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The Role Of The African Union And African Diaspora In Continental Development

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Abstract

From earliest times, people moved from one society to another. In Africa, the movement out of the continent became highly pronounced in the trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic slave trades as well as the French colonial policy that assimilated Africans and moved them to the metropole, where they became diaspora citizens. Over the years, Africans became scattered across the continents of the world. Consequently, this study focuses on the African Union, the African diaspora and the continent's development. The diaspora population is presented as African descendants abroad that contribute to African development. The study used secondary materials that were randomly selected from literature to develop the content of the study. It found that the African continent is faced with multiple problems that discourage the diaspora population. It therefore recommends transformational leadership within the African Union and states in the continent as paths to increased diaspora contribution to African development.

Keywords: *African Union, Diaspora, Africa & Development*

Introduction

Diaspora is a concept traceable to the Greek culture that means “to sow over or scatter” (Vertovec, 2005). The term was originally used to describe the forced dispersion of Jews in the ancient world (Suzuki, 2018; Cohen, 2008) but is now widely applied to people anywhere who have taken up residence outside their country’s borders and continue to identify with their homeland (Anthias, 1998: 557-580). Diaspora is conceived as populations of migrants scattered among two or more destinations, between which there develop multifarious links involving flows and exchanges of people and resources; between the homeland and destination countries and among destination countries (Hear & Vertovec, 2004). Mohamoud (2003: 9) also conceptualised diaspora as a community of “people living outside their origin”. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defines diaspora as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration, experience and background” (IOM, 2018: 305).

The specific context of ‘who can be referred to as African in the diaspora’ was one of the debated aspects of the African Union deliberations that led to the naming African diaspora as the sixth region of the continent (Jinmi 2017: 43; Olawale & Ani, 2023) during the process of engineering the definition, the A.U. convened a workshop in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, between June 2 and June 5 2004, to look into appropriate definitions for Africans in diaspora (Jinmi 2017: 43-44). However, the outcome of the workshop was rejected by the Permanent Representatives Committee of Ambassadors in preparation for the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Executive Council in Abuja, Nigeria, from January 27 to January 28 2005, after a thorough review (Jinmi 2017: 43-44; General Report T.W./Diaspora 1, “African Union Technical Workshop on the relationship with the Diaspora, 2–5 June 2004).

Subsequently, a meeting of experts from the member states of the AU was constituted to review the definition (Jinmi 2017: 43). In the A.U. expert meeting at Addis Ababa between April 11 and April 12 2005, the A.U. definition of diaspora was modified and accepted as the A.U. diaspora definition (Jinmi 2017: 43). According to the definition, the Africa Diaspora consist of “people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union” (Report of the Meeting of Experts from the Member States on the Definition of the Diaspora, 2005; Jinmi 2017:

43). The people of African origin as conceptualised include all the African people that were moved to other parts of the world from the era of trans-Saharan and trans- Atlantic slave trade and those who migrated during colonialism especially from the Franco-phone Africa, where citizenship were granted to the assimilated Africans. The A.U. definition emphasises African roots and the need to contribute to African development as key to the African Diaspora notion. The sentence "willing to contribute to the development of the continent" underlines that people of African heritage, who claim to be Africans in Diaspora, must be devoted to Africa's development. Put differently, the definition implies that having African ancestors or descendants does not only qualify an individual as an African diaspora except when matched with the willingness to contribute to Africa's growth and development. This is because there are some African descendants overseas who do not want to be associated with the continent. Page and Mercer (2018: 146-147) also claim that the A.U. definition does not factor in why an individual of African descent left Africa but is rather concerned with such individual commitment to African growth and development. This study focuses on the role of the African Union, the diaspora and the development of the African continent.

Methodology

The study was developed using secondary materials that were randomly selected and interpreted thematically. These secondary materials were sourced from journals, edited books and books. The focus was on the themes that are topical to the current research. When the relevant materials were identified, they were analysed and those useful in interrogating and enriching the content of the study were extracted and used in the necessary parts of the study. The next section of the study will discuss some selected literature.

Related literature on the African Union and African Diaspora

The African Union (A.U.) emerged from the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which was established in 1963 to champion the course of African independence and emancipation under colonial rule (Anyanwu, Ani & Uwizeyimana, 2020). Under the defunct OAU, the issue of harnessing Diaspora potential for the development of Africa received less attention but the years that followed recorded some shifts in the degree of attention given to the diaspora by the continental

