

**Programme on Innovation, Higher Education and
Research for Development
IHERD**

Policy brief:

Engaging the Diaspora:

Potential for sub-Saharan African Universities

Martha K. Ferede

This report is authored by Martha K. Ferede, as part of the Program on Innovation, Higher Education and Research for Development (IHERD) hosted at the OECD and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the OECD or Sida or of the governments of the OECD member countries.

Table of contents

Table of contents.....	1
Acronyms	2
Abstract	3
What challenges do universities in sub-Saharan Africa face?	3
Why mobilize and engage the diaspora?	3
What are the challenges of engaging and mobilizing the diaspora?	4
Potential avenues for diaspora engagement in sub-Saharan African universities	5
Diaspora engagement and university capacity-building initiatives	5
Policy recommendations	7
References	8

Acronyms

ADF	African Diaspora Fellows Program
ADP	Africa Diaspora Program
AAU	Association of African Universities
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges Canada
AWBC	Academics Without Borders Canada
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
HP	Hewlett Packard
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MIDA	Migration for Development in Africa
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WB	World Bank

Abstract

This policy brief, synthesizing existing research, discusses the benefits and challenges of mobilizing and engaging the diaspora in supporting sub-Saharan African universities to develop their research capacity and increase knowledge production. It concludes with recommendations for institutional leaders and policy makers. Although using broad strokes, it is written with the understanding that sub-Saharan Africa consists of many countries that vary considerably in their economical, political, and institutional histories and present-day realities.

What challenges do universities in sub-Saharan Africa face?

Universities in sub-Saharan Africa face a variety of challenges in increasing their research capacity, knowledge production and preparing future generations of scholars. A vast majority of these challenges arise from resource constraints including limited research and technology infrastructure, shortage of well-trained faculty, inadequate facilities and equipment, and lack of financial capital to support and sustain research. Despite a significant increase in tertiary education-level enrolment since the 1980s (UNESCO estimates 4.5 million students were enrolled in 2008 as compared to 200,000 in 1970), an aging professoriate coupled with insufficient numbers of faculty with research doctoral degrees impacts the rate at which new PhDs can be trained to conduct quality research and go on to supervise the training of future researchers and academics.

Considerations outside of academia also create challenging conditions. Some countries' political and civil instability – particularly for those within or near conflict-zones – limit the growth of universities. Such volatility can result in protracted closures from which institutions take years to recover. Economic issues also serve as barriers; without a significant amount of governmental expenditures spent on higher education, universities in many sub-Saharan African universities are strained for sufficient budgets.

Why mobilize and engage the diaspora?

- *Viable option to mitigate brain drain*

Brain drain, the loss of human capital, is a significant issue for African countries. Over the past five years, 450,000 tertiary-educated Africans migrated to OECD countries (UN-DESA & OECD, 2013). The social and economic impact of this loss, particularly to the health-care, science and technology fields, is widely documented. Sending countries lose initial educational investments, future tax-revenues, and a labour-force skilled to support development through innovations, governance, creating businesses, managing institutions, and participating in a globalized knowledge-based economy.

The brain drain of African academics occurs both within and outside of the continent. Academics are lured by better paying posts in industry and government within their own countries, to faculty positions in more developed African countries and to posts in industrialized countries outside of Africa (Holm, 2012).

Financial and other incentives needed to ameliorate the brain-drain problem through the retention of skilled professionals and by enticing migrants to return are not highly feasible for many sub-Saharan countries (Tettey, 2003). Tapping into the skills and expertise of migrants and other diaspora members may be a more viable option.

By viewing the African diaspora as resources for development, the shift moves from a brain drain perspective to a brain circulation paradigm. Skilled and well-connected members of the diaspora circulate human, financial and organizational capital back to the sending (developing) country, resulting in a dynamic flow of resources and know-how (Saxenian, 2005).

- *Many maintain connections to homelands and demonstrate a willingness to support*

Many diaspora members maintain familial connections to their countries of origin. The rise in telecommunications and transportation technologies has been pivotal for the formation and sustenance of transnational connections and the efficient circulation of financial and social remittances across borders (Levitt, 2001).

In the last decade, a significant amount of attention has been paid to the role of the diaspora in economic development and poverty reduction. Considering the substantial amount and growth of financial remittances, this is not surprising. In 2012, with remittances reaching \$60.4 billion USD, for the first time, remittances of the African diaspora became the largest external financial source for the continent (World Bank, 2013).

