in current home on issues relating to ancestral home, trade with and investment in ancestral home, transfers of intangible resources, support for development on a more 'professional' basis, payment of taxes in ancestral home.

It is believed that Diaspora NGOs and other organisations, apart from shaping political debate and influencing broader developmental processes in Africa, should also use their expertise to intervene in some critical infrastructural needs of the continent. For instance, clean and renewable energy, nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, technology transfer and Agriculture are some of the possible areas of intervention. These entrepreneurial initiatives can be done through public-private partnership. The diaspora can leverage on their contact to bring Foreign Direct Investments in these areas. It must be pointed out here that some professionals in the

diaspora had tried this for their homelands only to be thoroughly frustrated and disappointed. This is where the governments of African countries will do a lot.

A case in view is that of Beatrice in MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga's (2000) study. It narrates how she wants to establish production units in Congo, but has experienced embezzlement of her money and so is looking at more diverse opportunities across the globe until the situation is more predictable. "She bought equipment for a medical office with the profits of her trade. It went into operation, but was managed by a Congolese who embezzled the funds so that she had to close it down. She plans to sell the equipment to the General Hospital and has the necessary contacts there to do so...She plans to develop trade with Nigeria because it is a huge country and she has family connections there. She already knows wholesalers eager to buy T-shirts she has seen in the United States. She also plans new lines of business in Switzerland, where she has other connections" (2000:162/3). This is certainly not an encouraging story. The government may need to intervene in such cases to strengthen the trust of the Diaspora in Africa.

Engagement with hometown associations is a veritable tool through which the Diaspora can halt brain gain and technology transfer. Soft loans, scholarship programmes, training programmes and workshops can be coordinated through these associations. These can act as a feedback mechanism for the Diaspora. Women empowerment is another area of Diaspora engagement in Africa's development agenda. The marginalization of women in Africa is inextricably bound with Africa's underdevelopment. When the woman is empowered, she will be able to take care of the family, send her children to school and intrinsically develop her community. Developing the women in business education is a powerful *organon* for women empowerment.

The Role of government of African countries

Arthur (2000) in the study shows evidence of enthusiasm of about 80% of the African diaspora to return to Africa once the political and economic situations stabilises. In fact, respondents to his survey complained of the extreme risk involved in doing business in Africa when compared to other climes. (Arthur, 2000: 129). The implication of Arthur's study is that the governments of African countries need to show manifest commitment to engaging the African Diaspora. There should be a conscious development of incentives framework to woo the diaspora back for meaningful development. In fact, one of the major incentives is adequate security. There are stories of coveted professionals who come to their homelands to site industries only to be kidnapped and/or assassinated. Clean and renewable energy is another key area.

Beyond holding different summits, there should be some political will on ground that will encourage the Diaspora. Easy investment framework where the investment enquiries and investment interests of Diaspora is given expedited attention is something the governments should also consider.

Some African countries like Nigeria have done quite some remarkable things in that area by establishing the Federal Ministry of trade and Investment. The Nigerian government has created a Skills database of professionals in the Diaspora as a strategic engagement framework for the Diasporas. This database has enabled the government in calling on them to help out with some projects and service needs. Creating an enabling environment for Diaspora engagement includes opening of bank accounts, registration of companies, clearing of imported equipment, regulation and taxation being made easy and safe. The clear point here is that African Diaspora need to be invited and engaged by African leadership in order to accelerate the progress and development of Africa.

The African Union deserves commendation in the area of summits and researches as a platform for engaging the Diaspora in African developmental programme. The continental body has done well recently in this regard but there is need to sustain the tempo. However, effort need not end as reports of summits and researches, rather strategic actions should be incorporated. In the global Africa Diaspora Summit held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the 25th of May 2012, the Diaspora was confirmed as the sixth region of the continent. The then Director of African Citizens and Diaspora Organisation (CIDO) at the AU Commission gave his words that the commission will continue to strengthen the unity of continental Africa and those in Diaspora through partnership with the African Diaspora. True to the words of the director, CIDO has since then been partnering with other AU Commission departments and external organisations such as the World Bank, African Development Bank to strategically and vigorously engage the African Diaspora through worthwhile initiatives that utilizes the resources of the African Diaspora in the development of the continent. In Muhammed, (2012), President Jacob Zuma of South Africa is credited as stating that the legacy projects that would “blaze the trail in integrating the African Diaspora into all socio-economic activities of the continent” is the African Diaspora Volunteers Corps - a peace corps through which Africans abroad could participate directly in the continent's development.

Since after the 2012 summit in South Africa, the AU has established some notable frameworks like; the African Diaspora Investment Fund and the Development Market place for the Diaspora. These frameworks have facilitated innovation and entrepreneurship between Africa and the Diaspora. There is also the creating of an African Remittances Institute which now facilitates the use of the banking framework

by the recipients. The institute not only ensure the channelling of the money as investments, but also reduce the cost of sending the money (Muhammed 2012).

Further on, Muhammed (2012) confirms that the summit mandated the AU Commission to popularise the Africa Diaspora Initiative, and ensure that experiences of women, youth and vulnerable groups are taken into account in the implementation of programmes of action. International media reports indicate that the African Union has of recent been promoting positive images of Africa and has created conducive environment for investment opportunities in the continent. However, there is need for this positive image to be matched with the infrastructure and realities on ground, not just media hype in International media organisations. As said earlier, adequate security should be a priority, followed by transparency, significant reduction in corruption, clean and renewable energy, proper institutional processes in line with international best practices and infrastructural development that makes for safe and easy access to different areas of the continent.

Conclusion

This paper has through diasporic analysis, shown that the dialectics of the development of Africa is in balancing the dilemma of the African Diaspora who left the continent because of underdevelopment and is expected to engage the continent for development while the underdevelopment still exists. Where and how can the Diaspora start from without being a victim of embezzlement, corruption, kidnapping, assassination, terrorist attack and infrastructural decay? This question must be answered by the governments of African countries with concrete evidences that engender trust and confidence.

The African Diaspora has contributed in both formal and informal ways in the development of the continent, yet their capacity and full potential in engendering development in Africa is well under-utilized. The African Diaspora represents a form of 'globalisation from below' in which 'small' players, as opposed to mega-corporations, make use of the opportunities offered by globalisation and the interstices of a global economy. (Mohan and Zack-Williams, 2002)

Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002) have argued that that with deepening globalisation there will be a series of contradictory forces at work in dealing with the Diaspora issues in development. On one hand, the mobility of people and their ability to communicate and transact has increased much that the developmental potential of diaspora is likely to expand. On the other hand, social polarisation and economic and political exclusion means that there will be increased pressure on the Third World's poor to seek their well-being elsewhere. However, the movement of 'illegitimate' people is likely to be curtailed through restrictive immigration and citizenship

procedures. Hence, the activities and lifestyles of diasporic communities may become an ever more important role model for the future.

This paper concludes that researches have shown that the African Diaspora is ever willing and enthusiastic to engage in development in the continent, and some of them had and are still trying to do so, but are discouraged by the push factors that made them leave in the first place. It is the finding of this paper that unless these push factors are mitigated by different home governments of these African Diasporas, the long awaited African Diaspora engagement in Africa's development agenda may continue to be a pipe dream and infantile fantasy.

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