organisation and the degree of relevance of the diaspora to African development. However, given the constellation of events and the inability of OAU to address Africa's contemporary socio-economic and political needs (Adogamhe, 2008; Uzoigwe, 2004), African leaders decided to refurbish the Organisation to address contemporary African challenges, especially the management of conflict and quest for peace and development in the continent at the Sirte Extraordinary Session in July 1999 (Ani & Ojajorotu, 2021). At the Lomé Summit of 2000, the Constitutive Act of the Union was adopted and subsequently inaugurated at the Durban Summit of July 10, 2002. However, like the OAU, the initial Constitutive Act of A.U. did not capture the continent's diaspora population. Before the amendment of the Constitutive Act and naming of Africans in the diaspora as the Sixth region of development, the continental organisation pursued diaspora-related policies like the establishment of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) in 2001 to guide diaspora engagements as well as the Western Hemisphere African Diaspora Network (WHADN) – launched in Washington, DC, in December 2002, at the First AU-Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum. A.U. also collaborated with the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC), Africa Recruit, and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and worked closely with the World Bank and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to coordinate African mobility affairs.

The diaspora and African developmental idea became a policy position in the A.U. development framework around January 2003, after the protocol to amend the Constitutive Act of the Union was reached at the Extra-Ordinary Summit of the OAU held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In the aftermath of the Summit, the Diaspora was integrated as the “sixth region of the continent” to complement the five existing geographical regions of East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, South Africa and North Africa and the diasporas of the Americas, Europe, the Caribbean, Australia, and Asia (Olawale & Ani, 2023). Hence, in the amendment that followed the Constitutive Act on February 3, 2003, the African Diaspora was captured under Article 3 (q). Article 3 (q) encourages A.U. member States to “invite and encourage the full participation of the African diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union”(Jinmi, 2017: 47). In 2006, A.U. formally designated the African Diaspora as the “sixth region” of the A.U.'s structure. A.U.'s interest in Africans in the diaspora was further expressed through the Global African Diaspora Summit, held in Sandton, South Africa, on Africa Day, May 25, 2012 (Jinmi, 2017:

47). The Summit came after the A.U., in collaboration with the South African government, sponsored several African Diaspora Regional Consultative Conferences (RCC) to develop strategies and formulate programmes for ensuring effective diaspora integration in African growth and development (Jinmi, 2017: 47; A.U., 2007).

Also, in line with the A.U.'s unique efforts to engage with the African diaspora, the 'Agenda 2063: Africa We Want' – adopted in 2015, identifies that active engagement of the Diaspora can be one of the key drivers of change for Africa's development; contributing to the strengthening of African economic independence through investment, expertise and general political, cultural and social solidarity (Jinmi, 2017: 47). The Agenda 2063 envisaged: "agency for Diaspora affairs was established in all member states by 2020 with the Diaspora to integrated into the democratic processes by 2030. Dual citizenship for the Diaspora will be the standard by 2025" (Jinmi, 2017: 47). Also, to incorporate the Diaspora, the Union allocates 20 seats out of the 150 seats of the General Assembly of Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) to them.

However, though these goals have not yet materialised, an evolution towards more institutionalisation of African diaspora engagement can be observed. In September 2008, the African Union Commission launched the Africa Diaspora Health Initiative to provide a platform by which health experts from the African Diaspora can transfer information, skills and expertise to their African counterparts (Jinmi, 2017: 47). Among the forty-one (41) African countries covered by the European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) Diaspora mapping exercise, twenty-one (21) African countries have a diaspora engagement policy or are in the process of drafting one, and 30 have at least one diaspora-related institution (EUDif, 2021). Following the declaration in 2013, Uganda developed its diaspora engagement policy (EUDif, 2021). In 2014, diaspora engagement policies were adopted in Cape Verde, Kenya and Morocco, and a policy was drafted in Tanzania. However, most diaspora engagement policies were adopted (or drafted) after Agenda 2063 was proposed in 2015 (2015: Burundi, Ethiopia and Mauritius; 2016: DRC, Liberia and Zimbabwe; 2017: Djibouti; 2019: Chad, Nigeria, Togo, Uganda, and Zambia) (EUDif, 2021). Sequel to the development of the official protocols of the Au on the African diaspora, it is important to ask the question, how has the diaspora promoted the development of the continent? This will be the focus of the next session of the study.

Discussing the Gains from the African Diaspora

There are many forms of gains from the diaspora in the home states in Africa. These gains range from the political to the social, economic, health etc. Several African states like Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, and Zambia provide leverage on the intellectual capital of the Diaspora through skills transfer schemes. Also, countries like Cape Verde, Cameroon, Congo, Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Senegal, and Zimbabwe are pursuing diaspora international schemes that will focus on transforming their home states. One of the widely acknowledged transfer skills is the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme implemented by UNDP, the IOM Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) initiatives and Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D). TOKTEN programmes facilitate temporary assignments of Diaspora professionals in countries of origin and the diaspora population that are interested in the development of their home countries in many cases leverages on the opportunity created. For instance, CORDESRIA has progressively created an institutional framework for the African diaspora to contribute to the development of different sectors of the African continent. They often advertise for proposals yearly and fund the successful candidates to implement their proposals in a chosen African country.