The contributions of the African diaspora, through individual or coordinated efforts, extend beyond supporting families. Diaspora members also volunteer, help establish professional networks, forge links with resources in more developed countries, and help to facilitate knowledge-sharing initiatives (Migration Policy Institute, 2004).

What are the challenges of engaging & mobilizing the diaspora?

- *Need for micro-level data*

The African diaspora is not a single entity. Members encompass a wide range of mobility experiences (voluntary or forced migrants) and generations (African-born migrants or foreign-born descendants) and are dispersed worldwide. Some members feel connected to their homelands and wish to lend support. Others do not. Even if they send remittances, some members may not be compelled to support national or institutional development.

Accurate data is important for sound policies. What is the labour integration and circumstances of diaspora members? In what ways, if any, are members of the diaspora willing to support their ancestral homelands or countries of origins? What skill-sets and education levels do they possess that are useful for developing the capacity of universities and research institutions? Although some governments, institutions and organizations have made strides in understanding the characteristics of diaspora from particular African countries, more research and micro-level data is needed.

- *Country and university level issues*

One feasibility study found that academics and researchers in the diaspora also face homeland and institutional level challenges in their attempt to participate in knowledge-transfer with African universities. Country level factors include low-growth economic conditions, weak governance, and poor infrastructures. At the institutional level, the issues of bureaucracy, hierarchical structures, and inadequate facilities created limitations for involvement (Mohamoud, 2005).

Avenues for diaspora engagement in sub-Saharan African universities

Leveraging the human capital of the African diaspora with the skill-sets, connections, and commitment to develop their homelands can play an important role in facilitating knowledge-transfer, increasing research, and helping to develop robust institutions. Universities must begin by identifying their capacity-building priorities. These can encompass research training, curriculum development, academic programing, faculty needs and improvements in technical and infrastructure capabilities. To address these gaps, members of the diaspora could participate and lend their expertise through:

- Short-term or summer teaching and research visitations
- Organizing seminars, workshops and conferences
- Partnerships and collaborations on research projects (virtually and in-person)
- Resource sharing - providing access to funding, data, research and technology
- Serving as mentors and advisors
- Co-creating and reviewing teaching curricula and PhD training materials
- Investing in institutional advancement initiatives

Diaspora engagement and university capacity-building initiatives

A number of initiatives that aim to facilitate the knowledge and skills-transfer of the diaspora toward building the research, training and knowledge production capacity of African universities currently exist. Moreover, databases of skilled diaspora and volunteers, designed for use by government, private and public institutions also serve as resources for universities. In addition, academics and scientists in the diaspora are able to participate in programs that aim to build capacity at universities in developing countries (that are also open to non-diaspora participants). Some of these current initiatives are described below.

Initiative	Description	Link
The Carnegie African Diaspora Fellows Program (ADF)	ADF is a scholar exchange program where African-born academics from Canada and the United States working in higher education can register to participate in short-term exchanges in universities in the partnership countries of Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. Universities in partnership countries, with priority given to public institutions, also register to host an academic. ADF is funded for two-years by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) in partnership with Quinnipiac University (QU) and managed by the Institute for International Education (IIE).	iie.org/Programs/Carnegie-African-Diaspora-Fellows-Program
UNESCO-HP Brain Gain Initiative	The UNESCO-HP Brain Gain initiative, with the aim of advancing science and technology, currently connects 19 African and Arab universities in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Researchers at these institutions propose projects that are chosen following a highly competitive process. Selected researchers conduct joint research projects with experts in the diaspora using grid computing – shared computing facilities networked online with software that allows access and use of the grid. An IT grant provides for servers, workstations, training and operational funds to update infrastructure and computing knowledge.	unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/higher-education/reform-and-innovation/brain-gain-initiative/
IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) Diaspora Database	The International Organization for Migration 's (IOM) MIDA program aims to develop capacity in Africa by harnessing the skills of the African professional diaspora. In addition to other activities IOM manages a diaspora database of those willing to contribute to their homelands in the area of technology, education, health and business. Governments, public, and private sectors are able to access the database.	http://www.iom.int/cms/mida
World Bank African Program (ADP) Database of Professional Skills	In 2010, as part of its African Diaspora Program the World Bank launched its Database of Skilled Professionals. The long-term goal for the database is to make it available to African governments and donor partners so that they may utilize the skills of the diaspora in meeting Africa's development challenges in the health, education, and technology sectors.	http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/EXTDIASPORA/0,,contentMDK:22636820~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:4246098,00.html