In Nigeria, the Nigeria National Volunteer Service (NNVS) partners with the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) to facilitate Diaspora academics through a 'Linkages with Experts and Academics in the Diasporas (LEAD) programme to connect Diaspora scholars with their colleagues in the Nigerian universities annually. According to the NUC (2020), a total of 62 LEADS scholars (34 from the U.S., 16 from the U.K., three from Canada, two each from Ireland, Trinidad and Tobago, the Netherlands and the West Indies, respectively, and one from Russia) have rendered their services to various Nigerian universities before the programme came to an end in 2017. Also, through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), the TOKTEN scheme attracted some 900 Nigerian professionals living abroad to return home to provide technical assistance in critical economic sectors, including higher education in 2011 (Mayah, 2011). Also, professional knowledge facilitation through several other networks like the Nigerian Diaspora Alumni Network (NIDAN), Medical Associations of Nigerians across Great Britain (MASAG) and the Association of Nigerian Physicians in

the Americas (ANPA) have, on several bases, partnered with Nigerian health professional bodies like Nigeria Medical Associations (NMA) to support healthcare sector. The support from the health professionals in the diaspora has helped in bringing health equipment and experience back to the country.

The social dynamics of the diaspora dynamics is that it has created high opportunities for migration and labour mobility from the African continent to other parts of the globe, where the African citizenry tends to eke out better living. The economic advantages from such labour migration in many cases are targeted at greener pastures and a better life for the migrants and relatives at home has in many cases driven the culture diaspora investment and developmental projects in their home countries. Similarly, it has created an opportunity for increased citizenship diplomacy between some African states and their host countries. This citizen diplomacy covers the culture of protecting one's citizenry in a foreign land. There is also the transfer of science and technology from the diaspora to the home African countries, which has strong positive implications for domestic development in the continent. However, notwithstanding these beautiful gains, some challenges continued to undermine the African diaspora over the years. That is the focus of the next session of this study.

Challenges facing AU-Diaspora Initiatives

There are high expectations from the African diaspora by their kit and kiln at home, however, stronger policy expectations are often on the AU Diaspora initiatives. Unfortunately, several challenges undermine the African diaspora population in their quest to contribute to continental development.

First, terrorism and insurgencies have a significant impact on the AU-Diaspora initiative. Many of the diaspora population from Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, Kenya, Cameroon, Algeria etc are very scared of the negative attacks that they could receive from the terrorists who easily manipulate abduction, killing etc to achieve their goals. They need institutional support in managing the crises emanating from ongoing insecurity, terrorism and insurgency that have largely affected Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Mali, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, etc. From the Al-Shabaab in Somali to Boko Haram in Nigeria to Da na Ambassagou and Jamat Nusrat Al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM) in Mali, they are all directly frustrating AU-Diaspora initiatives by making the African homeland unsafe for the diaspora returnees. The 2021 Global Terrorism Index

published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2020) reveals that between the ranks of 1-100, twenty-seven (27) out of fifty-four (54) African countries are included. Despite its large diaspora and resources, Nigeria is ranked third on the 2021 Global Terrorism Index (GTI, 2021) and the activities of terrorists in Northern Nigeria undermine development to a very great extent. Sub-Saharan African death from terrorism in 2000 was 7, 612; by 2019, African countries recorded 44, 615 deaths due to terrorism (IEP, 2020). The above stats show that terrorism and insurgency have direct implications or capacity to prevent African countries from securing the needed environment for African diasporas to make informed contributions and investments. The insecurity in the continent affects Africans in the diaspora when it comes to their commitment to development, especially in establishing businesses and industries that could boost African Countries' Gross Domestic Profit (GDP).

Second, the problem of corruption and the unaccountable government also affect Africans as it reduces the Diaspora's commitment to partner with their home governments. This is because those in the diaspora get discouraged when they read and observe the excessive looting culture within many African governments. They easily conclude that whatever resources they send home will also be looted by the criminals in the corridors of power within the continent. Leadership corruption has affected Diaspora trust in African countries' governments. This is due to a low culture of utilising Diaspora-generated funds for designated national projects. The Transparency Index corruption ranking shows that forty-nine (49) African countries' corruption index average score for 2020 was 33 out of 100 (CPI, 2021). Of the 49 countries ranked, 44 still score below 50 (CPI 2021). This reinforces the argument on the perennial problem of corruption and the urgent need for African governments to implement anti-corruption policies for greater economic participation of Africans in the diaspora. In addition, the role of the diaspora in the political affairs of countries of origin is another major challenge. While some African countries have made tremendous progress, others continue to struggle with providing a platform for their diaspora populations to participate in political matters in their home countries. Also, the rise of authoritarian regimes and coup d'état in Africa poses a huge threat to existing democratisation and efforts to harness diaspora potential. Apart from Africa's experience with military intervention in politics during the early years of independence and African leader sit-tight syndrome, the new wave of military and authoritarian regimes has affected the African effort to reconstruct its