<p>Academics Without Borders Canada (AWBC)</p>	<p>Academics without Borders Canada has a mission to build the capacity of higher education institutions in developing countries (including those in Africa) by mobilizing a volunteer network of academics for advising, teaching, research, and administrative projects. Volunteer academics are not limited to, but can be, members of the diaspora.</p>	<p>www.awbc-usfc.org/</p>
<p>Royal Society – Department for International Development (DFID) Africa Capacity Building Initiative</p>	<p>This initiative of the Royal Society-DFID’s stated mission is to “strengthen the research capacity of universities and research institution in sub-Saharan Africa by supporting the development of sustainable research networks.” Scientists in sub-Sahara Africa collaborate with scientists in the UK for mentorships, training PhDs, and building institutional research capacity. Scientists in the UK are not limited to but can include members of the diaspora.</p>	<p>http://royalsociety.org/grants/schemes/africa-capacity-building/</p>
<p>Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC) & International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Canada-Africa Research Exchange Grants</p>	<p>CAREG is a grant program funded by IDRC and managed by the AUCC to support short-term exchanges (for research and graduate student training) between African and Canadian universities. The exchanges facilitate research on the developmental priorities of agriculture, social and economic policy, science and economics, and global health policy. Applicants from Canada are not limited to but can include members of the diaspora.</p>	<p>www.aucc.ca/programs-services/international-programs/canada-africa-research-exchanges/</p>

Policy Recommendations

1. Support for universities should be an explicit part of governments’ diaspora engagement policy.

Higher education is increasingly becoming a key policy priority for African governments. Research conducted at tertiary institutions can inform and drive social development. At the same time, universities are human-capital building institutions that supply skilled professionals and contribute to national economic growth. Countries with diaspora engagement policies generally encourage financial investments in infrastructure, enterprise, real estate, and banking systems. Considering the significant value of higher education, governments should also encourage diaspora engagement in building the capacity of universities.

2. Existing initiatives to develop the capacity of sub-Saharan African universities should actively encourage participation from the diaspora.

Academics in the diaspora, in addition to their subject area expertise, bring a wealth of information and skills that could be useful for understanding local contexts, university institutional cultures and managing some of the bureaucratic hurdles that arise in collaborative projects. Capacity building initiatives should consider direct participation and/or consultation by researchers and academics in the diaspora who have first-hand experience of universities in a given country.

3. Universities need to identify and prioritise the academic areas, skill-sets, and expertise gap as part of their differentiated approach to diaspora involvement.

4. The Association of African Universities (AAU) along with African universities should consider creating a database/network of academics, researchers, and university professionals in the diaspora.

Databases of professionals in the Africa diaspora currently exist. However, a database exclusively of academics and university experts in the diaspora could help sub-Saharan universities more efficiently target those who can best meet their capacity-building needs. Universities could begin to devise this list through outreach to alumni migrants. Organizations such as the AAU could work with international higher education associations to help identify and recruit academics, researchers, and university professionals worldwide.

References

- French Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012). *Harnessing the Skills of Migrants and Diasporas to Foster Development: Policy Options*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/migration/Policy_Brief_Migrants_En_BD%20DEFINITIF.pdf
- Holm, J. D. (2012, October 9) The brain drain within Africa. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/the-brain-drain-within-africa/30554>
- Levitt, P. (2001). *The transnational villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2004, July) *Beyond Remittances: The Role of Diaspora in Poverty Reduction in their Countries of Origin*. Retrieved from www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Beyond_Remittances_0704.pdf
- Mohaamad, A. A. (2005). *Reversing the Brain Drain in Africa: Harnessing the Intellectual Capital of the Diaspora for Knowledge Development in Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.diaspora-centre.org/DOCS/Reversingthebraind.pdf>
- Patterson, R. (2006). *African Brain Circulation: Beyond the Brain Gain Debate*. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.

- Saxenian, A. (2005). From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation. Transnational Communities and Regional Upgrading in India and China. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 40(2), 35-61.
- Tettey, W. (2003, January 05). *Africa's Options: Return, Retention or Diaspora?* Retrieved from <http://www.scidev.net/global/policy-brief/africa-s-options-return-retention-or-diaspora-.html>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs / Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2013). *World Migration in Figures*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/World-Migration-in-Figures.pdf>
- United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization – Institute for Statistics. *Trends in Tertiary Education: sub-Saharan Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/fs10-2010-en.pdf>
- World Bank (2013, June 26). *Remittances Create Safety Net for African Households*. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/06/26/remittances-create-safety-net-for-african-households>
- Zezeza, P. (2013, February) *Engagements between African Diaspora Academics in the U.S. and Canada and African Institutions of Higher Education: Perspectives from North America and Africa*. Report for the Carnegie Corporation of New York.