political identity as a stable and progressing (Adeoye, 2022). In August 2020, a coup led to the removal of President Ibrahim Bouba Keita and the installation of Bah Ndaou as the president by Colonel Assimi Goïta. Also, in March 2021, an attempted coup was recorded in Niger. In April 2021, the third coup in the Sahel unfolded in Chad after President Idriss Deby, who had ruled for over 30 years, was killed on the battlefield (Adeoye, 2022). In May 2021, Assimi Goïta struck again by May 2021, removing President Ndaou, and installed himself as the President of Mali. The spill-over effect of the waves of coups in the zone hit Guinea in September 2021, as the President of Guinea, Alpha Condé, was removed by Special Forces commander Mamady Doumbouya. Lastly, in October 2021, General Abdel Fattah Burhan led a military coup leading to the removal of Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok (Adeoye, 2022). It is also worthy of note that the French and Euro-American pursuit of mineral resources in Africa has institutionalised sit-tight and underperforming leaders in Africa. This implies that the coup plotters were heralded as the messiahs of the society. The above cases reveal that the African political environment is yet to be stable and it undermines Diaspora development. The absence of this supportive environment, given the resurgence of coups and authoritarian regimes, has not provided the enabling economic environment for the African Union Diaspora initiative to thrive.

Additionally, the above challenges, there has been an ongoing debate as to whether A.U. Diaspora initiatives only foster international migration and brain drain rather than addressing the factors pushing Africa into migration. Scholars such as Asong (2018: 247) have advocated for policies that can increase intra-African migration. The reason for such a position is not farfetched. Asong (2018: 247) contends that the damages done by brain drain cannot be equalled by remittance inflow. Put differently, remittance inflow does not tell the whole story about Africa's development dilemma. However, Asong (2018: 247) argues that unlike migration to developed countries, intra-Africa migration and the pursuit of development and a safe Africa will contribute significantly to realising the Africa we want. However, despite the A.U. effort to improve intra-African migration through various Regional Economic Cooperation (RECs) and instruments like the free movement policies, the increasing wave of xenophobia, as in the case of South Africa and Ghana (economic protectionism), has been a major hindrance. However, while Asong's argument remains logical, Adams (2013) -claims that increasing streams of remittance inflows in Africa are better than those from Western or Asian loans, which leads to debt crises

and perpetual underdevelopment. According to Adams (2013: 25), unlike loans, remittance targets are always met without conditionalities, hindering African countries' economic growth. However, while the article does not justify whose argument is more logical, it contends that the development of Africa's socio-economic and political space remains an important way to reposition Africa and its diaspora in global affairs as active rather than passive actors. This is because Africa currently needs all the money on earth for individual, societal and state developments.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Therefore, this study evaluates the activities of the African diaspora, and the African Union in relation to African development. The study focuses on the role of the African Union and the African diaspora in developing the continent. It conceptualised the African diaspora as the descendants of Africa that contribute to its development. It maintains that diaspora engagements have promoted skill and knowledge transfer to African countries. Skill and knowledge transfer comprises four major scopes, namely: first, permanent talent attraction programmes, which involve encouraging qualified diaspora nationals to return and support the Countries of Origin (COO) development; second, short-term targeted human capital transfer programmes that consist of deploying expatriates with marketable skills for temporary business visits, most of them volunteer-based; third, diaspora knowledge networks, which focused on scientists and engineers, that support information sharing among communities of skilled experts and their home countries, training of local staff, and investment projects and lastly, partnership programmes with the diaspora.

The study documents the African union initiatives and the diaspora making positive contributions to the continent. The study further outlines the expectations and challenges that have undermined the African diaspora initiative while advocating that states should create the necessary environment for the diaspora community to support national development and transformation. For instance, In the face of the crisis of Al Shabab and Boko Haram terrorism, the counter-terror policies of the African Union should be strengthened to accommodate terror information sharing that could be extended to FBI and Frontex as well as other agencies that understudy the history of migrants before they are properly documented in a given country abroad.

The African Union needs as a matter of urgency to intervene firstly within the continent in ensuring that migrants in Africa follow the same

process of documentation and face the challenge of xenophobia headlong by encouraging states to enact laws that could manage them. Then implementation of anti-corruption laws in the continent needs to be strengthened too. It is only the entrenchment of good governance and sustainable dividends of democracy that would reduce the mass emigration of Africans and checkmate coups in the continent. The African Union thus needs to intervene in strengthening the quality of governance and leadership in Africa generally notwithstanding the crisis or national interest of the state that undermines regionalism in the continent and globally.

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